

Region to get hotter

Temperatures in region have risen by 1.5°C, twice the global increase

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Countries in the Middle East and North Africa are already feeling the heat of climate change with the situation likely to get worse as average summer temperatures could exceed 30°C in half of the region's countries by 2040-59 even with substantial mitigation, according to International Monetary Fund.

Over the past three decades, temperatures in the region have risen by 1.5°C, twice the global increase, IMF stated.

Climate-related disasters have also risen faster than anywhere else in

HEATWAVE GRIPS SEVERAL PARTS OF OMAN

Muscat - Large parts of Oman are under a heat wave with daytime temperatures touching a high of 47°C in Sohar on Sunday.

According to the Met Department's weather bulletin for Monday, the mercury was expected to hit a high of 47°C again in Suwaiq and Madha, and 46°C in Rustaq.

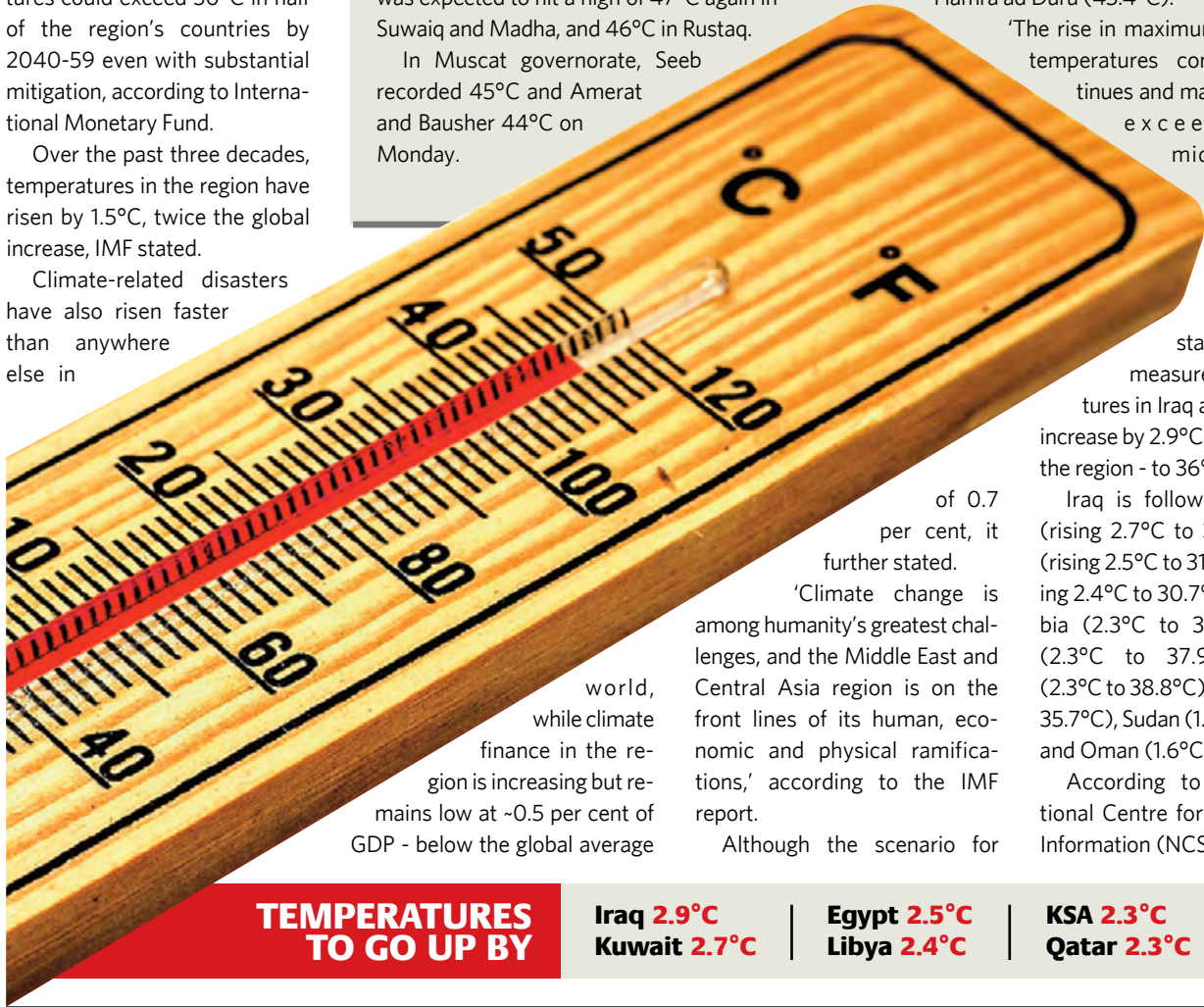
In Muscat governorate, Seeb recorded 45°C and Amerat and Bausher 44°C on Monday.

According to the Met Department, the second highest temperature on Sunday after Sohar was in Liwa (46.8°C), followed by Wadi al Maawil (46°C), Saham (45.6°C), Shinas, Suwaiq and Amerat (45.5°C) and Hamra ad Duru (45.4°C).

'The rise in maximum temperatures continues and may exceed mid-

40s in some areas in the governorates of North Batinah, South Batinah, Muscat and the desert areas of the governorates of Dhahirah, Al Wusta and Dhofar,' the Met Department stated.

In the weather forecast for Tuesday, it stated that mainly clear skies were expected over most governorates with chance of dust rising over desert and open areas, and low level clouds or fog patches late night to early morning over parts of South Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar.



TEMPERATURES TO GO UP BY

Iraq 2.9°C
Kuwait 2.7°C

Egypt 2.5°C
Libya 2.4°C

KSA 2.3°C
Qatar 2.3°C

Bahrain 2.3°C
UAE 2.1°C

Sudan 1.8°C
Oman 1.6°C

MoSD launches electronic platform to market, sell homemade products

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has launched an electronic platform, called Maksab, for the promotion and marketing of items produced by productive families in their homes. The app was launched on Monday with the objective of supporting families under social security and those with limited income in a ceremony held under the patronage of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, in the presence of H E Laila al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

On the occasion, Maani bint Abdullah bin Hamad al Busaidi, Director General of Family Growth Department in MoSD, said, "The platform aims to promote products made by those



under social security and limited-income families through smart outlets that will contribute to enhancing financial returns. The app allows users to buy household products online."

Maksab provides productive families an opportunity to sell their products digitally in the sultanate and abroad, generating revenue for themselves, "which

will contribute to their economic and social empowerment", Maani informed.

The government seeks economic empowerment and diversification of income sources for families and individuals, she said, calling on everyone to support productive families by registering on the platform.

'Productive family' refers to an

enterprise which often originates at home and is then developed and scaled to the market. It is similar to a cottage industry as known in other parts of the world.

"The platform targets productive families, social security families, low-income families, individuals, jobseekers, and owners of small and medium enterprises."

MoSD has set conditions for who can register on Maksab, including products offered for purchase on the platform must be properly packaged and conform to health and safety standards.

The business must present a licence from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and a certificate from the Ministry of Health in the case of homemade healthcare products.



Oman's inflation expected to slow further in 2023



Turkey presidential polls head to runoff vote

Oman affirms support to Libya

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, held a session of political talks on Monday with Najla Mohammed el Mangoush, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Collaboration of Libya, who is on an official visit to the sultanate.

During the meeting, the two affirmed their mutual interest to enhance bilateral relations and constructive cooperation between the two countries. They discussed aspects of cooperation in the political, economic and cultural fields, in addition to discussing ways to develop these further in order to achieve mutual benefits.

On developments in her coun-



try, the Libyan minister apprised H E Sayyid Badr on the efforts made to achieve internal political consensus, and the role played by representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in this aspect.

H E Sayyid Badr expressed Oman's firm support for those efforts. He said the sultanate

supports endeavours to build consensus between the various Libyan parties and, with the help of the United Nations and brotherly and friendly countries, preserve the unity and sovereignty of the State of Libya, build its security and stability, and advance development programmes for all parts of the country.



Moody's upgrades Oman rating to Ba2

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global credit rating agency Moody's Investors Service on Monday upgraded the Government of Oman's issuer and long-term senior unsecured ratings to Ba2 from Ba3 and maintained the positive outlook.

'The upgrade reflects the improvements in Oman's debt burden and debt affordability metrics during 2022, mainly as a result of the large oil and gas revenue windfall, which increase the sovereign's resilience to potential future shocks,' Moody's stated.

Importantly, the strengthening of the fiscal metrics was supported by the government's spending restraint and its decision to use the fiscal surplus and previously accumulated fiscal buffers to pay down debt, which in Moody's view demonstrates an improving track record of fiscal policy effectiveness and governance strength.

Moody's said its positive outlook on Oman captures the

prospect that the improvements in the government's debt metrics will be sustained over the next few years, despite lower oil prices, through maintenance of spending discipline and further implementation of fiscal and structural reforms.

According to Moody's, Oman's debt metrics have improved significantly due to a large oil revenue windfall and spending restraint.

'Increase in global oil demand and prices since the trough during the pandemic has generated a large revenue windfall for Oman, turning its fiscal deficit into a surplus in 2022. We estimate that nearly all of the fiscal improvement during 2022 was due to higher hydrocarbon revenue, which rose by more than 30 per cent and amounted to an equivalent of 26 per cent of GDP,' Moody's said.

The fiscal improvement was also supported by the government's spending restraint, which helped to maximise Oman's fiscal surplus.

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Oman eyes lucrative European fish market

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In efforts to find new export markets for its fishery products, Oman is studying the lucrative European market.

Omani authorities are in talks with their European counterparts to explore opportunities in the seafood sector. "We are waiting for the authorities to decide whether we will deal in fresh or processed seafood. The talks are in early stages but there will be an outcome soon," said Nabil al Bimani, CEO of Fisheries Development Oman.

The total value of seafood imports of Europe in 2020 was US\$54.8bn. Its seafood imports have been on the rise since 2015, peaking at US\$58bn in 2018.



Bimani was speaking at a conference titled 'Omani-French Opportunities in Fisheries Sector' held between Omani and French stakeholders at Oman Arab Bank Head Office on Monday.

Held under the patronage of H E Yaqoob al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Fisheries in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR), the conference saw participation of

more than a hundred people, including government officials, French and Omani businesses engaged in the fisheries sector, agro-food industries, shipbuilding and ship repair, and management

of marine resources.

The focus of the conference was on exploring opportunities in Oman's fisheries sector, particularly through the Duqm Multi-Purpose Port project.

The project is a collaboration between the Port of Lorient in France and Fisheries Development Oman. The conference aimed to connect stakeholders from France and Oman in different economic sectors and to highlight opportunities.

Bimani said, "The Duqm Multi-Purpose Port project is part of the development of the entire region of Duqm. Our association with the French teams will help us explore more opportunities in the area. It will also be expanded to train our fishermen both in technical and commercial aspects."

He added that the fisheries sector is expanding rapidly in Dhofar; 60 per cent of the catch in Oman is from the governorate.

Speaking at the conference,

Ahmed Saleh al Harthy, Director of Oman Vision 2040 in MAFWR, said, "We are 100 per cent committed to every SME and business related to fisheries. We have already identified fisheries ports that are run by SMEs and have extended full support."

Joining the conference via Zoom, Mustapha el Kettab, Deputy Director of European Maritime Training Centre (CEFCM), said that his facility ensures maritime professionals get the best services and customised training. "We have 18 research ships, six underwater vehicles and robots, and conduct 150 campaigns a year with 1,500 to 1,800 scientists and students. Our association with Omani counterparts will definitely witness mutual benefits."

Oman participates in Middle East Rail 2023 in Abu Dhabi

Muscat - The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, is participating in Middle East Rail 2023 in Abu Dhabi, UAE. A two-day event, it is a regional rail show for innovation, technology and strategy in the sector.

H E Said Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, represented Oman at the event opening.

The minister and his accompanying delegation viewed the latest railway development projects in the Middle East and global infrastructure. They also visited several pavilions of companies specialising in transport and railways.

Oman and UAE have formed a joint company - Oman-Ethiad Rail Company - to develop and operate the UAE-Oman rail network.

The company will lay the groundwork and work plan for the project, including its financing and schedule. The company will also handle the design, development and operations of the rail



network, which will connect Sohar and Abu Dhabi, in line with the criteria and standards of the two countries.

In a major step towards the development of the rail network, the company launched a prequalification tender for civil works of the network in March this year.

Middle East Rail 2023 expects to welcome around 6,000 attendees, 400 speakers, 300 exhibitors and 600 VIPs from across the industry.

Its agenda will include a three-track conference, presentations, peer-to-peer networking, panel discussions and interviews involving and led by leading figures, senior executives and key decision-makers.

The conference will cover a range of relevant topics, including connectivity, intelligent systems, automation, safe processes, Internet of Things, data analysis, sustainable operations and more.

10,000 reflective straps to be put on camels in North Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To curb the menace of stray camels and ensuing road accidents, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources launched a project on Monday to provide high visibility straps and reflective collars in North Batinah.

Abdullah Mohammed al Hadabi, Director General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in North Batinah, informed that a total of 10,656 reflective straps will be put on camels in the governorate.

He explained that the straps will warn road users of the animals' presence at night. "The straps are water and heat resistant, ensuring longevity of the project."

According to Hadabi, the ministry will launch a two-week awareness campaign among camel breeders in the governorate requesting them to put the straps and collars on their camels.

"The initiative aims to educate breeders about the dangers of



The initiative aims to educate breeders about the dangers of stray camels in the governorate and reduce traffic accidents

ABDULLAH AL HADABI

stray camels in the governorate and reduce traffic accidents," Hadabi said.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Infor-

mation show that in 2021, 11 people died and 45 others were injured when vehicles collided with stray camels. Dhofar recorded the highest number of such accidents - 20 - in 2021.

Oman has a camel population of 242,833, with Dhofar having the highest number (145,875), followed by North Sharqiyah (21,577).

In 2021, the Ministry of Interior issued a decision (No 164/2021) amending some provisions for the confinement of stray or neglected animals. The definition of stray or neglected animals now includes camels,

horses, cows, goats, sheep and any other animal left by its owner or guardian to wander without supervision.

Municipalities of every governorate have been empowered to collect a daily fee from owners of stray or neglected animals in return of the services provided to these animals.

Municipalities can impose a fine on violators of RO15 per day for a camel, horse or cow, and RO5 per day for goats, sheep or any other small animal found wandering.

The fine is doubled in the event of a repeat violation.

INVITATION TO TENDER



Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No. : RFQ - 2000000477

Tender Title : Provision of Engineering Site Supervisory Services

Scope : Sohar Aluminium Co. LLC (SA) undertakes various CAPEX projects, and this requires a continuous supervision of the mechanical work in progress and ensure the completion targets are met. The proposed supervisor will work in coordination with SA Engineering team and Oversees the day to day operations onsite. These services are onsite basis and will be for a term of 24 months. The detailed scope will be shared to the interested bidders.

Document Issue Date : 23 May 2023

Last Date For Submission :

Last Date For Applying : 22 May 2023

(Time: 1630Hrs) 30 May 2023

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

ROP warns of fraudulent job offers via SMS

Muscat - Royal Oman Police (ROP) stated on Monday that it is monitoring a new fraud involving job offers via SMS text.

"Royal Oman Police warns of a fraudulent method in which fraudsters communicate with targeted people via text messages, luring them with job offers with daily salary," a statement said.

"Targeted persons are persuaded to open bank accounts through which sums of money resulting from various fraud operations are transferred."

The ROP advised all not to respond to these fraudulent messages and to report immediately when exposed to such situations.

H E GEN NU'AMANI RECEIVES LIBYAN MINISTER



H E Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, received Najla Mohammed el Mangoush, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Collaboration of Libya, on Monday. The Libyan Minister expressed her appreciation for the march of relations between Oman and Libya. She also lauded the efforts and role of the sultanate in tackling regional and international issues and hailed Oman's backing of efforts to establish peace. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters and means of developing cooperation (ONA)



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MOH No: 558/2023

Sustainable City Yiti opens sale of properties

Muscat - The Sustainable City Yiti - with ambitions to be the first Net Zero Emissions community in Oman - opened the sale of properties in the region's largest sustainable settlement.

Embarking on a significant path towards achieving net zero emissions, the Sustainable City Yiti is coming up with 422 residential units in the first phase designed in line with the highest social, environmental, and economic sustainability standards.

A diverse selection of 136 eco-friendly residential villas will be available for purchase, each showcasing an elegant and energy-efficient design with spacious three and four-bedroom units, the developer said.

Additionally, a wide variety of 286 modern apartments will be offered, ranging from cosy studios to expansive three-bedroom units. 'All are designed to enhance the quality of life for residents while reducing their carbon emissions,' it asserted.

The development provides an environment for its residents to live, work, and thrive within the community. It boasts a comprehensive masterplan that includes a plaza featuring commercial outlets, a school and nursery, 5-star Nikki Beach Resort & Spa, a 4-star hotel, a wellness centre, an autism centre, and an educational institute.

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) tied up with Diamond Developers to launch the Sustainable City Yiti last year.

"It gives us great pride to partner with Diamond Developers on



422 residential units - designed in line with the highest sustainability standards - include villas, apartments

the Sustainable City Yiti, with joint efforts and determination in establishing the first project of this scale in Oman as in the Middle East," said Hashil Obaid al Mahrouqi, chairman of Sustainable Development and Investment Company (SDIC), and CEO of Omran Group.

"This project meets global green practices and is in adherence to the highest sustainability standards. Therefore, the project is a significant milestone in growing and developing the local

tourism sector, as well as attracting external investment."

According to him, with such developments, Omran is paving the way towards Oman's target of Net-Zero Carbon by 2050, whilst providing immense in-country value through job creation, tourism and services. "It has a focus on a sustainable impact to the circular economy, all of which resonates with the group's sustainability ethos."

Salah Habib, CEO of Diamond Developers, said, "The resounding success of the sustainable city concept and the high demand for our brand are testament to the growing appetite for eco-friendly living. As we expand our footprint in the region, we are confident that our commitment to delivering world-class, sustainable developments will resonate with investors who understand the value and impact

of embracing sustainable communities."

