

## ► NEWS BRIEF

OMAN AFFIRMS SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE AT ICJ

**The Hague, Netherlands** - Oman has reaffirmed its support for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

This was detailed in a written plea submitted by the Government of Oman to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, Netherlands. This action follows the United Nations General Assembly's resolution passed on December 30, 2022, which sought an advisory opinion from the court on the implications of Israel's persistent violations against the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

## Oman agrees to channel Iraqi debt payments to Iran

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Oman has agreed to act as a conduit for the transfer of debt owed by Iraq to Iran. In a significant move, the US has allowed Iran to receive payments for its energy exports to Iraq, providing the sanction-stricken nation a much-needed economic respite.

The US Department of State stated on Monday that even

though sanctions would remain in place, Iran will receive hundreds of millions of dollars from Iraq for the energy products it has sold to its neighbour.

According to Reuters, in June, Iraq agreed to pay about US\$2.76bn in gas and electricity debt to Iran after receiving a sanctions waiver from the US.

At a news briefing in Washington, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller



Matthew Miller

confirmed that Oman will manage the account, in which Iraq would deposit the money, while

Iran would be able to use it, with some restrictions.

Also on Monday, a spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said Oman and Qatar had agreed to manage the proposed transactions.

Asked to confirm the Iranian official's claim, Miller said, "I can confirm that Oman has indicated willingness to receive a portion of those funds and we believe that it's an important step.

"It's important to get that money out of Iraq because it's a source of leverage that Iran uses against its neighbour."

Explaining further, Miller said this money will be held in a fund or an account in Oman, but will still be subject to the same restrictions that were in place.

The money, he added, can only be used for "non-sanctionable activities such as humanitarian assistance" and that all

the transactions need to be approved by the US Treasury Department in advance.

Due to decades of conflict and sanctions, Iraq is dependent on imports from Iran for a lot of its gas needs.

However, US sanctions on Iranian oil and gas have hampered Iraq's payments for imports, putting it in heavy arrears and leading Iran to retaliate by cutting gas flows regularly.

## Sharp decline in number of low-wage Omani workers

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

The private sector in Oman has witnessed a sharp drop in the number of low-wage Omani workers this year, as employees increasingly seek better-paying job opportunities in a growing economy.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the number of Omanis earning between RO325-RO400 and registered with the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) sharply fell by 18.4% this year, declining from 88,911 in December 2022 to 72,553 in June 2023.

On the other hand, the number of Omani workers in the RO400-RO500 salary bracket remained relatively stable, with around 50,200 workers recorded in June 2023, similar to figures from six months ago.

The NCSI data showed a shift in the distribution of workers across various salary groups, notably with a substantial increase in the number of Omani workers earning monthly salaries exceeding RO500.

In particular, the number of Omanis earning between RO500-RO600 saw a notable



growth of 7.7%, rising to 38,364 in June 2023 from 35,615 in December 2022. However, the data indicated no significant changes in the number of Omani workers earning between RO600-RO1,000.

The number of Omani workers earning between RO1,000-RO2,000 witnessed a 5% increase, reaching 37,079 in June 2023 compared to 35,290 recorded in December 2022. Additionally, those earning between RO2,000-RO2,500 totaled 7,349, representing a 5.9% increase from the 6,942 reported six months ago.

Moreover, the number of Omanis holding higher-level po-

sitions in the private sector, earning more than RO2,500 in monthly salaries, grew by 6.5% to 14,825 in June 2023 from 13,923 registered with PASI in December 2022.

The decline in lower wage bracket Omani workers and the growing number of better-paid positions in the private sector suggest a potential improvement in the sultanate's job market. **Continued on Page 03**

## Royal Court Affairs embraces EVs in push for clean energy

**Muscat** - With the blessings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Royal Court Affairs has begun implementation of a significant sustainability initiative. The organisation is taking its first steps towards adopting electric vehicles (EVs) in alignment with Oman's zero-emissions strategy and commitment to clean energy transportation.

Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of Royal Court Affairs, confirmed that this shift to EVs mirrors the Royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan, who emphasises the importance of clean energy. It has positive impacts on both the environment and society.

According to Kindi, this measure keeps pace with global transportation trends, aiming to significantly cut carbon emissions and the consumption of fossil fuels.

Kindi explained that the transition to EVs will be a gradual process, subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation. He also noted the Royal Court Affairs' plans to install a series of EV charging points within its units. "This proactive approach will ensure seamless integration of the vehicles into various work sites and cater to the organisation's operational needs."



Oman's financial system resilient: CBO



Expected better performance from boys: Mendis



Date harvest season tabseel in progress

## MHT wins 'Fastest Growing Tourism Board' award in India

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) won the 'Fastest Growing Tourism Board' category at the India Travel Awards 2023 held in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The award was received by Asmaa bint Salim al Hajri, Assistant Director General of Tourism Promotion at MHT. Currently, Asmaa is spearheading the ministry's delegation in a promotional road show across India, visiting four cities: Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata and Mumbai.

Accepting the award, Asmaa expressed pride, noting that the recognition is an achievement for the sultanate. "This award mirrors the advancements made in our tourism sector, and the tireless promotional efforts made by the ministry to attract tourists from around the world," she said.

She described the award as motivation for MHT to persist in showcasing Oman as a distinguished tourist destination in global markets.

The India Travel Awards



(Supplied photo)

*This award mirrors the advancements made in our tourism sector, and the tireless promotional efforts made by the ministry to attract tourists from around the world*

ASMAA BINT SALIM AL HAJRI

recognise and celebrate the accomplishments of companies and organisations in the global travel and hospitality industry. These awards are unique in their reliance on online voting by

major tourism sector companies in India, backed by the Indian Ministry of Tourism.

Last year, Oman welcomed 355,459 visitors from India, marking a significant increase

from 106,042 visitors in 2021. This surge positions India as the second most important source market for Oman's tourism industry, accounting for 12.2% of all tourists to the sultanate, just behind the GCC countries.

In the road show - ending in Mumbai on July 31 - specialists from MHT are conducting meetings with leading figures in the tourism industry, including travel agents and tour operators, with the objective of increasing the number of tourists from India and discussing cooperation opportunities to attract the desired demographic, thereby promoting Oman's tourism facilities.

These meetings also enable MHT to liaise with partners in promising tourism source markets. The ministry seeks to update them on developments in Oman's tourism sector and solicit their suggestions to amplify inbound tourism. Furthermore, it aims to highlight the sultanate's newest destinations and projects, offering an exceptional tourism experience for visitors from India.



## MHUP launches architectural map competition for social housing

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has launched an architectural map competition, aiming to promote community involvement in social housing sector projects.

The competition intends to provide modern architectural maps for citizens under the housing assistance programme, which in turn will improve the efficiency of the programme's housing designs. The contest encourages the involvement of consultants and specialised architectural design offices to serve the social housing sector.

Faisal bin Rabie al Farsi, Acting

Director of Design and Quantities Department, stated that entries must be distinctive, innovative and sustainable, and should not be adapted from other designs.

The competition comprises two stages. The first stage entails participants providing a brief idea, a three-dimensional perspective, and horizontal and vertical projections. Additionally, they are required to submit an estimated construction cost.

The second stage involves providing detailed structural and electromechanical maps, a list of used materials, and an interior design video. Entries will be assessed based on cost-effectiveness and feasibility.

Farsi further explained that the

competition demands requirements such as flexibility and future expansion capabilities in design, and suitability for all family age groups.

He added that the contest is looking for designs catering to three categories of beneficiaries of the social housing programme. Entries will be evaluated on criteria such as innovation, sustainability, future expandability, and space utilisation efficiency.

He emphasised that the competition's outcomes would streamline the architectural and structural map provision process, saving both effort and time.

The competition's top five projects will be awarded cash prizes.