The new city will be powered by clean, renewable energy sources, prominently featuring solar panels tactically mounted on rooftops and parking facilities.

This facility enables residents to save up to 100% of their energy bills. Simultaneously, the introduction of high-efficiency water systems will lead to a significant decrease in water bills, potentially by as much as 50%, the company stated.

Expected to be completed by 2025, the city will feature a green spine running the length of the community, complete with biodomes and community gardens. 'This holistic, wellness-inspired environment aims to reduce air and noise pollution with its car-free areas and a variety of outdoor amenities promoting an active lifestyle', it added.

ITHCA chief urges jobseekers to join Tamkeen training

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Communications and Information Technology Group (ITHCA) has called on jobseekers to register in the second batch of Tamkeen programme, the registration for which will remain open until May 20.

Tamkeen programme, which was launched in January 2016, aims to empower Omani youth in several technical fields, said Eng Said Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group.

"The training programme has helped develop the skills of Omani youth and qualified graduates to enter the labour market." The programme is held annually in two batches to train Omani youth for six months, the ITHCA chief elaborated.

Mandhari further informed that the programme includes a number of technical courses such as electronics engineering, mechanical engineering, project management and urban planning, operations engineering and others.

"It also covers support serv-



ices such as business administration, supply chain management, communication, marketing, human resources and others."

Mandhari revealed that the number of beneficiaries of the programme since 2016 has crossed 600.

Giving more details about the programme, Mandhari said that the selection of trainees involves several stages, such as setting the goals for the trainees according to their jobs, and monthly evaluation of their skills.

He affirmed ITHCA's commitment saying, "We are keen to improve the technical competence of the trainees and their practical skills, to make them ready for any future job opportunity."

OCCI forms committee to empower Omani workforce



Muscat - Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Monday announced the formation of a supervisory committee for the Omani Financial Manager Programme. The panel is mandated to operate from 2023 to 2026.

Dr Abdullah Masoud al Harthi, OCCI board member and chairman of the Omani Financial Manager Programme's supervisory committee, said that the

programme seeks to empower Omani human resources in the public and private sectors.

Harthi added that the programme, launched by the OCCI in cooperation with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in India, aims to train Omanis on strategic leadership skills and encourage the largest possible number of Omani citizens to assume leadership positions in their respective establishments.

Oman participates in Chemical Weapons Convention review

The Hague - The Sultanate of Oman took part in the Fifth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), held in The Hague, the Netherlands, on Monday.

Representatives of countries that are part of the CWC are attending this five-day event. Oman's delegation is headed by

Dr Abdullah Salim al Harthi, Oman's Permanent Representative at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The conference discussed the role of the CWC in promoting global peace and security. It also reviewed means of achieving the goals of CWC.



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Directors' Report For the Three-Month Period Ended 31 March 2023

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Life & General Insurance Co SAOG & its subsidiaries ("the Group" or "NLGIC"), it's my pleasure to present to you the unaudited consolidated results of the Group for the three-month period ended 31 March 2023.

Performance Highlights for the Three-Period Ended 31 March 2023:

Our financial results for the three-month period ended 31 March 2023 reflect the consolidated financial position and performance of NLGIC following the acquisition of RSA ME on the 7th of July 2022.

Gross Written Premiums (GWP) and Net Underwriting Results (NUR):

GWP grew by 76% to RO 109.3 million in the three-month period ended 31 March 2023 as compared to RO 62.1 million in the corresponding period of the previous year. This was primarily driven by the acquisition of the RSA business as well as the successful renewals of key partnerships and key new wins during the quarter, with significant growth of our medical portfolio in the UAE.

NUR grew by 53% to RO 7.6 million for the three-month period ended 31 March 2023 as compared to RO 5 million in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Investment Income

As the global markets recalibrate with higher inflationary pressures, the GCC local markets have been sheltered by the continued elevated oil prices. This helped deliver better returns in the period with the group's investment income increasing by 144% to RO 2.7 million as compared to RO 1.1 million in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Net Loss After Tax

The Group posted a consolidated Loss After Tax (attributable to shareholders of NLGIC) of RO 2.6 million during the three-month period ended 31 March 2023 as compared to Profit After Tax RO 2.1 million in corresponding period of 2022.

The primary factors driving Loss after tax performance stem from motor and medical portfolios. In both segments, price conditions remain competitive whilst the level of claims has increased alongside inflationary pressure in core markets. In medical, increased claims cost were driven by a stronger than average influenza. Furthermore, seasonality effects in non-motor lines impacted results. Following returning market conditions post Covid,

Outlook

Remediation measures are in place across lines of business to deliver profitable growth amidst the ongoing post-Covid market corrections, which have resulted in a discrepancy between claim levels and premium increases.

In motor, pricing actions are underway to review new business activity and renewal accounts with segmentation and pricing sophistication driving this change. On non-motor, we continue re-

balancing action to deliver accelerated growth across existing profitable segments in line with key market trends across core markets.

The deployment of claims adjudication technology across the medical book will facilitate better customer experiences and cost control, with streamlined case management promoting efficient supply chain operations. These initiatives will foster an improved customer journey coupled with sustainable earnings.

As part of the integration efforts, further establishment of our off-shore operations will support upper-quartile cost control as we look to expand services across all lines of business. A significant advantage of the integration will be the continuous expansion of our full product range in all markets, which promotes greater scaling opportunities and customizable offerings for our customers and partners.

Furthermore, ongoing optimization of investment strategies entails higher yields across the course of the year driving increased returns. Based on the above measures, we are optimistic that the Group's performance will improve during the year and we believe that it will exceed the results of the previous year.

Training and Skill Development

We continue to invest in our people and held several training and development initiatives in the period.

Soft skills and sales efficiency training held which was provided by the Hallmark Training Institute. The training was targeted at our customer facing employees and included modules on how to enhance competency, sales and service improvements to help ensure optimal customer engagement and service.

A virtual training session was organized on Change Management for all NLGIC staff which was aimed at utilising change tools and applications, the mechanisms of handling change resistance and how to employ change within the organization.

Recent Awards

I am proud to share with you the following recognition received during the quarter, which are a testimony to the Group's quest for customer trust and service excellence.

- "Oman's Most Trusted Brand" in Insurance category, for 2022
- AIWA "Top Omani Brand 2022" Insurance category

Ramadhan Initiative

In its endeavor to give back to society, NLGIC organized an Iftar distribution initiative to 101 underprivileged families in collaboration with Ithar Charity Group. This good cause initiative was delivered through volunteers from NLGIC & Ithar who coordinated and managed the distribution.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Group, I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his dynamic and progressive leadership. Under His Majesty's visionary leadership, we pray for the steady growth, stability, and enduring prosperity of our great country.

I would like to thank our esteemed shareholders, partners and regulators for their continued support and trust. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the management and staff of NLGIC for their professionalism, dedication and commitment.

Khalid Mohammad AlZubair
Chairman

Unaudited interim condensed separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss for the three months ended 31st March 2023

	Group		Parent Company	
	31 March 2023 RO	31 March 2022 RO	31 March 2023 RO	31 March 2022 RO
	Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited
Statement of profit or loss				
Income				
Gross premium written	109,273,241	62,097,562	70,632,162	62,097,562
Gross premium earned	78,480,738	39,811,351	45,261,886	39,811,351
Reinsurance share of ceded premium	(13,748,854)	(6,000,635)	(8,135,209)	(6,000,635)
Net premium earned	64,731,884	33,810,716	37,126,677	33,810,716
Commission income	1,596,274	1,205,537	1,661,747	1,205,537
Income from policy fees	474,515	463,535	474,515	463,535
Gross claims expense	(57,227,760)	(32,465,915)	(37,590,161)	(32,465,915)
Reinsurance share of gross claims expense	7,877,648	6,268,704	5,893,164	6,268,704
Commission expense	(9,818,444)	(4,285,629)	(5,615,696)	(4,285,629)
Net underwriting income	7,634,117	4,996,948	1,950,246	4,996,948
Investment income - net	2,678,358	1,095,828	1,277,722	1,095,828
Share of Profit from Subsidiaries	-	-	(625,504)	49,854
Expected credit losses on financial assets	184	(27,621)	(727)	(27,621)
Other operating income - net	6,322	28,456	2,505	34,777
Third party administration fees	(661,057)	(348,607)	(1,034,608)	(722,307)
General and administrative expenses	(11,413,468)	(3,294,418)	(3,166,560)	(2,977,593)
Finance cost	(1,057,353)	(34,811)	(1,034,021)	(34,811)
Amortisation of intangible assets	(178,818)	(5,899)	(5,899)	(5,899)
(Loss) / profit before tax	(2,991,715)	2,409,876	(2,636,846)	2,409,176
Income tax expense	(170,854)	(351,889)	-	(351,189)
(Loss) / profit for the year	(3,162,569)	2,057,987	(2,636,846)	2,057,987
(Loss) / profit for the year attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	(2,636,846)	2,057,987	(2,636,846)	2,057,987
Non-controlling interests	(525,723)	-	-	-
	(3,162,569)	2,057,987	(2,636,846)	2,057,987
Other comprehensive income				
<i>(Items that are or may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss):</i>				
Exchange differences on translation of foreign operations	1,605	(4,061)	1,605	(4,061)
Changes in fair value of debt instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income - net	196,787	(177,799)	198,537	(177,799)
Share of FVOCI from Subsidiaries	75,166	626,290	75,166	626,290
(Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss):				
Changes in fair value of equity instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income - net	85,479	9,891	81,982	9,891
Other comprehensive income	359,037	454,321	357,290	454,321
Total comprehensive (loss) / income for the year	(2,803,532)	2,512,308	(2,279,556)	2,512,308
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE (LOSS) / INCOME for the year attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	(2,279,556)	2,512,308	(2,279,556)	2,512,308
Non-controlling interests	(523,976)	-	-	-
	(2,803,532)	2,512,308	(2,279,556)	2,512,308
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	(0.007)	0.008	(0.007)	0.008

Unaudited interim condensed separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 31st March 2023

	Group		Parent Company	
	31 March 2023 RO	31 December 2022 RO	31 March 2023 RO	31 December 2022 RO
	(Unaudited)	(Audited)	(Unaudited)	(Audited)
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	42,606,323	47,914,047	19,444,864	19,631,657
Bank deposits	142,042,831	147,277,552	37,935,440	42,143,517
Investment in securities	105,919,851	100,839,325	59,854,311	56,376,006
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	123,105,917	121,559,265
Insurance and reinsurance receivables	118,705,498	81,114,393	87,642,070	53,589,712
Reinsurance share of outstanding claims and IBNR reserve	24,118,743	23,262,905	7,674,057	6,498,774
Reinsurance share of actuarial / mathematical and unexpired risk reserve	23,258,686	18,082,401	17,004,523	12,165,379
Other receivables and prepayments	24,849,820	23,581,728	14,803,339	11,707,753
Loans to policyholders	45,713	47,587	45,713	47,587
Property and equipment	8,712,981	9,131,126	6,114,450	6,280,651
Deferred tax asset	630,689	638,574	390,558	398,570
Intangible assets (including goodwill)	26,474,884	26,572,822	419,556	425,455
Total assets	517,366,019	478,462,460	374,434,798	330,824,326
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
EQUITY				
Share capital	39,837,434	39,837,434	39,837,434	39,837,434
Legal reserve	9,199,031	9,199,031	9,199,031	9,199,031
Contingency reserve	17,558,992	17,531,397	17,558,992	17,531,397
Revaluation reserve	352,345	352,345	352,345	352,345
Share premium	29,176,468	29,176,468	29,176,468	29,176,468
Fair value reserve	(291,663)	(627,007)	(291,663)	(627,007)
Foreign exchange translation reserve	(43,855)	(45,460)	(43,855)	(45,460)
Retained earnings	14,618,035	13,789,249	17,393,310	16,564,524
Total equity attributable to shareholders of the Parent	110,406,787	109,213,457	113,182,062	111,988,732
Non-controlling interests	18,885,797	17,268,751	-	-
Total equity	129,292,584	126,482,208	113,182,062	111,988,732
Liabilities				
Gross outstanding claims and IBNR reserve	92,603,106	79,562,251	44,672,668	31,319,829
Gross actuarial / mathematical and unexpired risk reserve	136,123,392	101,738,096	87,456,819	62,086,543
Due to reinsurers	26,601,296	25,449,995	18,401,572	11,985,821
Other liabilities	48,811,035	61,219,213	33,224,055	36,030,138
Term Loan & Overdraft from Bank	77,155,187	77,093,974	77,155,187	77,093,974
Income tax payable	6,779,419	6,916,723	342,435	319,289
Total liabilities	388,073,435	351,980,252	261,252,736	218,835,594
Total equity and liabilities	517,366,019	478,462,460	374,434,798	330,824,326
Net assets per share	0.277	0.274	0.284	0.281

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,715.83
Sensex	62,345.71

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian	213.99
Pakistan	768.95
Bangladesh	280.69
Philippines	145.78
Sri Lanka	814.31

*Rates as on May 15
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US energy majors report higher profits despite oil price dip

US oil giants ExxonMobil and Chevron reported another quarter of heady profits as both companies continued to direct large cash payments to shareholders. Strong refining results offset the effect of lower crude prices in the first quarter compared with the year-ago period, lifting profits and enabling ExxonMobil to return US\$8.1bn to shareholders and Chevron US\$6.6bn in dividends and share repurchases.

"We're delivering strong financial results and increasing cash return to shareholders," said Chevron Executive Mike Wirth, pointing to a 65 per cent jump in shareholder repayments compared with the year-ago period.

At ExxonMobil, first-quarter profits more than doubled to US\$11.4bn, while revenues declined 4.3 per cent to US\$86.6bn. Results in the year-ago period were dented by US\$3.4bn in one-time costs connected to ExxonMobil's withdrawal from the Sakhalin offshore oilfield following the invasion of Ukraine..

Oman's inflation expected to slow further in 2023

IMF projects Oman's annual inflation to average at 1.9% in 2023

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Oman's annual inflation, which remained relatively low in 2022 despite rising global inflation, is expected to further decelerate this year, thanks to government subsidies, price caps on certain products, and a strengthening US dollar.

After experiencing one of the lowest inflation rates among GCC countries in 2022, Oman is expected to record an average inflation rate of 1.9 per cent for 2023, the lowest expected inflation in the GCC, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The inflation rate in Oman decreased to 1.6 per cent in March 2023 from 1.9 per cent recorded in the previous month, the lowest monthly reading since June 2021. The sultanate witnessed the second-lowest average inflation rate among GCC countries in 2022 at 2.8 per cent, following Saudi Arabia which registered an inflation rate of just 2.5 per cent during the year.

The IMF expects GCC inflation to further decrease in the next two years, with an average of 2.9 per cent in 2023 and 2.3 per cent in 2024.

'Lower inflation in GCC coun-



Oman's March 2023 inflation was mainly driven by a 4.1 per cent growth of the food and non-alcoholic beverage index (Muscat Daily)

tries is mainly attributed to governmental interventions such as price caps on certain products, subsidies on key products or utilities, and the strengthening of the US dollar, which all GCC countries have pegged to their currencies, except for Kuwait which has linked its currency to a basket of currencies including the US dollar,' Kuwait-based Kamco Investment said in a research report released on Monday.

In terms of sectoral inflation trends, the food and beverages category has been one of the most important categories in terms of weight or growth in Oman's and GCC inflation performance. The food and beverages category has shown growth in all GCC countries.

Oman's March 2023 inflation was mainly driven by a 4.1 per cent year-on-year growth of the food and non-alcoholic beverage index, the second biggest weighted index.

Among GCC countries, inflation growth in the housing category was mixed, albeit leaning towards positive year-on-year growth during March. Qatar's housing costs rose by 8.7 per cent year-on-year during March, the highest growth among GCC countries. On the other hand, Oman's housing prices remained stable in March compared to the same month of the previous year.

According to the Kamco Investment report, the combination of persistent high oil and gas prices and interest rate hikes by GCC central banks, largely in unison with the US Federal Reserve rate increases, has been another key factor that kept GCC inflation rates significantly

lower than their global counterparts.

The US Federal Reserve continued its rate-increasing measures to combat inflation. In its most recent rate hike, the US central bank increased its benchmark overnight interest rate by 0.25 basis points to the 5.0-5.25 per cent range, marking the Fed's tenth consecutive rate increase since March 2022.

In response to the Fed's rate hike, all GCC central banks have also increased their benchmark rates. The Central Bank of Oman recently increased its repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.75 per cent, following the US central bank's decision as Omani rial is pegged to the US dollar. This was Omani central bank's tenth rate hike since March 2022.

Another key driver of the decline in GCC inflation is the decline in global food prices. The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) main food price index witnessed its 12th consecutive month of decline in March 2023.

The FAO index tracks the most globally traded food items. The FAO index averaged 126.9 points during March, 20.5 per cent lower than its peak value at the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Dubai, UAE – Dubai retained its No 1 spot globally for attracting greenfield FDI projects in 2022, further reinforcing its position as the world's top foreign direct investment (FDI) hub, according to the latest data from the 2022 Financial Times 'FDI Markets' report.

Retaining its top spot for a second successive year, Dubai achieved 89.5 per cent year-on-year growth in total announced FDI projects in 2022, while total FDI capital surged 80.3 per cent over the same period, further consolidating the emirate's status as one of the top three global cities.

Sheikh Hamdan al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and chairman of Dubai Executive Council said, "Dubai's ability to secure the No 1 global ranking for greenfield FDI projects for the second year in a row demonstrates its ability to sustain its compelling investment value proposition even at a time when the world-wide economy is facing headwinds."

Financial Times Ltd's 'FDI Markets' data for 2022 showed that Dubai continued to maintain and improve its leadership position across key FDI attraction metrics.

WAM

Bank Nizwa signs sustainable financing deal with Asyad

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Bank Nizwa recently signed an agreement with Asyad Group, Oman's global integrated logistics services provider, to extend sustainable finance to its subsidiary Duqm Development Company (DDC).

This is the first-of-its-kind sustainable financing deal to be signed in Oman with the terms of financing linked to predefined key performance indicators (KPIs) that encompass various environment, social and governance (ESG) norms, Bank Nizwa said in a press statement.

The agreement was signed during a ceremony held at the Asyad Group headquarters, with Bank Nizwa represented by its CEO Khaled al Kayed and Asyad Group represented by Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping and Drydock.

Dr Ibrahim said, "Asyad Group has crafted a comprehensive sustainability strategy that aligns with our core values, aiming to minimise our carbon footprint. It reaffirms our unwavering dedication to environmental and social responsibilities, whilst adhering to the principles of good governance. Our objective is to establish a dynamic and support-



The agreement was signed by Khaled al Kayed (right) and Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi

ive logistics sector that accommodates holistic development pathways, effectively addressing current demands without compromising the future generation's capacity to fulfil their aspirations and requirements."

"This strategic partnership with Bank Nizwa demonstrates our commitment to incorporating innovative sustainability elements throughout our diverse business operations. Our main focus is to optimise efficiency, reduce costs and sustainably enhance performance. Simultane-

ously, we want to cement our reputation as a company that deeply supports Oman's ambitious vision of attaining carbon neutrality by 2050," he added.

Kayed said, "Bank Nizwa and Asyad Group have enjoyed strong corporate ties and we are indeed delighted to join hands with the group as it further develops its businesses sustainably. While DDC is a strategic venture with immense potential, it also reserves the capacity to impact the environment and people. In this regard, the sustainability-linked financing agreement solidifies the commitment of the company to ensure that sustainable operations take utmost priority and that the said impact is a positive one."

"As a Shariah-compliant bank, we will continue to extend our support to ventures that strive to achieve the greater good of the community while upholding values of ethicality, integrity, and morality. It is quintessential to note that the larger community and stakeholders have become more mindful of sustainability credentials, and, therefore, it is paramount that businesses implement tangible sustainability-linked policies," he added.

DDC is strongly aligned with Oman's sustainability goals, and decarbonisation and optimum waste management including recycling are top priorities for the company. DDC was formed in 2010 to establish an urban residential community to serve the housing needs in Duqm while engaging in various tourism, commercial real estate development, and rental and sale activities.

The financing from Bank Nizwa will help in boosting DDC's capital efficiency and its ability to contribute to nurturing a sustainable society.

Tejarah Talks empowers SMEs for climate action

Muscat – Tejarah Talks, the popular Omani business forum initiative organized in association with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), is back with a new discussion session titled 'Oman's Journey to Net-Zero: An Environment for Enterprise?'

This new edition of Tejarah Talks is supported by Jindal Shadeed, Sustainable City – Yiti, Nortal, Omantel and OmanFM and will take place on Wednesday at Omantel's head-office in Airports Heights.

The event aims to provide a platform for Omani SMEs to learn about the latest developments in sustainable practices and climate-related regulations, helping them develop strategies to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

As SMEs make up 90 per cent of all businesses and employ 70 per cent of the world's workforce, their role in achieving climate goals is key. This Tejarah Talks session is also designed to inform, inspire and empower local businesses to seize the opportunities presented by Oman's green transition.

Maymuna al Adawi, MoCIIP director for public private partnerships and organiser of Tejarah Talks, highlighted the importance of helping small



businesses develop net-zero strategies. She said, "SMEs are the backbone of Oman's economy. They play a significant role in creating jobs and contributing to our GDP. However, they also have a responsibility to reduce their carbon footprint and contribute to Oman's 2050 net-zero emissions target. Every step an SME takes on its journey to net-zero adds up - not only in protecting the health of the planet but also in future-proofing their business, attracting new investment and customers as well as creating new opportunities for growth."

The Wednesday session will cover a range of topics related to net-zero, including renewables, energy efficiency, carbon pricing and climate legislation. The panel of experts include H H Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, co-founder of The Firm; Fadi al Shihabi, KPMG partner and ESG services lead;

Hilal al Ghaithi, director of energy at Authority for Public Services Regulation; Walter Simpson, managing director of CC Energy Development; and Ammar al Kharusi, group head of development, Omran.

In line with Oman's ambitions to become a low-carbon economy, the sultanate's CO2 emissions per capita fell 16 per cent between 2015-2020, according to an EY MENA Climate Change Readiness Index report. Within the GCC, Oman's carbon emissions per capita were the lowest at 15.3 metric tonnes. The report also highlighted Oman's National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change 2020-2040 and its support for sustainability focused start-ups. The strategy is intended to be a catalyst to spur local climate action and facilitate Oman's move to a low-carbon economy.

According to MoCIIP's Adawi, the Tejarah Talks will help businesses understand the new commercial opportunities presented by Oman's ambitious green transition. "We have an exciting opportunity to come together to tackle climate change. We all need to play our part and as SMEs make up the majority of Oman's business community it is critical they get involved," said Adawi.

Britain's economy ekes out growth in first quarter of 2023

London, UK – Britain's economy grew 0.1 per cent over the first quarter despite weakening in March, as output continues to be hit by high inflation and strikes.

After narrowly avoiding recession last year, the economy advanced 0.5 per cent in January before flattening in February and

sliding 0.3 per cent in March, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

"The fall in March was driven by widespread decreases across the services sector," noted ONS director of economic statistics, Darren Morgan.

"Despite the launch of new number plates, cars sales were

low by historic standards - continuing the trend seen since the start of the pandemic - with warehousing, distribution and retail also having a poor month," he added.

The data comes one day after the Bank of England forecast that the UK economy would avoid recession this year despite

the country's annual inflation stuck above 10 per cent.

With consumer prices continuing to rise at a fast pace, the BoE on Thursday hiked its key interest rate by a further quarter-point to 4.5 per cent.

It was the central bank's 12th increase in a row, putting the rate at the highest level since the

global financial crisis in 2008.

Elevated inflation is eroding the value of workers' wages, causing mass strikes across Britain, the latest being stoppages on the railway network Friday.

"A weaker economy in March underscores its fragility despite a fall in wholesale energy

prices, improving supply chain conditions, and consumer confidence that has... recovered from multi-year lows," noted Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK.

The latest BoE hike is set to deepen the crunch in living standards as retail banks pass on the increase, resulting in higher re-

payments on loans, including mortgages. At the same time, those who can afford to save will benefit for increased fixed returns on investments.

UK annual inflation stood at 10.1 per cent in March, the highest level in the Group of Seven richest nations.

AFP

Europe resists energy crunch, boosting growth forecast

Brussels, Belgium – Europe's economy rode out the energy price crisis triggered by Russia's war on Ukraine with better than expected economic growth, Brussels said Monday, as it boosted its forecast.

The European Commission revised upwards its 2023 economic outlook, but also warned that inflation remains higher than hoped, maintaining pressure for higher interest rates.

The commission raised its 2023 growth outlook by 0.2 points to 1.1 per cent for the 20-country eurozone single currency bloc, and to 1.0 per cent for the EU as a whole.

It also raised the 2024 growth forecast for the eurozone by 0.1 points to 1.6 per cent.

"The European economy is in better shape than we projected last autumn," the EU commissioner for the economy, Paolo Gentiloni, said in a statement.

"Thanks to determined efforts to strengthen our energy security, a remarkably resilient labour market and easing supply constraints, we avoided a winter recession and are set for moderate growth this year and next."

The eurozone inflation forecast has also been revised higher, the forecast rising 5.8 per cent in 2023 compared to 5.6 per cent in the previous outlook last last year.

Recent turbulence
Consumer price inflation is ex-



The European Commission revised upwards its 2023 economic outlook

European Commission raised its 2023 growth outlook by 0.2 points to 1.1% for the 20-country eurozone single currency bloc, and to 1% for the EU as a whole. It also raised the 2024 growth forecast for the eurozone by 0.1 points to 1.6%

pected to drop back to 2.8 per cent in 2024, still above the European Central Bank's two per cent target.

"As inflation remains high, financing conditions are set to tighten further," the commission warned.

The EU executive also pointed to the recent turbulence in the banking industry during which a clutch of US regional lenders collapsed and Switzerland's troubled Credit Suisse was bought by UBS.

"Though the ECB and other EU central banks are expected to be nearing the end of the interest rate hiking cycle, the recent tur-

bulence in the financial sector is likely to add pressure to the cost and ease of accessing credit, slowing down investment growth and hitting in particular residential investment."

Europe's better than expected results have been explained by energy prices falling quickly from their peaks after big gas exporter Russia launched a war against EU candidate Ukraine.

Last week wholesale EU gas prices were the lowest since the summer of 2021, well before the February 2022 invasion triggered energy sanctions and embargoes, Gentiloni said.

Electricity prices have fallen in tandem and oil prices are expected to fall this year, after a mild winter and efforts by EU energy producers to diversify suppliers.

Gentiloni also said that the EU labour market is the strongest it has been in decades, with eurozone unemployment rate at all time low in March of 6.5 per cent. For the first time, the European Commission's forecast also includes estimates for Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia-Herzegovina, candidates for EU membership.

After a 29 per cent collapse in GDP last year due to the war, the Ukrainian economy is expected to stabilise this year with growth of 0.6 per cent and may rebound in 2024, depending on progress in the conflict.

AFP



Global stock markets jump with focus on US debt

London, UK – Major stock markets advanced Monday after President Joe Biden said he was "optimistic" about finding an agreement on averting a first-ever US default.

Traders reacted also to a mixed inflation picture out of Europe and weekend elections in Thailand and Turkey.

Stock markets in Europe and Asia kicked the week off with gains amid "growing hopes that the Democrats and Republicans will reach a deal to avert the disastrous scenario of a government default" in the world's biggest economy, noted Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor.

Elsewhere, European gas prices reached the lowest levels in almost two years as concerns about tight supplies continued to ease heading into the summer.

On currency markets, the Thai baht rallied as pro-democracy parties looked set to win weekend general elections, with voters delivering a clear rejection of nearly a decade of military-backed government.

The progressive Move Forward Party claimed victory Mon-

day, while the Pheu Thai party agreed to join a coalition government.

However, stocks in Bangkok fell.

The Turkish lira edged down, reversing earlier gains, as the country looked set for a presidential election runoff.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will face opposition candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu again in a second round on May 28 if neither candidate achieves the 50 per cent needed to win.

"If these results hold, it would be one of the worst outcomes for the markets," said Ogeday Topcular, a money manager at RAM Capital SA.

"There will be (no clarity) for the next two weeks."

In Brussels, the European Commission boosted its 2023 economic growth outlook for the eurozone -- but also raised the inflation forecast for the single currency area.

"The European economy is in better shape than we projected last autumn," the EU commissioner for the economy, Paolo Gentiloni, said in the statement.

AFP



SoftBank logs \$7.2bn full-year loss on tech woes

Tokyo, Japan – SoftBank Group reported an annual net loss of over US\$7.2bn after a bruising year for the tech startup sector in which it is heavily invested.

The company said its annual net loss came to 970bn yen (US\$7.2bn) on sales of 6.57tn yen, reflecting in part major losses from its Vision Fund portfolios.

The Vision Fund 1 and 2 vehicles were hit by the global tech rout, SoftBank Group said in a statement.

But the depth of the group's loss was reduced by unwinding its stake in Chinese tech giant Alibaba.

"Share prices of numerous public portfolio companies declined for the fiscal year amid the weakness in global stock markets, although share prices of several companies rose in the fourth quarter," SoftBank said.

"The fair value of a wide range of private portfolio companies also decreased, reflecting mark-downs of weaker-performing companies and share price declines among market comparable companies."

The two Vision funds recorded a whopping 4.3tn yen in losses (US\$32bn), SoftBank said – a record, according to Bloomberg News.

SoftBank took hits across a range of startup investments,

from long-struggling WeWork to delivery service DoorDash.

The Japanese group has made aggressive investments in tech startups and has been exposed to fickle market forces.

"SoftBank Group's performance very much depends on share prices," Hideki Yasuda of Toyo Securities told AFP ahead of the company's announcement.

Analysts fear more bad news may be on the cards.

"We believe that the private company portfolios... are at risk of further meaningful mark-downs going forward," wrote Victor Galliano, an analyst who publishes on SmartKarma.

Vision Fund vehicles had reported losses for four straight quarters through December.

Risk evaluator Standard and Poor's gave SoftBank Group's long-term bonds a BB+ rating in February.

The group said earlier this year that it was focused on "defence", though it was convinced of investment opportunities for artificial intelligence.

Led by billionaire founder Masayoshi Son, SoftBank Group is going through a broad rethink to restore its financial health, hit hard by global economic disruptions caused by the pandemic.

It is moving to take British semiconductor firm Arm public

while selling down its stake in Alibaba.

Britain had hoped to see the chip designer listed on the London stock exchange, but in March the firm and SoftBank said they would instead pursue a US-only listing for now.

SoftBank initially hoped to sell Arm to US chip giant Nvidia, but the US\$40bn deal was scrapped over regulatory objections.

Son had reportedly hoped to secure a valuation of around US\$60bn for Arm, but analysts say it will now be lucky to secure around half that -- approximately what it paid for the firm in 2016.

SoftBank has also moved to offload almost all of its stake in e-commerce giant Alibaba, raising cash while limiting its exposure to China's tech crackdown.

The company once held more than 30 per cent of Alibaba, and said Thursday it recorded gains of 4.8bn yen in fiscal 2022 as it took steps to reduce its stake in its long-term partner.

The small amount of remaining shares will also be offloaded in one or two years, chief financial officer Yoshimitsu Goto told reporters.

He did not give exact figures, but the Financial Times reported last month that SoftBank plans to reduce its stake in Alibaba down to 3.8 per cent.

AFP

Biden 'optimistic' on debt talks with Republicans as default looms

Rehoboth Beach, US – President Joe Biden said Sunday he remains "optimistic" about finding an agreement with his Republican opponents to raise the US debt limit and avoid a default, which his administration warned would cause "catastrophic" consequences.

Congressional Republicans are demanding budget cuts in exchange for lifting the US borrowing limit, while the White House has insisted for months that the nation's credit should not be up for negotiation.

Alarm bells are meanwhile ringing over the possibility of a first-ever US default, with uncertainty over the actual date the government would stop being able to pay its bills.

The two sides have remained at an impasse despite weeks of warnings from government officials and bankers that a default could unleash drastic consequences, including a possible recession and likely global financial contagion.

Nonetheless, Biden said Sunday he thinks he will eventually be able to reach a deal.



US President Joe Biden makes his way to board Air Force One before departing from Joint Base Andrews in Maryland on Saturday (AFP)

"I remain optimistic because I'm a congenital optimist, but I really think there's a desire on their part as well as ours to reach agreement. I think we'll be able to do it," Biden told reporters while out on a bike ride near his beach home in Delaware.

A much-anticipated new round of debt-ceiling talks between Biden and Republican leaders, including House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, was postponed from Friday until the coming week.

Asked if the Tuesday meeting was still on, Biden said: "I think

so."

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has warned a default could occur by June 1, while the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office forecast on Friday the date of June 15.

"We shouldn't be here," Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union."

"If Congress failed to raise the debt limit by the time of default, we would go into a recession and it'd be catastrophic," he warned.

"The United States of America has never defaulted on its

debt -- and we can't."

'Massive cuts'

Biden has stated he wants a "clean" hike of the debt ceiling, but Republicans are insisting any extension of the country's borrowing authority, currently capped at US\$31.4tn, come with substantial curbs on spending.

"It's time to bring spending levels back to pre-Covid, and then we can talk about raising the debt ceiling," Byron Donalds, a Republican representative from Florida, told FOX News on Sunday.

"If Joe Biden brings nothing to the table, if all he does is sit there with his hands in his pockets... then he's the one leading our nation into default."

Former president Donald Trump on Sunday again encouraged his party to not give in, saying on Truth Social that "unless the Republicans get EVERYTHING they are asking for in terms of Cost Cutting," a default should be allowed to occur.

"Better now than later, especially with 32 Trillion Dollars of Debt out there," he added.

AFP

US gold miner snaps up Australian rival in \$19bn deal

Sydney, Australia – Australian mining company Newcrest said Monday it had agreed to a takeover by US rival Newmont, creating a world-leading gold producer in a deal worth Aus\$28.8bn (US\$19bn).

By swallowing up Newcrest, the US mining giant will cement its position as the world's biggest gold producer, with operations extending across North and South America, Africa, Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Melbourne-based Newcrest's shareholders will receive 0.4 of the US firm's shares for each



Newcrest share, giving them 31 per cent of the combined group, the Australian firm said.

The takeover, expected to be

completed by the end of 2023, has an implied value of Aus\$28.8bn, it said.

"The combined group will set a new benchmark in gold production while benefitting from a material and growing exposure to copper and a market-leading position in safety and sustainability," Newcrest chairman Peter Tomsett said in a statement.

Newcrest had "unanimously" recommended the takeover offer to shareholders, he said, three months after its board rejected an earlier US\$17bn approach as

too cheap.

"It's a fantastic opportunity for Newmont because they're going to be acquiring some very good assets at what I consider to be an attractive price," said Daniel Morgan, mining equity analyst at financial services firm Barrenjoey.

The takeover still needs approval from Newcrest shareholders at a meeting expected in September or October, and agreement from competition authorities in Australia, Canada and Papua New Guinea.

AFP

Oman marks day for health, safety at work

The Department of Infection Control, Sterilisation, Environmental Health, and Occupational Safety celebrated the World Day for Safety and Health at Work at an event on Monday.

The programme, entitled ‘A safe and healthy work environment is a basic principle and a right to work’, was held under the patronage of H E Dr Saeed bin Hareb al Lamki, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs at the General Directorate of Al-Nahda Hospital.

Dr Rashid bin Mohammed al Alawi, Director General of Khoula Hospital, attended the celebration along with the heads of departments and clinics in the hospital and a number of employees from all departments and clinics in Al Nahda Hospital, with the participation of 25 participants from seven government and private authorities.