# PDO commits \$1.8mn to community projects

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Committing to new social investment projects, valued at over US\$1.8mn, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) signed four memoranda of cooperation targeting public health, education and transportation safety in the sultanate on Wednesday.

These projects are geared towards enhancing the welfare of communities across Oman.

The signing ceremony was presided over by H E Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Undersecretary of Ministry of Energy and Minerals. He highlighted the ministry's continuous efforts to inspire energy companies in Oman to contribute towards local community enhancement projects.

One of the key agreements is with the Ministry of Health, under which PDO will finance the development of a new maternity and neonatal ward in Bahla Hospital. This addition aims to improve the standard of healthcare available to the wilayat, reflecting the growing demand for such services in Bahla and the broader Dakhliyah governorate.

In an endeavor to strengthen the education sector within its concession areas, PDO has partnered with the Ministry of Education through two memoranda. The first involves funding the construction of extra classrooms in Al Habbi School in Bahla. The second agreement supports a defensive driving training programme for school bus drivers throughout the country in collaboration with Royal Oman Police to mitigate school bus-related accidents, ensuring the safe transportation of students to and



One agreement supports a defensive driving training programme for school bus drivers throughout the country in collaboration with Royal Oman Police to mitigate school bus-related accidents, ensuring the safe transportation of students

safety and hygiene standards. Steve Phimster, Managing Director of PDO, stated these agreements would benefit Omani citizens and align with PDO's commitment to sustainable development and value maximisation. Abdul Hameed al Ajmi, Executive Director of External Affairs and Value Creation at PDO, emphasised that the company adheres to strict criteria when assessing the viability of proposed projects, ensuring their potential for maximum community benefit.



## Special event ‘Return of the Past’ launched for khareef

Salalah - Dhofar Municipality launched a special cultural event titled 'Return of the Past' - a major highlight of Dhofar Khareef 2023 - in Salalah's Al Hafa area on Tuesday.

The 'Return of the Past' event takes inspiration from five distinct environments of Dhofar. It puts the spotlight on the governorate's urban, rural, marine, bedouin and agricultural roots, providing an immersive journey through Dhofar's historical and cultural connections.

The event setup at Al Hafa includes an art-focused square, bringing together an array of local food stalls, heritage markets and engaging live performances. Vis-

*'Return of the Past' takes inspiration from five distinct environments of Dhofar governorate*

itors can savour authentic Omani cuisine, explore local artisanal products and enjoy art showcases that reflect Omani culture.

The Dhofar Khareef festival activities this year are spread across several locations. Visitors can enjoy a rich array of cultural experiences across venues such as the Salalah, Awqad and Al Saada parks, and Aten Square,

which will remain open until August 31.

A unique 'Children's City' has sprung up at Awqad Park, catering specifically to young visitors. The attraction features several kid-centric installations like a Smurfs village, a Masha and the Bear village and a Panda village, all of which pay tribute to beloved cartoon characters.

Adding to the line-up of kid-friendly activities, the festival also hosts a candy museum, an ice-skating rink, an Alice in Wonderland show, and an assortment of interactive VR games, ensuring a memorable and fun-filled experience for children visiting Dhofar Khareef 2023.

## Muscat Municipality cautions against improper waste disposal

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has issued a warning against unregulated disposal of construction waste, stating that offenders face fines of up to RO1,000.

It is amplifying efforts to monitor waste transportation across Muscat governorate and has emphasised that indiscriminate waste dumping poses significant environmental hazards.

The municipality has increased frequency of its awareness campaigns, cautioning contractors and truck drivers about the environmental impacts of waste and the hefty fines they could incur. These actions fall in line with the municipality's orders and laws designed to protect the environment from damage, especially from waste mismanagement.

Under local order 1/2006 on protective health and administrative decision 55/2017, fines have



been put in place for violations. The municipality also mandates contractors and property owners to clean construction sites upon completion. Approvals and licences for utilities such as electricity and water will only be granted once safe waste disposal has been confirmed.