Azza bint Hilal al Barwani, a health, safety, and environment technician at Al-Nahda Hospital, pointed out that 865,000 people around the world - while per-



forming their work - face the risk of death or exposure to harm.

Around US\$2.8tn is spent annually on this issue, between money wasted due to lost work time and money spent on treatment, compensation, and rehabilitation for occupational damages and diseases.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is working to define the slogan for the event every year. In June 2022, the International Labour Conference decided to include a 'safe and healthy work environment' in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work.

“On April 28 this year, the organisation promoted this slogan,

where it brought together experts and bodies to discuss its effects, as well as how to implement this right in practice in the world of work to bear the slogan of this year's celebration under the title 'a safe and healthy work environment is a basic principle and a right at work,' she added.

The event aimed to introduce the importance of adherence to health and safety in the occupational environment, with the aim of spreading health awareness in government and private health institutions in the community.

The importance of the event comes in promoting a culture of health and safety among workers in all sectors, identifying and reducing psychological and social risks and work pressures, identifying the emergency plan in the event of a fire, and introducing the community to the services provided by government institutions and companies in the field of occupational health and safety.



MoE holds Shell Road Safety Programme

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Office of the Undersecretary for Education, concluded experimental application phase of the Shell Road Safety Programme (VIA), in co-operation with Shell Development Oman and the Royal Oman Police

The programme, held under the auspices of H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education, and in the presence of Malak bint Ahmed al Shaibaniya, Director-General of Shell Oman Development Company, comes to enhance the roles and efforts of the Ministry of Education in instilling traffic awareness and disseminating traffic culture among school students.

This global programme was implemented in four schools on an experiment basis for the second-cycle education in Muscat and South Batinah governorates.

Two schools for boys and two schools for girls were chosen in each governorate for an inte-

grated curriculum that combines the theoretical and practical aspects of traffic safety.

The programme was designed to be flexible and easy to apply in order to be implemented in the activities period for the selected students, according to a study plan specially prepared to ensure the sequence of teaching the four units of the programme, and the implementation of basic exercises.

The plan included the participation of specialists from the Royal Oman Police in the implementation of some practical exercises, and field visits to the Traffic Safety Institute to refine expertise knowledge, and skills acquired in the programme.

The closing ceremony began with a speech by the Undersecretary of Education for Education. “The Sultanate of Oman is considered one of the countries that have assumed the responsibilities supporting traffic safety issues at the local and international levels. It is evident

in the Sultanate of Oman initiative in presenting a draft resolution for the work of the United Nations General Assembly on the global road safety crisis in 2003,” H E Dr Ambosaidi said.

“Concepts, knowledge and skills related to the subject of traffic safety are considered an essential pillar in the school curricula. The Ministry of Education has been working in partnership with the Royal Oman Police and the institutions interested in this from the public and private sectors, stressing the importance of consolidating it and integrating it into the curricula, educational programs and accompanying educational activities,” he added.

In his speech, Al Ahnaf al Zubaidi, Director of Social Investment and Community Relations at Shell Development Company Oman, highlighted Oman Shell's belief that education in childhood is like engraving on a stone. “This initiative came to provide an integrated approach to train our students and teachers on basic

traffic safety rules, and we are all confident that these information and sound behaviours will be transmitted by these participants to their families, relatives, friends and the rest of society to contribute to spreading awareness of road safety and achieving the ultimate goal of reducing unfortunate events that cost our country a lot on the social and economic levels.”

The closing ceremony included a visual presentation of the programme, following which the participating schools - Fatima Bint Al-Khattab School for Basic Education, Hazem Bin Hammam School from Muscat governorate, and Durat Al-Hashemia School and Al-Qoda School for Basic Education from South Batinah governorate - were introduced.

At the end of the ceremony, the participating schools, the teachers implementing the project, and the members of the team supervising the implementation and follow-up of the On the Road programme were honoured.

Ooredoo ropes in eight new indirect sales channel partners

Committed to supporting the digital transformation and growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oman, Ooredoo has inducted eight new SME indirect sales channel partners, to provide value-added services to other SMEs.

“Such partners will be able to provide easy-to-use and smart solutions to existing customers, as well as to new customers who are currently outside of Ooredoo's main reach and who require support in digitising certain aspects of their operations,” Ooredoo stated.

“Ooredoo aims to support small and medium-sized businesses in Oman in a number of ways. These enterprises can col-



Saoud al Riyami

lectively have a huge impact on our economy, and are part of the drive for economic diversification, set out in Vision 2040,” said Saoud al Riyami, acting chief business and wholesale officer at Ooredoo.

By partnering with these eight new indirect sales channel partners, he said, “we are supporting them, and in turn, supporting many other businesses across Oman with telecoms solutions”.

“This is aligned with our aim to support the digitisation of SMEs and provide them with access to higher connectivity at lower cost so they can successfully focus on growing their business,” he added.

Ooredoo provides SMEs and SoHos in Oman with superior connectivity and cutting-edge digital solutions.

The company's growing portfolio includes several highly innovative, dynamic and flexible business products, services and solutions, covering both mobile and fixed technologies.

Instant loan up to RO25,000 from OAB

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) customers can now apply for an instant loan through the OAB Online app, with an increased limit of RO25,000, available either on new loans or when topping up an existing loan.

Customers can apply any time online from the comfort of their own homes or on-the-go and it takes only a few minutes to complete, with fast automated approval, said the bank.

Once approved, the funds are deposited into the customer's bank account within minutes, it added.

“This fast, secure, reliable and user-friendly solution is the latest



step in our commitment to providing advanced digital services to our customers,” said Rashad al Sheikh, head of Retail Banking at OAB. “Our OAB Online app is spearheading the charge for innovative solutions, and this new offering is the latest testament to our commitment to providing ex-

ceptional digital services.”

As for repayment, customers can choose up to 120 months repayment plan depending on their age.

They have the flexibility to choose Eid waivers and/or a one month grace periods, when necessary.

Spirit of leadership invigorated as Indian School Muladha inducts council

Indian School Muladha on May 11 organised a programme to felicitate the new office - bearers of the Student Council of the school for the academic year 2023-24.

Captain Harish Shrinivasan, Defence Advisor, Indian Embassy, graced the occasion as the chief guest, while A Anil Kumar, president of the School Management Committee; M T Musthafa, the management committee convener; and two committee members T H Arshad and Ashifa Asif attended the ceremony along with the staff and the students of the school.

M T Musthafa greeted the chief guest by presenting a bouquet.

The march by the student council members was a spectac-



ular event which set the mood for the event. The school choir led everyone into prayer through a devotional rendition.

Principal Parveen Kumar extended a hearty welcome to the chief guest and the distinguished gathering.

In his address, SMS president Anil Kumar emphasised on the relevance of the day's function and reminded the budding leaders of the pivotal role of dedication and hard work to achieve their goals.

The newly elected student council members were introduced by Pramode Joy, the council coordinator.

Following the oath of allegiance administered by the principal, the prefects were

honoured with badges and sashes by the chief guest and the dignitaries.

Chief guest Capt Shrinivasan invigorated the spirit of leadership in the student council with his words of wisdom. He exhorted the students to work earnestly and uphold the legacy of the school, and shared the tips on how to turn out to be responsible leaders. He also apprised students about the career options available for all streams in Armed Forces particularly for girls. The Head Boy Paul Mons and the Head Girl Awathif Karuvattil delivered the acceptance speech with pride.

On behalf of the School, Anil Kumar presented a memento to the chief guest.



Alizz ONE awarded for exceptional banking value proposition

Alizz ONE - the enhanced banking value proposition for salaried customers from Alizz Islamic Bank - has been honoured with the 'Business Excellence Award for meeting customer requirements through a comprehensive value proposition and enhanced banking experience' at the OER Business and HR Excellence Awards held as part of the OER Business Summit 2023.

The award ceremony recognises outstanding organisations and individuals who have demonstrated exceptional leadership, vision, and achievement in setting new benchmarks for excellence in the business world.

The award was received by Asaad bin Hilal al Kharusi, assistant general manager and chief operating officer of Alizz Islamic Bank.

Alizz ONE offers a comprehensive range of services, encompassing financing, accounts, and savings plans specifically designed for individuals seeking to transfer their salaries to Alizz Islamic Bank.

With a wide variety of options available and flexible financing rates, the programme not only caters to customer's diverse financial needs but also enhances the overall customer experience, empowering them to pursue their investment goals with confidence.

Featuring a range of versatile options Alizz ONE includes a current account, designed to facilitate various customer transactions. Additionally, it offers a savings plan account with attractive monthly profits, enabling customers to save and work towards specific financial goals through a structured savings plan.

Moreover, the programme provides a savings account for deposits, offering the flexibility to link it to both a current account and a savings account, while also providing customers with the option to obtain a cheque book.

Alizz ONE from Alizz Islamic Bank also provides a wide range of financing options, including home finance, auto finance, and personal finance at competitive profit rates.

Designed exclusively for customers who transfer their salaries to Alizz Islamic Bank, Alizz ONE offers an array of wonderful and enticing benefits. These include a full-year exemption from credit card fees when applying for a card, as well as obtaining a direct debit card without any annual fees for the first year.

Asyad, ESO to hold lecture series on climate change from end of May

Asyad Group and the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) have joined forces to launch an insightful series of lectures that shed light on the challenges facing Oman in its fight to tackle climate change. The lectures and technical seminars are planned to take place from later this month to early January next year, a release stated.

The global integrated logistics provider partnered with ESO to implement this joint undertaking in line with Asyad's sustainability strategy and commitment to strengthen cooperation on environment and climate issues between business and civil society organizations across Oman.

This dedicated series of lectures and workshops will leverage the combined resources and expertise of Asyad and ESO to highlight the urgency of adapting to environmental challenges and the need for impactful transformative action.

Local and international experts will join representatives from both organisations to explain how individual, organisational and national action is needed today, more than ever, to achieve the sultanate's climate change goals, starting from its national objective of net zero by 2050.

"As a national and global corporate citizen, we are proud to take part in this initiative as one of our many impactful environmental and sustainability programmes," said Essam al Sheibany, VP Sustainability at Asyad Group.

"Through this awareness-raising series, our group is following through on its unwavering commitment to support Oman in its endeavour to achieve net-zero by 2050 and play our global part in helping realise the UN Sustainable Development Goals related to climate change and sustainability," he said, while explaining the value of the joint initiative.

"Raising awareness amongst the general public and professionals on climate issues and inspiring collective action is



instrumental to complement our large-scale initiatives and plans to create a more sustainable logistics sector with a lower carbon footprint," Sheibany added.

"Asyad Group is keen on protecting the environment and building a brighter tomorrow, that is why we have undertaken numerous emission-reduction and solar-energy initiatives at our ports and geared up to support Oman's nascent hydrogen sector, all under our unified strategy to join the world's fight against climate change."

Rumaitha al Busaidi, Middle East Climate Strategist and Executive Board Director at ESO, said:

"The Environment Society of Oman has embraced the momentum of a growing and deeper public acknowledgment that we are facing an urgent planetary crisis. We want to encourage more people and entities to join us in trying to successfully avert the worst impacts of climate change and support the accelerated efforts towards our goals of biodiversity protection and a net-zero emissions economy by 2050.

"It may be a challenge, but it is definitely one worth rising to because it is only through empowerment and collective action that we can secure a better future for our generation and many generations to come."

The anticipated ESO-Asyad series will consist of four lectures open to the public, three discussion clinics targeted to specific audience groups, and one white paper to help prepare for Oman's participation in the 28th session of the Conference of Parties (COP28) the annual Climate Change Conference organised by the United Nations.

Asyad Group continues to push forward with its sustainability strategies to create a low-emission logistics ecosystem, mitigate the impact of climate change in Oman and beyond.

ISD erupts in joy after great performance in CBSE

Indian School Darsait erupted in joy following a great performance by the students in the CBSE Classes X and Class XII examinations this year.

'It's a proof of the remarkable blend of academic rigor and holistic education that we strive to provide at Indian School Darsait,' the school stated in a release.

As many as 164 students appeared for the Class XII examination, of which 13 per cent scored above 90%, while 33 per cent scored 80% and 53 per cent scored above 70%.

Yogil Adrin Poomani Arumai became the school topper in Class XII science stream with 96.2%, while Heizal Joy came second with 95.4%, and Ashly

CLASS X TOPPER

Keerthana Aravind (98%)

Biju third with 95.2%.

Sandeep Ramanujam in the Commerce stream secured the first position with 95.8%, followed by Magandha Dinesh in the second (95.4%) and Aswin

CLASS XII FIRST POSITION HOLDERS

Science: Yogil Adrin Poomani Arumai (96.2%)

Vijayan Nair in the third position (90%).

In Class X examination, of the total 152 candidates, 17.1 per cent scored above 90%, 28.9 per cent scored above 80% and 24.3

Commerce: Sandeep Ramanujam (95.8%)

per cent above 70%.

Keerthana Aravind with 98% occupied the first position, Elsa Mariya Eldhose with 97.2% stood second while Malavika Manoj came Third with 96.4%.

School principal Amar Srivastava congratulated the students, parents and teachers on the exemplary feat of the school. He further lauded the good works of all who made the school proud.

Vijaya Saravanan Sankaran, president of the school management committee, along with other members expressed their happiness over the startling results. This is a testament to the teamwork and collaboration of everyone involved in the educational process, they said.

The management hopes and prays that ISD would continue its march towards fineness by repeating success stories, the release added.

Malabar Gold opens world's biggest jewellery shop

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer in the world with an extensive retail network of over 310 outlets across ten countries, has launched the world's biggest jewellery destination in the Kozhikode district of Kerala.

The Artistry store, which is being set up as a new global destination for gold and diamonds jewellery shopping, is incidentally being set up at the same place where Malabar Group originated three decades ago.

Indian Union Muslim League state president Syed Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal inaugurated the Artistry Store, while state ministers P A Muhammad Riyas, V Abdurrahiman, A K Sasindran and Ahmed Devarkovil, along with several legislators attended the event.

Covering an area of 1,10,000 square feet with five floors for shopping and three for parking, the Artistry Store will be the world's biggest jewellery showroom, offering a differentiated shopping experience and innovative bouquet of services to the



customers.

It has a dedicated wedding arena exclusively for bridal ornaments. A bespoke suite will enable the customers to design jewellery of their choice with the assistance of expert designers and craftsmen. A privilege lounge with personalized services is another feature of the showroom, to be run by a set of specially trained staff.

Malabar Group chairman M P

Ahammed termed the completion of 30 years as a momentous occasion in their journey, which was made possible only because of the trust and affection of the customers.

"Their continued support and trust took us where we stand now as one of the biggest jewellery groups in the world. We are especially happy to set up the Artistry store, the world's biggest jewellery showroom, at the same

place where we started our humble journey. This is a significant step towards our goal to emerge as the biggest jewellery retailer in the world," he said.

"The artistry store here gives an indication of how we want to move ahead in the coming years. We aim to give a completely different experience to the customers, providing them information on design development and manufacturing. This is

one of the crucial results of our continued and sustained research and development on how to elevate the shopping experience. The trust from the customers and our commitment to give back the best to them made this brand the most favourite of the people," said O Asher, Indian Operations Managing Director of Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

The showroom has a set of experts who will brief the customers on the sourcing, value and features of different gemstones. The experience zone, set up as part of the showroom, offers an immersive experience to the customers of the gold and diamond manufacturing process.

More than being a sales point, it has been conceived to be a jewellery tourist destination where the customer gets to know the depth, diversity and styles of traditional ornament manufacturing and jewellery craft. There is a special pavilion to showcase the precious and age-old diamonds, jewellery and antiques collected from across the world.

ahlibank offers 10% cash reward on salary transfers

Committed to enhance customer experiences, while underscoring its intent to inculcate a savings culture, ahlibank continues its attractive 10% cash reward on salary transfers. As part of this rewarding promotion, customers who transfer their salary to ahlibank will receive an immediate one-time cash reward of 10% of their monthly salary, with a maximum cash reward amount capped at RO500.

The offer, open to both Omanis and expatriates, is structured to infuse a note of positivity while transferring salaries for the first time to ahlibank.

Customers who get their monthly salary - RO1,000 or above - transferred to the account in the bank, are eligible for this reward offer.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM - head of Retail Distribution, said, "This cash reward promotion is an extension of our gratitude to our customers who value our services and trust our products.

"We want our new salary transfer customers to experience the sense of gratification that is embedded in our scheme; we want each one of our customers to feel inspired to save and grow their money with our bank."

Corrigendum

The first line of the Chairman's Statement Q1 2023 released yesterday by Renaissance Services should read "On behalf of the Board of Directors, I present the unaudited accounts for Renaissance Services SAOG for the first quarter ended March 31, 2023."

Thai's MFP claims victory as army-backed parties rejected

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand's progressive Move Forward Party claimed victory in the country's election on Monday after a stunning result that decimated military-backed parties, which have ruled the kingdom for nearly a decade.

A massive surge for Move Forward Party (MFP) in Sunday's ballot left it on course to be the biggest party, followed by its rival opposition - the Pheu Thai movement of billionaire ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

Thai voters turned out in record numbers to deliver a brutal verdict on former coup leader Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, who has been blamed for economic stagnation and a crackdown on rights.

MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat said he would seek to build a six-party coalition including Pheu Thai, which said it was ready to join, though negotiations of the details have not yet begun.

"I am Pita Limjaroenrat, the next prime minister of Thailand," he told reporters at the MFP headquarters in Bangkok.

"We are ready to form the government," he added, vowing to be a 'prime minister for all'.

Pita said he had called Paetongtarn Shinawatra, Pheu Thai's lead prime minister candidate, to congratulate her on her campaign and invite her to join the coalition.

"The sentiment of the air has changed, it was right. It was the right timing, people have been through enough," he said in English. "Today is a new day, and hopefully it is full of sunshine and hope."

Between them, MFP and Pheu Thai are expected to take 292 out



Move Forward Party leader and prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat gives a press conference at the party headquarter in Bangkok on Monday (AFP)

of 500 seats in the lower house, with the two main army-allied parties mustering just 76 seats in total.

A massive surge for Move Forward Party in Sunday's ballot left it on course to be the biggest party, followed by the Pheu Thai movement of billionaire ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra

But in a kingdom where coups and court orders have often trumped the ballot box, there are fears that the result may yet be thwarted.

MFP has vowed to reform Thailand's strict royal insult laws, putting it on course for a collision with the kingdom's powerful royal-military establishment.

The newest force in Thai poli-

tics, MFP channelled the energy of youth-led pro-democracy protests in 2020 in an election campaign pitting a young gener-

With ballots counted from 99 per cent of polling stations, Election Commission data showed MFP on 14.1mn in the popular vote followed by Pheu Thai on 10.8mn. The United Thai Nation party, led by Prayut - the former army chief who seized power in a 2014 coup - was a distant third on 4.7mn.

But in a sign of the potential flashpoints ahead, Pita on Monday repeated a promise to reform the lese majeste law that imposes harsh prison terms for insulting the monarchy.

This was an issue once deemed untouchable in Thai politics, and which Pheu Thai shied from during the campaign.

'Work together'

Pheu Thai, which, including previous iterations, has been the most popular party for two decades, had hoped for a land-

slide win that would allow it to lead a coalition.

The party congratulated MFP, saying it had won the right to lead the new government.

Paetongtarn, daughter of party patriarch and exiled billionaire Thaksin, said the two sides have not yet started negotiating the details of a coalition.

Despite their success, MFP and Pheu Thai still face many hurdles to secure power, due to a junta-scripted 2017 constitution.

The new premier will be chosen jointly by the 500 elected MPs in the lower house, plus 250 senate members appointed by Prayut's junta.

Adding to the uncertainty, rumours are already swirling that MFP could be dissolved by court order - the same fate that befell its predecessor Future Forward Party after it performed unexpectedly well in the 2019 elections. The Election Commission is not expected to officially confirm the final number of seats won by each party for several weeks. But on Monday it said MFP was on course for 151 seats and Pheu Thai 141.

This election was the first since 2020 protests that demanded curbs on the power and spending of Thailand's king.

The demonstrations petered out as COVID-19 curbs were imposed and dozens of leaders were arrested, but their energy fuelled growing support for the more radical opposition MFP.

MFP sought millennial and Gen Z voters, who make up nearly half the 52mn-strong electorate, but early results indicated their inroads across all demographics.

AFP

China jails US citizen for life for espionage

Beijing, China - China has sentenced a 78-year-old US citizen to life in prison for espionage, a court said on Monday, but revealed few details about the previously unreported case.

Such heavy terms are relatively rare for foreign citizens in China, and the jailing of American passport holder John Shing-wan Leung is likely to further strain already-damaged ties between Beijing and Washington.

Leung, who is also a Hong Kong permanent resident, 'was found guilty of espionage, sentenced to life imprisonment, deprived of political rights for life', said a statement from the Intermediate People's Court in the eastern Chinese city of Suzhou.

Suzhou authorities 'took compulsory measures according to the law' against Leung in April 2021, it said, without specifying when he had been taken into custody.

It was unclear where Leung had been living at the time of his arrest.

A spokesperson for the US embassy in Beijing said they were aware of reports that a US citizen had been recently convicted and sentenced in Suzhou.

"The Department of State has no greater priority than the safety and security of US citizens overseas," the spokesperson said. "Due to privacy considerations, we have no further comment."

The court statement provided no further details on the

charges, and closed-door trials are routine in China for sensitive cases.

Foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin declined to comment further on the case at a regular press briefing on Monday.

The jailing is likely to further damage relations with Washington, which are already severely strained over issues such as trade, human rights and Taiwan.

Washington and Beijing have just ended an unofficial pause in high-level contacts over the United States' shooting down in February of a suspected Chinese surveillance balloon.

In an apparent breakthrough last week, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi held eight hours of talks in Vienna, with both sides describing the meeting as 'candid, substantive and constructive'.

On Friday Washington issued a statement condemning the reported sentencing of a Chinese human rights activist for 'inciting subversion of state power'.

Guo Feixiong, also known as Yang Maodong, was jailed for eight years, according to rights groups. There has been no official confirmation from China of the sentencing.

In its statement, the US State Department said its diplomats had been barred from attending the trial in southern China.

AFP

At least 13 killed in Mexico highway crash

Matamoros, Mexico - At least 13 people were killed when a passenger van and a semi-truck collided on a highway in northeastern Mexico on Sunday, local authorities said.

The vehicles crashed on a road between the cities of Zaragoza and Hidalgo in the border state of Tamaulipas.

"Civil protection authorities are responding, and so far they are reporting 13 people deceased," Tamaulipas security officials said in a statement.

Images shared by authorities showed the passenger van almost entirely destroyed by fire, with the semi-truck also severely burned.

The number of victims could increase, said an official from the



The site of the accident on the Zaragoza-Hidalgo highway between a truck and a van with passengers, in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico (AFP)

prosecutor's office, who did not want to be identified, as there were indications that the truck

driver's family was with him and may have died too.

Early indications were that the

driver may have fled.

Local media reported that more than 20 people may have died in the crash and resulting fire, but first responders were still working to fully understand the situation at the scene, the prosecutor's office official said.

The victims may have all been members of one family who had rented the van to drive to the northern city of Monterrey in Veracruz, local media reported.

Road accidents have increased in recent years in Mexico, usually due to high speeds, poor vehicle conditions or driver fatigue.

Civil organisations have demanded stricter regulations to curb the toll.

AFP

KEEPING COOL IN CLASS



A primary school student uses a portable fan to keep cool in a classroom during hot weather in Banda Aceh, Indonesia on Monday (AFP)

A month into Sudan's brutal war, hopes are dim for an end

Khartoum, Sudan - One month since Sudan's conflict erupted, its capital is a desolate war zone where terrorised families huddle in their homes as gun battles rage in the dusty, deserted streets outside.

As people hope to dodge stray bullets, they also endure desperate shortages of food and basic supplies, power blackouts, communications outages and runaway inflation.

Khartoum, a city of five million on the Nile River, was long a place of relative stability and wealth, even under decades of sanctions against former strongman Omar al-Bashir.

Now it has become a shell of its former self.

Charred aircraft lie on the airport tarmac, foreign embassies

are shuttered and hospitals, banks, shops and wheat silos have been ransacked by looters.

The fighting broke out on April 15 between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who leads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

While the generals fight, what remains of the government has retreated to Port Sudan about 850km (500 miles) away, the hub for mass evacuations of both Sudanese and foreign citizens.

The battles have killed more than 750 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. Thousands more have been wounded and nearly a million displaced, with long refugee convoys headed to Egypt, Ethiopia, Chad and South



Smoke billows in the distance in Khartoum amid ongoing fighting between two rival generals, on Monday (AFP)

Sudan.

Multiple truce deals have been agreed and quickly violated, and hopes are dim for an end to the fighting which has piled more suffering on the 45mn people of

one of the world's poorest countries. Both sides 'break ceasefires with a regularity that demonstrates a sense of impunity unprecedented even by Sudan's standards of civil conflict', said

Alex Rondos, the European Union's former special representative to the Horn of Africa.

In their latest moves, Burhan declared that he was freezing the RSF's assets, while Daglo threat-

ened in an audio recording that the army chief would be 'brought to justice and hanged' in a public square.

History of coups

Sudan has a long history of military coups, but hopes had risen after mass pro-democracy protests led to the ouster of Islamist-backed Bashir in 2019, followed by a shaky transition toward civilian rule.

As Washington and other foreign powers lifted sanctions, Sudan was slowly reintegrating into the international community, before the generals derailed that transition with another coup in 2021.

Despite all the bullets, aerial bombardments and anti-aircraft fire of recent weeks, neither side

has been able to seize the battlefield advantage.

The army, backed by Egypt, has the advantage of air power while Daglo is, according to experts, supported by the United Arab Emirates and foreign fighters. He commands troops that stemmed from the notorious Janjaweed militia, accused of atrocities in the Darfur war that began two decades ago.

For now, 'both sides believe that they can win militarily', US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told a recent Senate hearing.

The fighting has deepened the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, where one in three people already relied on humanitarian assistance before the war.

AFP

Erdogan ascendant as Turkey heads for historic presidential runoff vote

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey on Monday woke up to the prospect of its first presidential runoff vote after conservative President Recep Tayyip Erdogan confounded pollsters and his secular rival to win the first round of the country's pivotal election.

Pre-election opinion polls had suggested Erdogan risked a first national election defeat to his main challenger's disparate six-party alliance, in a vote seen as the most important in the Muslim-majority nation's post-Ottoman history.

But the 69-year-old defied expectations in Sunday's ballot and could extend his two-decade grip on power on May 28, after neither he nor Kemal Kilicdaroglu reached the 50-per cent threshold for a first-round victory.

With almost all ballots counted on Monday morning, Erdogan led with 49.42 per cent of the vote to Kilicdaroglu's 44.95 per cent, according to official figures provided by state news agency Anadolu.

A nationalist third candidate, Sinan Ogan, emerged as the kingmaker after picking up five per cent, but has yet to come out for either frontrunner.



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, accompanied by his wife Ermine Erdogan, waves to supporters at the AK Party headquarters in Ankara, Turkey, on Monday (AFP)

Erdogan's Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its far-right allies were also close to an outright majority in Sunday's parliamentary elections.

The lira fell against the euro as traders digested with apprehension the increased likelihood of Erdogan's unconventional economic policies continuing.

The Borsa Istanbul index

opened sharply in the red on Monday and was down by almost 4.5 per cent at around 11am (0800 GMT).

'It's going to be close'

The result was a crushing disappointment for Kilicdaroglu and his Republican People's Party (CHP) supporters.

An overcast dawn greeted

Istanbul residents on Monday, a symbolic reflection of the opposition's gloomier outlook but opinions were divided as to the outcome of Turkey's unprecedented runoff.

"Erdogan is going to win. He's a real leader. The Turkish people trust him and he has a vision for Turkey," Hamdi Kurumahmut told AFP in Istanbul.

"Of course there are things

that need to be improved, on the economy, education or the refugee policy. But we know he's the one who can sort all that out," added the 40-year-old tourism sector worker.

Erdogan defied expectations in Sunday's ballot and could extend his two-decade grip on power on May 28, after neither he nor Kemal Kilicdaroglu reached the 50% threshold

Betul Yilmaz, 26, wanted to keep the faith in a Kilicdaroglu victory if he sealed an alliance with Ogan. "But it's going to be close," the young woman said.

"If Kilicdaroglu wins... a beautiful time awaits us. I don't want to even think about a scenario in which Erdogan wins," Emin Serbest, 33, an employee of Istanbul's municipal authority, told AFP as the count con-

tinued. Pro-government daily *Sabah* called Erdogan's unexpectedly strong performance a 'superb success'.

Kilicdaroglu, who has a history of defeats to pro-Erdogan candidates, only emerged as the opposition's candidate after a year of bitter debate between the alliance's disparate members, who span Turkey's cultural and religious divides.

The unwieldy coalition now faces a challenging task to regroup for the runoff, with Erdogan seemingly possessing the momentum. "The president is likely to ride his strong approval rating, surprise win in parliament, and incumbency advantages to secure re-election," said Emre Peker of the Eurasia Group consultancy.

The strong performance of the AKP and its allies in the legislative ballot suggests 'identity, terrorism and security issues played well with Erdogan's broader conservative base and helped the president make up for his economic shortcomings', he added.

Support from Kurdish voters for Kilicdaroglu's alliance means it is 'unlikely' Ogan will back it, Peker noted.

AFP

IN BRIEF

Girl wounded in Belgrade school shooting dies

Belgrade, Serbia - A girl who was wounded in an elementary school shooting in Serbia earlier this month died on Monday, state television said, becoming the tenth victim of the unprecedented massacre. On May 3, a 13-year-old allegedly brought his father's gun to school and murdered eight of his fellow classmates and a security guard at an elementary school in downtown Belgrade.

Seven people were wounded - six students and one teacher - including the girl who was rushed to a Belgrade hospital and operated by a team of brain surgeons, according to local media.

The patient sustained 'severe head injuries' and died despite doctors' best efforts, broadcaster RTS reported.

Iran executes five over drug trafficking

Tehran, Iran - Iranian authorities on Monday executed five people over 'armed drug smuggling' in the south of the country, the judiciary reported.

The convicts, 'all criminals and armed drug smugglers', had been sentenced to death by hanging in a verdict upheld by Iran's top court, the judiciary's website Mizan Online quoted Mojtaba Ghahramani, Chief Justice of the southern province of Hormozgan, as saying.

"The sentences of the aforementioned were carried out this morning in Bandar Abbas and Minab prisons" in Hormozgan, he added.

Brazil police officer kills four colleagues

Sao Paulo, Brazil - A Brazilian police inspector shot and killed four colleagues on Sunday at the station where they worked, according to the department. The incident occurred early on Sunday morning at a Civil Police station in the city of Camocim, in the northeastern state of Ceara, the force said in an Instagram post. The suspect shooter fled in a police vehicle and later surrendered at a Military Police station.

AFP



Supporters of parties from Pakistan's ruling alliance gather near the Supreme Court in Islamabad on Monday (AFP)

Pakistan: Protests against Supreme Court chief justice

Lahore, Pakistan - Several thousand pro-government protesters demanded on Monday the resignation of Pakistan's top judge for releasing Imran Khan from arrest last week, as the former prime minister went back to court facing yet more legal cases.

Khan, who was ousted from power in April last year, was arrested on corruption charges on Tuesday following months of simmering political crisis, prompting his voters to rampage through cities.

His arrest was declared unlawful by the Supreme Court's chief justice and Khan was later released and granted various protective bail applications.

"The chief justice and a few of his cronies are disgracing the judiciary like never before. Their justice seems to be serving one leader only," said Malik Hassam Mehmood, a 36-year-old trader and supporter of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's party. "We are here to protest for the rule of law and a non-partisan judiciary."

There was a heavy security presence in the capital on Monday as protesters gathered outside the court in the capital's so-called red zone.

The Supreme Court order said Khan's arrest last week as he arrived at the Islamabad High Court to file a bail application in the graft case 'violated the petitioner's right of access to justice'.

However, referring to the pro-government protesters, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said on Sunday that 'people want to come in very large numbers because of a deep sense of anger and anguish'.

Analysts say legal hurdles are often used to discourage dissent in Pakistan and Khan dismisses the cases arrayed against him as politically motivated.

Political analyst Mosharraf Zaidi said judges were split down the middle over the political crisis. "The judiciary still makes compromises with both civilians and the military, but on many issues judges have repeatedly demonstrated the ability to take a stand and hold their ground," he told AFP. Former international cricket star Khan returned to the Lahore High Court on Monday, where his lawyers said they were seeking information on fresh cases linking him to the violence that followed his arrest.

AFP

Israeli soldiers kill Palestinian in West Bank: Palestinian ministry

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Israeli soldiers killed a Palestinian man on Monday in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said, with the army saying it returned fire after being shot at.

"Saleh Mohamed Sabra, 22, was killed by live bullets during an Israeli attack in Nablus," the ministry said, adding that another Palestinian was wounded by gunfire.

The Israeli army said it was conducting an operation in Nablus to prepare to demolish the house of a man suspected of an armed attack that killed two Israelis in the area in February.

"During the operation, sus-



Women react during the funeral of Palestinian Saleh Sabra in Askar refugee camp east of Nablus in the occupied West Bank on Monday (AFP)

pects threw stones and fired in the direction of soldiers who responded with live fire," the army said in a statement, adding that one suspect was hit.

The incident comes after a ceasefire ended five days of fierce fighting between the Islamic Jihad fighter group in Gaza and Israel. The clashes

killed 35 people, the vast majority Palestinians.

The conflict has this year claimed the lives of at least 150 Palestinians, 20 Israelis, a Ukrainian and an Italian, according to an AFP tally based on official sources from both sides.

These figures include combatants as well as civilians, and, on the Israeli side, three members of the Arab minority.

Palestinians on Monday mark the 'Nakba', or catastrophe, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced from their homes following the creation of Israel 75 years ago.

AFP

Russian strike kills 4 in Ukraine as Zelensky visits UK

Kyiv, Ukraine - A Russian missile strike killed four people and hit a hospital in eastern Ukraine, officials said on Monday, as President Volodymyr Zelensky won the promise of 'hundreds' more missiles and drones on a visit to Britain.

The attack on the front-line city of Avdiivka was one of a wave of strikes that damaged 57 residential buildings in 13 localities, Ukraine's national police force said.

"Four people died as a result of a missile attack on Avdiivka. Russians attacked the city with missiles this morning, hitting a hospital," Donetsk regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said.

But elsewhere, Ukraine claimed advances around Bakhmut, as its armed forces prepare for a counter-offensive over a year on from the invasion ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin in February 2022.

While Russia's ally China vies to act as peace broker, sending an envoy to Kyiv this week, Zelensky drummed up hefty new packages of military aid on weekend visits to France and Germany. He proceeded on Monday to Britain for talks with



Britain's PM Rishi Sunak greets Volodymyr Zelensky at Chequers, the PM's official country residence, northwest of London, on Monday (AFP)

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who pledged air-defence missiles and long-range attack drones for Ukraine, both numbering in the hundreds.

The Kremlin said the new UK weapons would only cause 'further destruction'.

Sunak noted that the meeting at the prime minister's country estate of Chequers was taking

place in the buildup to a Council of Europe leaders' meeting in Iceland and a G7 summit in Japan.

"The front lines of Putin's war of aggression may be in Ukraine but the fault lines stretch all over the world," he said, vowing: "We must not let them down."

Sunak hosted Zelensky in the same Chequers room used by Britain's World War II leader

Winston Churchill to broadcast defiant speeches vowing victory over the Nazis. "And the same way today, your leadership, your country's bravery and fortitude are an inspiration to us all," he told Zelensky.

Dressed in his trademark fatigues, Zelensky gave a bear hug to Sunak after disembarking from a military helicopter, and thanked him for the latest UK aid.

Zelensky proceeded on Monday to Britain for talks with PM Rishi Sunak, who pledged air-defence missiles and long-range attack drones for Ukraine

He said the crisis was a matter of 'security not only for Ukraine, it is important for all of Europe'.

"We are thankful from all our hearts, from Ukrainians, from our

soldiers, we are thankful," he told Sunak. The timing and focus of Ukraine's high-stakes fightback are unclear, but Zelensky's tour of European capitals underscored the importance of securing Western heavy weapons and ammunition to press the fight.

France offered dozens more light tanks and armoured vehicles, while Germany said it was preparing a new military package worth €2.7bn (US\$3bn) - its biggest yet for Ukraine.

It was his first trip to Germany since Russia invaded, and Zelensky was presented the Charlemagne Prize for defending European freedom and values.

"Ukraine incarnates everything the European idea is living for: the courage of convictions, the fight for values and freedom, the commitment to peace and unity," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said at the award ceremony in Aachen.

The British attack drones have a range of more than 200km (125 miles), according to the UK government, which last week became the first Western country to offer long-range cruise missiles to Ukraine.

AFP

Myanmar port city reopens after deadly Mocha

Mocha was the biggest storm to hit the Bay of Bengal in more than a decade

Sittwe, Myanmar - Contact was slowly being restored on Monday with tens of thousands of people cut off in a major Myanmar port city as the death toll from a cyclone that tore through the west of the country and neighbouring Bangladesh rose to at least five.

Cyclone Mocha made landfall between Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh and Myanmar's Sittwe carrying winds of up to 195km (120 miles) per hour, the biggest storm to hit the Bay of Bengal in more than a decade.

The storm had largely passed by late on Sunday, sparing the refugee camps housing almost a million Rohingya in Bangladesh, where officials said there had been no deaths.

At least five people were killed in Myanmar and 'some residents' were injured, the military junta said in a statement, without giving details.



Residents walk past fallen trees in Kyauktaw in Myanmar's Rakhine state on Monday, after Cyclone Mocha crashed ashore (AFP)

More than 860 houses and 14 hospitals or clinics had been damaged across the country, it said.

Communications were still mostly down on Monday with Rakhine state's capital Sittwe, home to around 150,000 people and which bore the brunt of the storm according to cyclone trackers.

Hundreds of people who had

sheltered on higher ground were returning to the city along a road littered with trees, pylons and power cables, AFP correspondents said.

A military checkpoint around 10km (six miles) outside the city barred cars and vans from entering, forcing people to continue their journeys on motorbike or foot.

In Sittwe, power pylons hung

low over deserted streets and trees still standing were stripped of leaves.

At least five people had died in the city and around 25 had been injured, local rescue worker Ko Lin Lin told AFP. It was not clear whether any of them were included in the death toll in the junta's statement.

Mocha made landfall on Sunday, bringing a storm surge and

high winds that toppled a communications tower in Sittwe, according to images published on social media.

"I was in a Buddhist monastery when the storm came," one resident told AFP.

"The prayer hall and monk dining hall have collapsed. We had to move from this building and that building. Now roads are blocked as trees and pylons are

fallen."

Junta-affiliated media reported that the storm had put hundreds of base stations, which connect mobile phones to networks, out of action in Rakhine. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing had 'instructed officials to make preparations for Sittwe Airport transport relief', state media reported, without giving details on when relief was expected to arrive.

The roof of my home has been blown away by the wind, now I am eating rice under the open sky with my children

JOMILA BANU

'Extensive damage'

The United Nations said communications problems meant it had not yet been able to assess the damage in Rakhine, which has been ravaged by ethnic conflict for years. "Early reports suggest the damage is extensive," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said late on Sunday.

On Bangladesh's Shah Porir

Dwip island, residents began repairing damaged homes, searching through debris and retrieving scattered possessions.

Bangladesh officials said they had evacuated 750,000 people.

Secretary of the disaster management ministry, Kamrul Hasan, told AFP on Monday no one had died in the cyclone.

The damage was also minimal in the Rohingya camps, where about a million people live in 190,000 bamboo and tarpaulin shelters, officials said.

"About 300 shelters were destroyed by the cyclone," deputy refugee commissioner Shamsud Douza told AFP.

The chances of landslides in the camps were also low 'due to lack of rain'.

"The sky has become clear."

Jomila Banu, a 20-year-old Rohingya woman from Nayapara refugee camp at Teknaf, said: "The roof of my home has been blown away by the wind, now I am eating rice under the open sky with my children."

"The sound and force of the wind made it seem like we would not survive," she told AFP.

Better forecasting and more effective evacuation planning have dramatically reduced the death toll from such storms in recent years.

AFP

Kenya, Somalia for phased border reopening

Nairobi, Kenya - Kenya and Somalia have agreed to reopen their common border after more than a decade, Kenya's interior minister said on Monday as ties warm between the two neighbours following years of tensions. The announcement came after a high-level joint ministerial meeting in Nairobi on cooperation including on security, as well as trade and the movement of people.

The frontier had been officially closed in October 2011 because of attacks on Kenyan soil by the radical Islamist Somali group Al-Shabaab, which has been waging an insurgency against the central government in Mogadishu for more than 15 years.

"We have resolved that the border between Kenya and Somalia will be reopened in a phased manner within the next 90 days, effective today," Interior



Kenyan Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki and Somali Internal Security Minister Mohamed Ahmed Sheikh Ali attend a press conference in Nairobi on Monday

Minister Kithure Kindiki said, adding that a first crossing should be opened in 30 days.

The two nations had announced plans in July last year to reopen the frontier at talks between then Kenyan presi-

dent Uhuru Kenyatta and his Somali counterpart Hassan Sheikh Mohamud but they never materialised.

Kindiki said at a joint press conference with his Somali counterpart Mohamed Ahmed Sheikh

Ali that they would work together on security, improving information sharing and mechanisms for cross-border collaboration.

"Kenya and Somalia are continuously experiencing both inter- and intra-security challenges emanating from Al-Shabaab," he added.

Tumultuous relationship

Kenya first sent troops into Somalia in 2011 to combat the Al-Qaeda affiliated militants and is now a major contributor of troops to an African Union military operation against the group.

But it suffered a string of retaliatory assaults, including a bloody siege at the Westgate mall in Nairobi in 2013 that cost 67 lives and an attack on Garissa University in eastern Kenya in 2015 that killed 148 people.

Since taking office a year ago, Mohamud has launched 'all-out' war against the militants, who were ousted from Mogadishu in 2011 but remain entrenched in parts of rural central and southern Somalia.

In recent months, the Somali army and local clan militias have retaken chunks of territory from Al-Shabaab in an operation backed by US air strikes and the AU-force known as ATMIS.

Despite their shared fight against the militants, Kenya and Somalia have had a tumultuous relationship.

Ties have been dogged by a maritime border row as well as Somali accusations of Kenyan meddling in its affairs, while Nairobi has accused Mogadishu of using it as a scapegoat for its own political and security problems.

AFP

Main Cambodia opposition excluded from July polls

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Cambodia's election body on Monday refused to register the main opposition party and chief challenger to Prime Minister Hun Sen for upcoming national elections.

The National Election Committee said in a statement that the opposition Candlelight Party (CP) had failed to submit certain documents, so it would not be permitted to contest the July 23 vote.

Hun Sen is one of the world's longest-serving leaders and critics and rights groups accuse him of using the legal system to crush opposition to his rule, particularly in the run-up to elections.

The CP - seen as the only viable challenger to Hun Sen's ruling Cambodian People's

Party (CPP) - told AFP they would appeal to 'restore a democratic base'. If the ruling is upheld, it will pave the way for the CPP to effectively compete in a one-horse race when Cambodians vote in July.

The CP gained traction in last year's local elections, claiming 22 per cent of the popular vote, and was planning to challenge the CPP in every constituency in the national polls.

Party spokesperson Kim-sour Phirith told AFP the ban was 'unreasonable because we already have grassroots support'. "It is difficult for Cambodia to walk the path of plural-party democracy because we cannot compete in the elections," he said.

AFP

INDIA

Seized drugs worth Rs 25,000 crore, says NCB

Kochi, Kerala - The value of drugs seized in a special operation by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and Indian Navy in Indian waters on Saturday was priced at Rs 25,000 crores after enumeration, informed NCB on Monday.

According to the NCB officials, the enumeration of the high-purity methamphetamine seized by NCB and the Indian Navy has been completed. The total seizure has been confirmed as 2,525kg and it is valued at Rs 25,000 crore, as per the official information received from the NCB. The officials further informed that the enumeration was completed in 23 hours.

"The value became higher because it is higher grade methamphetamine. The seized drugs were in 134 sacks. The methamphetamine was kept in packets of one kilogram each", one of

the officials said. One suspected Pakistani national was already arrested in this regard. He will be produced before the Court today evening, informed the NCB officials.

Sanjay Kumar Singh, Deputy Director General (Ops) said it was the largest in terms of monetary value.

"It originated from the Chabahar port in Iran. The source of the drugs is Pakistan," he added

Singh further said that the consignment was meant for Sri Lanka, Maldives and India. "The mother ship was being stationed at different points in the sea. The smaller boats would go from various countries and collect consignments from the mother ships." In the operation which started in February last year, the team has seized roughly around 4,000kg of various drugs.

ANI

US calls on India to condemn religious violence

Washington, United States - The United States wants India to condemn persistent religious violence, a senior official said Monday, one month before a state visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The State Department on Monday released an annual report on religious freedom which listed attacks against religious minorities including Muslims and Christians in the billion-plus nation led by Modi's Hindu nationalists.

A senior US official, briefing reporters on the report on customary condition of anonymity, spoke of India's "vast potential" and said he was "saddened" by the persistence of religious violence.

"Regarding these concerns, we're continuing to encourage the government to condemn violence and hold accountable (those) who engage in rhetoric that's dehumanising towards religious minorities," the official said.

The official promised to speak "directly" with Indian officials and said: "We'll continue to work



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (R) looks on as Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain delivers remarks on the roll-out of the International Religious Freedom Report on May 15 (AFP)

very closely with our civil society colleagues on the ground (and) with courageous journalists that are working every day to document some of these abuses."

The State Department report, based on direct research as well as accounts by media and advocacy groups, pointed to concerns about home demolitions against Muslims and public flog-

ging by police of Muslims accused of injuring Hindus in the state of Gujarat.

New Delhi has long hit back at American criticism on religious freedom, particularly by the autonomous US Commission on International Religious Freedom, which earlier this month once again recommended that the State Depart-

ment put India on a blacklist over its record.

Later this year Secretary of State Antony Blinken will list "countries of particular concern" on religious freedom but it is virtually certain he will spare India, with which the United States has been building warmer relations for decades, partly as a bulwark against China.

Regarding these concerns, we're continuing to encourage the government to condemn violence and hold accountable (those) who engage in rhetoric that's dehumanising towards religious minorities

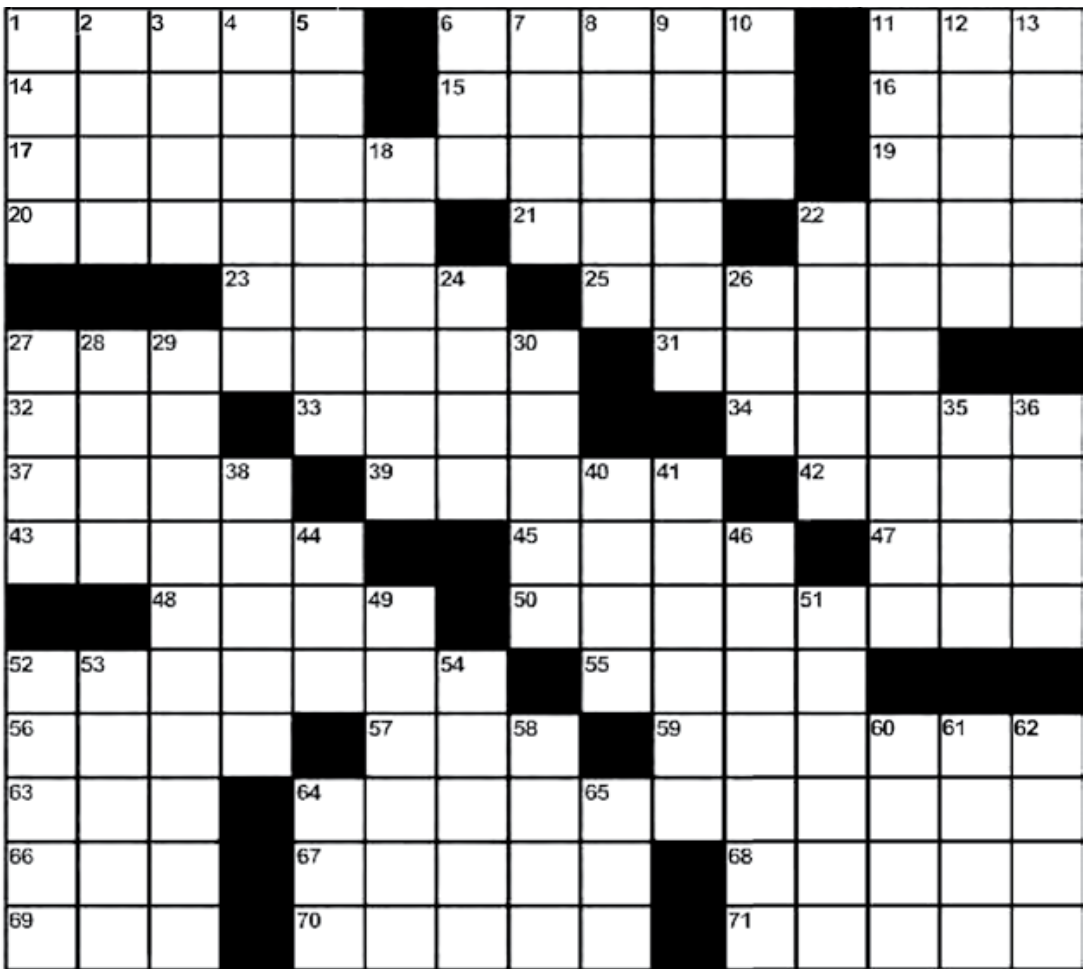
US OFFICIAL

Blinken, presenting the report, did not mention India as he voiced alarm by actions by authorities in China, Iran, Myanmar and Nicaragua.

"We defend the right to believe - or to not believe - not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because of the extraordinary good that people of faith can do in our societies and around the world," he said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Prefix meaning "large"
 - 6) Odd-numbered page
 - 11) Beaver's work
 - 14) Like some bodies on a beach
 - 15) Dog- (well-worn, as pages)
 - 16) Lennon's love
 - 17) Magazine layout
 - 19) African antelope
 - 20) Zen enlightenment
 - 21) Bird bill
 - 22) Storklike critter
 - 23) CD- (computer inserts)
 - 25) CIA town
 - 27) Sickeningly suave
 - 31) Fancy party
 - 32) Barracks address
 - 33) Barber's motion
 - 34) May, for one
 - 37) Hosiery annoyance
 - 39) Ringo with the beat
 - 42) Creole vegetable
 - 43) Leveled
 - 45) Carpe _
 - 47) Suffix for "velvet"
 - 48) Canine cry
 - 50) Ushered
 - 52) Not peaceful
 - 55) Nut with caffeine
 - 56) Mock turtle, for one
 - 57) As_ instructions
 - 59) Summaries
 - 63) "Gimme,!" (start of an Iowa State cheer)
 - 64) Accountant's tool
 - 66) Come together
 - 67) Director Marshall
 - 68) In a nutshell
 - 69) Suffix for 41-Down
 - 70) Mountain crest
 - 71) Fore-and-aft-rigged vessel
- DOWN**
- 1) Swabs a floor
 - 2) Eastern pooh-bah (Var.)
 - 3) Coagulate
 - 4) Comeback
 - 5) Aromatic
 - 6) Weightlifter's lift
 - 7) Make, as money
 - 8) Angler's basket
 - 9) Steeped thing on a string
 - 10) Unpaired
 - 11) Pooch warmer
 - 12) "Tomorrow" musical
 - 13) Terribly timid
 - 18) Neil and Carly
 - 22) Hardly a summer house
 - 24) It must be followed
 - 26) War zone during LBJ's presidency
 - 27) Moscow's land, once (Abbr.)
 - 28) Pinta's sailing companion
 - 29) Bee product?
 - 30) Hand shovel
 - 35) Forest growth
 - 36) Full house, e.g.
 - 38) "Forward," when commanding a horse
 - 40) Game of world conquest
 - 41) Guinness Book entry
 - 44) 551, in stone
 - 46) Annoys continually or chronically
 - 49) Effervescent "Dr"
 - 51) "Friends" female
 - 52) Grammar topic
 - 53) July 7, e.g.
 - 54) Coat with a metal alloy
 - 58) Cost of living?
 - 60) Sleek, for short
 - 61) 100 centavos
 - 62) Resign (with "down")
 - 64) You may get into hot water here
 - 65) Nautical "yes"

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Let your actions speak for you today. They are louder than any of your words could be, and they will make your point quickly and effectively. Plus, they will enable you to stay out of any arguments. Too much talking can lead to gossiping, which can lead to hurt feelings and confusion. Right now it's better to do than to talk about doing, because things need to get done. Other people are waiting for you to finish things up so that they can move forward too.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Today could be a day to remember, one full of romance, intrigue, secrets, and even one or two dramatic revelations! You'll be in the thick of things right away, so make sure you have a great breakfast and are prepared for some roller-coaster hours. You're a featured player in this daytime drama, and whether or not you're the hero of the story is completely up to you. If you want to stir up some trouble, go for it! You're ready to deal with the fallout.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
You're happy for a friend who's started a new relationship, so be supportive about it! Sure, you might not be seeing as much of them as you used to now that you have more competition for their time, but so what? They're happy, and you can get along with seeing less of them for a while. Give them the space they need to explore this new thing they're doing. Let them know that you aren't going to be possessive about their time. They need you and will call you soon.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
It looks like you're going to meet your match today! Someone comes onto the scene who has as much charm, as much intelligence, and as much wit as you do. At first you might feel like your territory is being taken over, but if you give this person a shot you'll stop seeing them as competition and start seeing them as one heck of a cool person. There is room enough for both of you, so considering teaming up. You two might have a wonderful future together.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
If you're in the middle of negotiations today, expect a snag to pop up early on. You'll be able to suggest an alternative idea, but the other party involved might not see your solution as the right one. Expect some pushback and stand up to it. Play a little bit of hardball and show this person that while you're willing to be flexible and just go with the flow, you aren't a pushover. It's in your interest to come up with an answer. You shouldn't lose focus on what you need to gain.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
No matter what you're working on right now, you must have full conviction that you're doing the right thing! Believe in yourself. Doing so will inspire others to believe in you too. This isn't the time to listen to the doubts crawling around in the back of your mind. This is the time to block out what other people are doing and focus on your own thing. Persevere. Stay away from negative thoughts by getting in touch with a supportive friend who can cheer you on.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You need to keep all of your interactions with other people on a more formal level for a few days. Even if you're in the middle of building a romantic relationship, you should try not to make any big demands on their time or push too hard toward greater intimacy. Instead of sharing your most personal thoughts and ideas, stick to broader subjects that are less likely to invite controversy or deep emotions. You should be careful how much you share with these people right now.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Today, your response to a new announcement or idea could surprise other people in the room. They never knew you could be so jaded, and neither did you! Act quickly before you lose the last remnants of your idealistic tendencies. You'll need them to balance yourself out on days like today. They've been sleeping, just waiting for a time when they'll be necessary and relevant in your life again. Let yourself be impressed by the magic that is around you every day.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You know good and well that you can rely on your friends for support, so why aren't you doing it? This is no time to feel embarrassed about what you're going through! All your people love you for who you are, and they've all made some mistakes too. They're ready and waiting with open arms for you to reach out to them, so make that connection. Send a message to that one person who's been where you are now. They have some wise words to give you.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Today, follow your urge to let your selfless side come out and make the world a better place, or at least your little corner of it. Spread the word to friends and colleagues that you're free to lend them a hand with whatever tasks need your special brand of energy, and before the end of the day you could be involved in at least one thing that's going to entitle you to pat yourself on the back. The best way to celebrate your good fortune is to help other people.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
You could be asked to take a larger role in a group, and this will be very welcome news. You've been waiting to take on more responsibility for a long time, and now is your time to really shine and show them how it's done! Your style is very different from everyone else's, so you can make a huge impact on the status quo right from the start. Just be yourself and manage things the way you always imagined you would. It's like a dream come true.

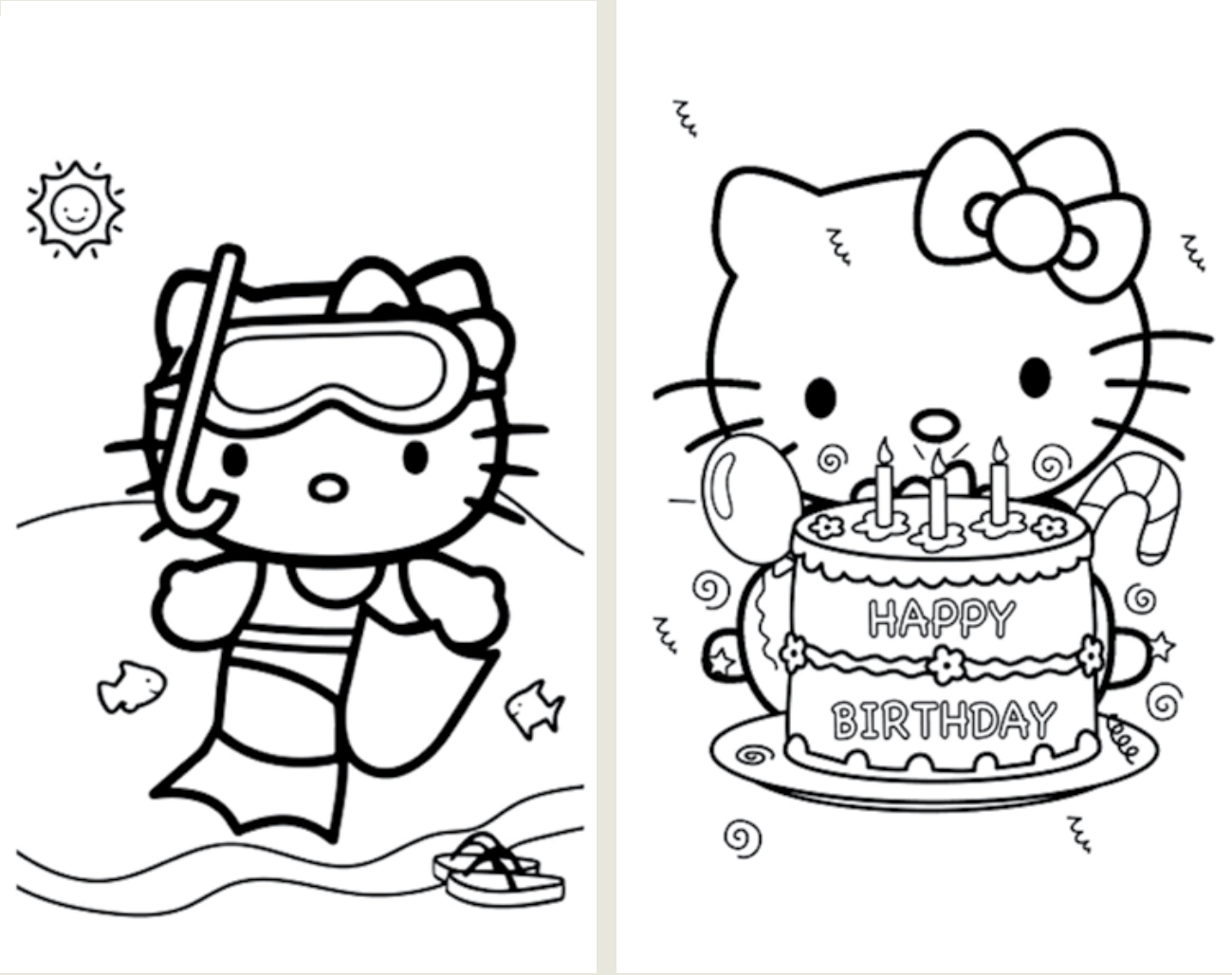
PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Pay close attention to odd combinations, unexpected events, and any unusual behavior that your friends exhibit today. Besides being immensely entertaining, these out of the ordinary vignettes are bound to provide the perfect conversation starter when you're with the person you're trying to get to know better. People who think differently find a kindred spirit in you, so be on the lookout for folks who march to the beat of their own drummer.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. How heavy is a megagram?
A. 0.1 tonnes
B. 10 tonnes
C. 100 tonnes
D. 1 tonne
2. The 2nd and 6th presidents of the USA had the same surname. What was it?
A. Jefferson
B. Adams
C. Grant
D. Lincoln
3. In which of these areas would you be most likely to find a traditional dwelling called a rondavel?
A. Pacific Islands
B. Alaska
C. Mongolia
D. South Africa
- Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

C	V	E	T
R	G	O	R
K	S	A	E
O	G	A	H

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

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

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

BARCELONA CHAMPIONS

Catalan side win La Liga title with Espanyol rout

Cornellà de Llobregat, Spain - Barcelona won La Liga for the first time since 2019 by thrashing Espanyol 4-2 on Sunday, wresting the title back from rivals Real Madrid.

The Catalan giants clinched their 27th Spanish championship at the home of their neighbours, with scenes turning ugly at full time as celebrating Barcelona players were chased from the field by pitch invaders.

Robert Lewandowski struck twice for Barcelona, along with goals for Alejandro Balde and Jules Kounde, while Javi Puado and Joselu pulled two back late on for the hosts.

Barcelona have endured a troubled period on and off the pitch in recent years but their triumph signals significant improvement, with coach Xavi Hernandez winning his first major trophy since taking over in November 2021.

President Joan Laporta's rebuild was widely criticised last summer in light of the club's perilous financial situation.

Early Champions League elimination was a blow, but the club won the Spanish Super Cup in January, before sealing La Liga glory with four games to spare.

"It's a magnificent feeling, (of) work well done," Xavi told Movistar.

"Ten months of work and sac-



Barcelona players celebrate after winning the Spanish league title on Sunday (AFP)

rifice. The fans deserve it, the club, it gives us stability and security that things are being done well.

"We sealed La Liga with a fantastic game, we were brilliant."

Xavi did not spring any surprises with his line-up and Barcelona's first team took to the pitch with one goal firmly in mind, the end finally in sight.

They conjured an electric display, one of their finest this season, to seal their triumph and leave their city rivals 19th, four points from safety with four matches remaining.

Barcelona broke the deadlock after 11 minutes with a well-worked goal, finished off by Lewandowski for his 20th of the season in La Liga.

Ronald Araujo played an inch perfect long pass for left-back Balde, who blazed past Espanyol defender Oscar Gil and crossed for Lewandowski to bundle home from close range.

Gil was beaten by Balde again for the second goal, this time scored by the young left-back after Pedri darted to the byline and scooped an inviting cross to

the back post. It was Balde's first goal for Barcelona, capping a superb breakthrough season for the youngster, who has phased veteran defender Jordi Alba out of the side.

Espanyol goalkeeper Fernando Pacheco tipped away a Lewandowski effort as Barcelona poured forward, with the hosts battling not to be blown away.

It's a magnificent feeling, (of) work well done. Ten months of work and sacrifice. The fans deserve it, the club, it gives us stability and security that things are being done well

XAVI HERNANDEZ

back in goals.

Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen made a sublime save to deny former team-mate Martin Braithwaite from close range in stoppage time at the end of the first period.

Kounde headed home the fourth early in the second half from Frenkie de Jong's perfect chipped pass as Espanyol's defence crumbled yet again.

Some Espanyol fans headed for the exits early while others

demanded the board resign, including aiming one unsavoury chant at the club's Chinese owners. Ter Stegen denied Puado when through on goal, determined to earn a La Liga record-equalling 26th clean sheet of the season in the top flight.

However moments later the Espanyol forward found himself through on goal once more and this time scored with a sublime lob - small consolation in the face of Espanyol's defeat and Barcelona's glory.

Joselu pulled another goal back in stoppage time, but it was too little, too late.

Xavi's side celebrated at full-time, to the anger of Espanyol fans, who invaded the pitch, with Barcelona players sprinting down the tunnel to escape.

AFP



A portrait of slain AFP journalist Arman Soldin is displayed on a giant screen before the French L1 football match between Stade Rennais FC and Troyes

Marseille win, Troyes relegated in Ligue 1

Paris, France - Marseille won and Troyes' relegation fate was sealed in Ligue 1 on Sunday as Rennes paid tribute to former youth player Arman Soldin, the AFP video reporter killed in Ukraine.

Marseille came from behind at home to beat bottom club Angers 3-1 to move to within two points of second-placed Lens.

Goals from Alexis Sanchez, Dimitri Payet and Jordan Veretout's penalty proved the perfect riposte to last week's defeat to Lens after Abdallah Sima's goal had given the visitors early hope of an upset at the Velodrome. Earlier, Clermont also came from a goal down to beat Lyon 2-1.

Alexandre Lacazette gave Lyon the lead after 22 minutes but Grejohn Kyei levelled from the penalty spot three minutes later. Kyei netted his second after 65 minutes to lift Clermont up to eighth, just three points behind Lyon whose hopes of European football next season appear to be over.

AFP

Barcelona will 'do everything possible' to sign Messi: Laporta

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona president Joan Laporta said on Monday the club will "do everything possible" to bring Argentine superstar Lionel Messi back in the close season.

The Paris Saint-Germain forward is set to leave in the summer when his contract expires and new La Liga champions Barcelona are hoping to lure their all-time top goalscorer back, despite strong interest from Saudi Arabia.

Messi has had two lacklustre seasons in Paris after a glorious era at Barcelona where he won four Champions League and 10 La Liga titles, and is still worshipped by the fans there.

Laporta said he has spoken with Messi to try and rebuild the relationship between them, which was damaged when he left in 2021.

Messi wanted to stay at Barcelona but the club could not afford to keep him because of debt of over one billion euros (\$1.1 billion).

"I have spoken to Leo to somehow redirect a situation that occurred, in which I had to put the club ahead of everything, even him, who is the best player in the world," Laporta told Catalan regional public television station TV3.

"The truth is that it was a very affectionate conversation, very pleasant, and we have also been sending each other messages lately - I congratulated him on the World Cup."

In the early hours of Monday morning after Barcelona won 4-2 at Espanyol to clinch La Liga, Laporta said on Twitch that "we will do everything possible" to sign Messi.

AFP

Liga title first step on Barca's long road to recovery

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona's La Liga triumph proves they are heading in the right direction, but the road back towards Europe's elite remains long and treacherous.

President Joan Laporta mortgaged part of the club's future last summer to sign Robert Lewandowski, Jules Kounde and other star names, with Barcelona over 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) in debt.

It paid off in the top flight as Barcelona won the league for the first time in four years, but a humiliating Champions League group elimination saw the Catalans drop into the Europa League.

Their stay in Europe's second tier didn't last long either, knocked out by Manchester United in a play-off tie, and were left to watch rivals Real Madrid cruise into the Champions League semi-finals. The full outcome of that gamble, which saw Barcelona sell 25 percent of future domestic television rights for the next 25 years, may not be



Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski (L) celebrates after scoring against Espanyol on Sunday (AFP)

clear for a long time, but in the short term, success is imperative.

Barcelona's league and Spanish Super Cup wins are the minimum that could be expected, and significant improvement on the continent is needed next season.

Their Champions League exit showed the team still needs strengthening beyond the starting line-up, because a spate of badly-timed injuries induced their European collapse.

However the economic "palancas" - levers - that Barcelona pulled last summer to make signings were a one-time-only parachute for the club to use.

This summer they need to make over 200 million euros (\$218 million) in savings or new revenue to be able to operate without their hands tied in the market.



Paul Pogba

Juventus see off Cremonese as Pogba injury misery continues

Rome, Italy - Juventus consolidated second place in Serie A with Sunday's 2-0 win over sinking Cremonese, while yet another injury forced Paul Pogba out of his first competitive start in over a year.

Nicolo Fagioli and Gleison Bremer netted the crucial goals which moved Juve three points ahead of third-placed Inter Milan and strengthened their hopes of Champions League football next season.

Massimiliano Allegri's side are eight points ahead of AC Milan in fifth but their top four ambitions hinge on a tribunal ruling on alleged illicit transfer activity later this month.

Last month Juve had a 15-point deduction inflicted in January revoked, with Italy's top sporting court asking the Italian Football Federation's court of appeal to revise their original decision.

There is the serious risk of a new points punishment which could knock them out of the top four.

It has been a turbulent season for Juve and no-one has more personified that more than Pogba, who was substituted 23 minutes into Sunday's match in Turin and left the field with his jersey covering his face to hide his dismay.

He had pulled up in agony after putting in a routine cross before sinking to the turf and getting on-pitch treatment on his left thigh.

AFP

CONTRASTING FORTUNES

Lukaku back to best as Inter eye Champions League final, Milan in disarray

Milan, Italy - Romelu Lukaku's return to sparkling form has given Inter Milan an extra weapon ahead of Tuesday's Champions League semi-final decider with AC Milan.

Out for much of the season with injuries and with a damaged reputation following a disastrous World Cup, Lukaku has slowly worked his way back to his best.

The Belgium striker has scored five times and set up three more in his last six matches and his double in Saturday's 4-2 win over Sassuolo

they won it under Jose Mourinho 13 years ago.

However it will likely be veteran Edin Dzeko who partners Lautaro Martinez up front for the second of two huge derbies with Milan, with Lukaku set to come on as an impact substitute.

"Of course every player wants to start, but the coach has to make his choices for the team," said Lukaku

"As I have always said, the most important thing is Inter and that's why I give my all for the team."

Of course every player wants to start, but the coach has to make his choices for the team. As I have always said, the most important thing is Inter

ROMELU LUKAKU

highlighted his new-found confidence.

Lukaku celebrated his 30th birthday by beginning and ending the scoring at the San Siro, spinning and lashing home the opener from the edge of the box shortly before half-time and drilling in his eighth league goal of the season just before the end.

A striker in his sort of form should probably expect to be starting such a huge match on Tuesday, where Inter defend a 2-0 first leg lead in a bid to reach their first Champions League final since the last time

Inter CEO Beppe Marotta said on Saturday that there was a chance of loanee Lukaku staying at Inter next season but with parent club Chelsea yet to announce their new manager his future remains uncertain.

What is sure is that the San Siro will again be a riot of colour and noise as two of Italy's standard bearers recreate the days when they were among Europe's elite.

Inter fans have good reason to be confident about their side's chances, as they have a healthy lead from the first leg and are bang in form.



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

Heads bowed

Simone Inzaghi's side have won seven matches in a row, scoring 20 goals in the process and playing with a confidence which has been lacking for most of an odd league season in which they have lost 11 times, more than any other team in Serie A's European places.

Milan meanwhile come into Tuesday's match in disarray after an embarrassing defeat at lowly Spezia which ended with team and coach Stefano Pioli having a post-match discussion with their away support.

Pioli and his players had their heads bowed in remorse while Milan's hardcore ultras bellowed encouragement in the hope that their words might add something which was missing in the first leg.

However seeing as the big miss in the first leg was Rafael Leao, the Portugal winger's probable return on Tuesday from a thigh injury will be much more of a boost to Milan.

Leao has been crucial to Milan's advance to the last four for the first time since 2007 and without him last week the seven-time European champions were painfully short of cutting edge.

"We're playing a match which could make history for us, we need to believe that we can beat Inter," said Pioli on Saturday.

"We haven't been good enough in our last two matches, but we can play much better."

AFP



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz looks disappointed after losing to Hungary's Fabian Marozsan in the third-round of the Rome Open on Monday

Alcaraz knocked out of Italian Open

Rome, Italy - World number one Carlos Alcaraz suffered a shock third round defeat in the Italian Open at the hands of unheralded Hungarian Fabian Marozsan, losing 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) on Monday.

The 20-year-old Spaniard had come into the tournament on the back of wins in Barcelona and Madrid but was outplayed by Marozsan, who is ranked 135th in the world.

Marozsan, 23, won the final six points of the second-set tiebreaker to hand US Open champion Alcaraz a wake-up call with the French Open starting in less than a fortnight.

Novak Djokovic reached the last 16 on Sunday after winning a battle with Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 4-6, 6-1.

Six-time Rome champion Djokovic initially looked in improved form compared to his sluggish tournament opener against Tomas Etcheverry but

again had a fight on his hands against the former world number three.

"I think I'm getting close to the desired level. You can always play better but today I had a really good quality opponent and I think I delivered," Djokovic told reporters.

No longer wearing the elbow brace he had in Friday's second round match, Djokovic looked to have shaken off the injury which forced him to miss last week's Madrid Masters.

The 22-time Grand Slam title winner lost his serve in the first game of the match but broke back immediately and in game four broke again to tip the first set in his favour. Djokovic served out to take the lead and in game three of the second set broke former world number three Dimitrov, who handed the initiative to the Serb with a weak backhand into the net.

AFP

Arteta apologises for unacceptable defeat

London, United Kingdom - Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta apologised for his side's second-half implosion in a 3-0 home defeat to Brighton on Sunday that put Manchester City on the verge of being crowned Premier League champions.

The Gunners had topped the table for much of the season as they tried to end a 19-year wait to win the title. But under relentless pressure from City, who have won 11 consecutive league games, the wheels have come off for Arsenal in recent months.

Arteta's men have now won just two of their last seven games.

"We have to apologise because the performance we had in the second-half is not acceptable," Arteta told Sky Sports.

"Mathematically (winning the league) it's still possible and this is football but today it is impossible to be thinking about it. We have to first digest the result, the performance that we had in the second half, and understand why and have a very different reaction in the next game."



Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta is shown a yellow card by referee Andrew Madley during their English Premier League match against Brighton in London on Sunday (AFP)

City will win the title for the fifth time in six seasons, and for a third year in a row, if Arsenal lose at Nottingham Forest on Saturday.

Even if Arteta's men respond at Forest, the title will still go to City if the leaders win at home to Chelsea on May 21 or take three points in their other two matches at Brighton and Brentford.

Arsenal have surpassed expectations just by being involved in the title race and they have secured Champions League qualification for the first time in seven seasons. But Arteta said his side's failure to respond after

falling behind to Julio Enciso's header early in the second-half is a red flag ahead of next season.

Deniz Undav and Pervis Estupinan rubbed salt in Arsenal wounds in the closing stages as Brighton took a huge step towards European qualification for the first time in the club's history.

"We concede a goal and from there the team had no reaction," added Arteta.

"When you give away the silly goal we gave away, the second one, the team collapsed and had no answers. If the team is able to do that there is something we have to address."

Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard accepted that the title race is as good as over.

"Yeah it feels like that," said the Norwegian. "It is going to be very difficult now we have to be honest. It is tough to take."

"It is not a good feeling at the moment. The way we played, particularly in the second half, I don't know what happened to be honest. It feels like there is no hope now."

Despite their late collapse, Odegaard insisted his young teammates had been mentally tough enough for the pressure of the title race.

"We wanted to come here and continue like we have in the last two games, get a good result and keep pushing. It is a big disappointment," he said.



Mustafizur Rahman

Mustafizur and Hasan bowl Bangladesh to Ireland series win

London, United Kingdom - Mustafizur Rahman took four wickets before Hasan Mahmud held his nerve as Bangladesh beat Ireland by just five runs in the third one-day international at Chelmsford on Sunday.

Victory gave Bangladesh a 2-0 win, with one washout, in the three-match series.

Mustafizur, a 27-year-old left-arm quick, finished with fine figures of 4-44 from 10 overs, including several top-order bats-

man, as Ireland were held to 269-9 in reply to Bangladesh's 274 all out.

Ireland needed 10 off the final over only for Hasan to take two wickets.

Then, with six required off the last ball, Hasan's fine yorker hit tailender Craig Young on the boot to the delight of the Tigers' vocal fans at the headquarters of English county Essex.

Ireland were well-placed when needing 51 off nine overs with seven wickets in hand.

But Najmul Hossain, who hit a

maiden ODI century in Bangladesh's three-wicket win on Friday, took his first wicket at this level to remove Harry Tector.

The in-form Tector, fresh from a career-best 140 on Friday, had made a brisk 45 when he pulled part-time bowler Najmul only for Liton Das to take a stunning diving catch low down as he ran in from wide of long-on.

"If I tell you we had the belief we'd win, I'd be lying," Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal, who top-scored for the Tigers with 69, told ESPNcricinfo.



GILL, SHAMI, SHARMA DAZZLE AS GUJARAT CONSOLIDATE TOP SPOT

MATCH 62



Shubman Gill of Gujarat Titans celebrates after scoring a century against Sunrisers Hyderabad in their Indian Premier League match in Ahmedabad on Monday. Gill cracked 101 off 58 balls while Sai Sudharsan scored 47 as Gujarat made 188 for 9 and then restricted Hyderabad to 154 for 9. Mohammed Shami and Mohit Sharma took four wickets each for Gujarat who won by 34 runs to consolidate their position at the top of the standings with 18 points.



Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh (R) celebrates with Nitish Rana after scoring a half-century in their Indian Premier League match against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday (AFP)

STAYING ALIVE

All-round Kolkata down Chennai to keep play-off hopes alive

Chennai, India - Fifties from skipper Nitish Rana and Rinku Singh led Kolkata Knight Riders to a six-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings and stay alive in the Indian Premier League on Sunday.

Kolkata kept Chennai down to 144-6, a total they overhauled riding on a key stand of 99 between Rinku (54) and Rana (57 not out) in Chennai.

Spinners Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine took two wickets each to set up victory as Kolkata jumped a spot to seventh in their attempt to finish the league stage on top four for a play-off berth.

"I said at the toss that if we do well in all the three departments, then our chances are good," Rana said after his team's sixth win in 13 matches.

Four-time winners Chennai remain second in the 10-team table led by holders Gujarat Titans and on course for the play-offs.

Kolkata looked in trouble at 33-3 after Chennai pace bowler Deepak Chahar's third strike to send back Jason Roy, before the left-handed pair of Rinku and Rana guided the team home with nine balls to spare.

Rinku, who became an IPL sensation with his five sixes off the last five balls to conjure up a miracle win for Kolkata last month, struck his third fifty of the season before being run out. He was named man of the match.

Rana made most of a dropped catch on 18 to reach his fifty and stood firm to hit the winning runs.

Four-time winners Chennai started strongly but slipped from 61-1 to 72-5 in the space of 19 balls before Shivam Dube revived the innings with his unbeaten 48.

'We go really hard in the powerplay, but today it didn't work'

Jaipur, India - Sanju Samson did not have an answer to why and how Rajasthan Royals' fortunes have fluctuated in IPL 2023 as they were skittled out for 59 - the third-lowest total in the history of IPL - chasing 172 against Royal Challengers Bangalore in Jaipur.

Royals' top three of Jos Buttler, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Samson have done the bulk of the scoring this season in the powerplay, but with them falling inside the first two overs, the chase never took flight. "In our batting, the top three were scoring a lot of runs in the past few games. We go really hard in the powerplay, but today it did not come out well," Samson told the host broadcasters after the game.

"It is the nature of T20 cricket. You have to go hard at the bowlers in the powerplay, knowing that the wicket is slowing down when the ball is getting older. That's how Jaiswal, Jos and myself play in the powerplay, but today it didn't work."

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Weight gain in women

Family, career, coping with menstruation, pregnancy, raising kids, etc... A woman, certainly has plenty of issues to handle. During these years, she is so engrossed with her responsibilities that she fails to notice that her body is also undergoing changes. Female hormones change drastically with age. Lifestyle changes, such as, poor diet, excessive prolonged stress, lack of activity, use of supplements or medication, can also disrupt the hormonal balance. This disrupt in balance can cause many problems, the commonest and the most noticeable one is weight gain which may be the root cause for other conditions.

What are the health risks of being overweight?

Extra weight can put one at a higher risk for:

- Type 2 diabetes
- High BP
- Heart disease and stroke
- Osteoarthritis
- Breast cancer
- Gallbladder disease
- Irregular periods
- Infertility
- Complications in pregnancy

What makes women gain weight?

Factors that contribute to weight gain in women are:

- Incorrect eating habits - Eating too many calories, eating when lonely, or stressed, eating due to being pressured by family or friends, using food for recreation, irregular eating due to work and family pressures.
- Hormonal Imbalance - Women are highly



VANDANA CHAWLA

NUTRITION & YOU

prone to hormonal disruption. Medical problems associated with it, like, PCOS, (Polycystic Ovarian Disorder), hypothyroidism can result in weight gain.

- Depression - Hormones and related factors may affect a woman's mood through various stages of her life, like, puberty, premenstrual, pregnancy or postpartum. During these periods of depression, food is used as a weapon to overcome the problem. Loneliness or boredom can further aggravate the problem.
- Changes in lifestyle - More than men, it is women who undergo many changes during adulthood years. Marriage and pregnancy are the major stages that bring about lifestyle changes, which can contribute to weight gain.

To maintain weight or prevent weight gain

- Eat breakfast regularly
- Begin meal with a low-fat salad, soup, or water.
- Eat more vegetables, fruits, or whole grains in each meal.
- Drink fewer sugar-sweetened beverages, like

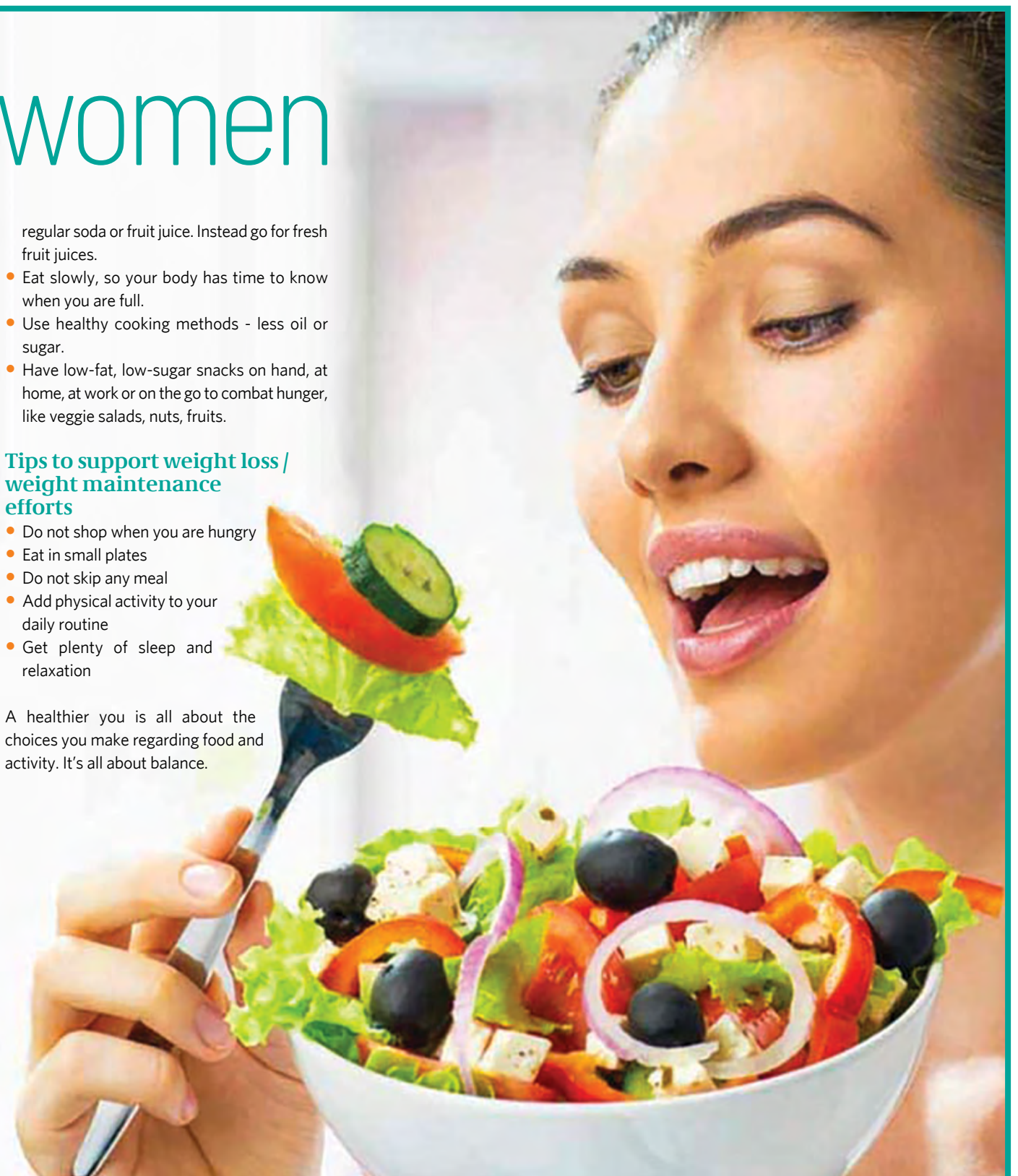
regular soda or fruit juice. Instead go for fresh fruit juices.

- Eat slowly, so your body has time to know when you are full.
- Use healthy cooking methods - less oil or sugar.
- Have low-fat, low-sugar snacks on hand, at home, at work or on the go to combat hunger, like veggie salads, nuts, fruits.

Tips to support weight loss / weight maintenance efforts

- Do not shop when you are hungry
- Eat in small plates
- Do not skip any meal
- Add physical activity to your daily routine
- Get plenty of sleep and relaxation

A healthier you is all about the choices you make regarding food and activity. It's all about balance.



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FIT
FOR A
'KING'

Fitness is all about striking a perfect balance between mental and physical well being, says **Nageeb al Khaldi**, an HSE professional and personal trainer, who likens the brain to a 'king' and body parts to 'soldiers'. The ultimate goal is about making the king strong, he says



Hubert Vaz

Have you given up fitness activity after a few weeks of earnest pursuit? Do other commitments occasionally force you to shift fitness to the back burner? Has a mentally taxing day at work often made you shelve your fitness routine though it involved no physical exhaustion whatsoever?

Fitness is a combination of mental and physical well being, and when the two exist in perfect harmony, one experiences good health, says Nageeb al Khaldi, a fitness freak who has also been training numerous people in Oman who struggle to keep their fitness commitments alive in the face of pressures of the daily grind.

"Mental fatigue often forces individuals to give up their fitness commitments, though they are not physically tired," says Khaldi, adding that one needs to devise ways to tackle mental fatigue so that it does not interfere with one's physical activities that are very important for all round good health.

"My personal preference is such, straight after work, I love to go to the gym and workout to release my negative energy. I take it

all out in the gym and when I go home, I am fully refreshed and filled with only positive energy. I make sure to plan to workout five days a week and take two days off as my body would need rest to recover. That also depends on the specific sport that a person is doing," he asserts.

Distinguishing between mental and physical fatigue, Khaldi says, "Mental fatigue is when a person is mentally tired, depending on how much work did he put in office. Work in finance can be mentally taxing as it in-

volves concentration and focusing on writing reports, etc. That would make a person feel mentally tired and he might want to sleep. It can also be induced by other stresses of life.

"Physical fatigue, on the other hand, is when a person does physical work, moving his body to achieve a task. It applies on those involved in hard manual labour in building/construction or maintenance works, especially technicians and engineers.

Despite the clear distinction between physical and mental fatigue, confusion often

arises due to the tendency for the brain to command the body to sleep when it is mentally tired. However, there are alternative methods to refresh the mind, and sports can serve as a powerful example.

Although the thought of hitting the gym after a long day may seem daunting, the benefits of exercise for refreshing the mind and boosting energy levels cannot be overstated. Once an individual overcomes the initial hurdle of getting to the gym and warming up, they will likely notice a surge of energy and mental clarity. By incorporating regular workouts into one's routine, it is possible to refresh the brain and increase productivity while enjoying the benefits of physical fitness.

Asked if it is okay for one to workout when mentally tired, Khaldi said, one must first evaluate whether one has indulged in any physical activity. If not, then fatigue relates to mental strain. And physical workouts are beneficial to get rid of mental fatigue because when you workout you hit two birds with one stone - you refresh your brain and at the same time you improve your physical health.

Admitting that mental fatigue does affect physical performance, he, however, asserted that one needs to make a start somewhere. "Your brain is like a 'king' and your body

parts are 'soldiers'. With a strong king you have strong soldiers and with a weak king you have weak soldiers. So, it is important to keep the king strong."

Khaldi further asserts, that it is important to tell oneself that one has chosen to go to the gym to refresh the brain as well as build a healthier, stronger physique.

To those sitting for a very long time in front of a computer in the office, Khaldi says, it can affect your body and make your muscles weak, besides causing spine-related injuries. Hence, taking up any type of sports that works the muscles would be the ideal exercise to make up for it. Spending at least 45 minutes in a gym is also enough to activate the muscles, he said.

"We normally make time for everything - work, family, friends, and so on, but we don't set aside 45 minutes a day for fitness though it provides positive outcomes," Khaldi said, adding that the choice of fitness activities is contingent upon personal preference and the enjoyment derived from various physical pursuits.

Some individuals may prefer running or martial arts, others may opt for gym workouts or engaging in team sports. Ultimately, any form of physical activity can be beneficial for promoting wellness and achieving fitness goals.



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