Administrative decision No 55/2017 has also been enacted to impose sanctions for violations of the Muscat Municipality law, as issued by Royal Decree No 38/2015. Specifically, for environmental offences, certain pro-

visions state that anyone found disposing waste in public spaces, open squares or wadis will be fined RO1,000.

Repeat offenders will face a doubling of the fine, and a deadline of one day to transfer the waste to designated disposal sites. If the offender fails to remove construction or renovation waste or dumps it on third-party land or public spaces, they will be fined RO100. Repeat offences incur a fine of RO300, with a one-day deadline to rectify the violation.

# صندوق مزون الأول The First Mazoon Fund

## THE FIRST MZOOM FUND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED JUNE 30, 2023

### The Chairman's Report For June 30th, 2023

The primary objective of the fund is to achieve capital appreciation through a diversified portfolio of equity and bond investments in public companies listed at GCC Markets and MENA region.

A summary of financial results is as follows:

| Figure 1                     | For the period ended<br>June 30, 2023 | For the period ended<br>June 30, 2022 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|                              | (OMR)                                 | (OMR)                                 |
| Total Income                 | 1,045,062                             | 236,395                               |
| Total Expenses               | (182,187)                             | (206,556)                             |
| Profit (Loss) for the Period | 862,875                               | 29,839                                |
| Profit (Loss) per Unit       | 0.113                                 | 0.004                                 |

Fund Performance:

For the period ended June 30, 2023, the performance of The First Mazoon Fund is as follows:

| Figure 2:                             | June 30, 2023 | June 30, 2022 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Net Asset Value (OMR)                 | 8,974,164     | 8,657,673     |
| Number of Outstanding Units           | 7,613,136     | 7,615,238     |
| Net Asset Value per Unit**            | 1.179         | 1.137         |
| UBGCC Fund Performance for the period | 10.68%        | 0.31%         |
| Benchmark Performance for the period  | 2.87%         | -0.08%        |

Market Performance

Figure A: Index Returns

| Index                          | YTD (June 30, 2023) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Dubai Financial Market         | 13.70%              |
| Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul) | 9.40%               |
| Bahrain Bourse                 | 3.30%               |
| S&P GCC Index                  | 2.80%               |
| Muscat Securities Market       | -1.80%              |
| Boursa Kuwait                  | -3.80%              |
| Qatar Exchange                 | -5.70%              |
| Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange  | -6.50%              |

Economy and Markets

Going forward, the world will watch the BRICS summit in South Africa, in August, with a lot of interest. A BRICS gold linked currency is likely to be previewed in this meet, one which is likely to compete with the US Dollar. In the near term, The Shanghai Co-operation Council (SCO) will likely merge into the BRICS group and other countries are likely to join in. Around 12 more countries have shown interest in joining this group, which is seen as counter to the US Dollar and giving rise to a multipolar global financial system. This has implications for the MENA region as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt have expressed interest in joining the BRICS. The unveiling of a BRICS gold linked currency has already resulted in expectations of a weaker dollar in Q3. A weaker dollar, very low levels of oil inventory and a backwardated futures curve, implies a constructive outlook for oil prices and also for the GCC markets. Consequently, our outlook for GCC, remains cautiously optimistic.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Fund Management Body, I extend my thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq bin Taimur for his government's progressive policies and constant encouragement to the financial services sector.

I also take this opportunity to thank the CMA, MSX & MCD for their support and cooperation, our valued unitholders, members of the Fund Management Body for their valuable time and guidance, for your continued support and trust and the fund manager and service providers for their efforts.

Chairman

The First Mazoon Fund

July 26th, 2023

### Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income For 30 June 2023

|                                                                        | 30 June 2023<br>RO | 30 June 2022<br>RO |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| INCOME                                                                 |                    |                    |
| Dividend income                                                        | 204,198            | 184,555            |
| Interest income                                                        | 40                 | 296                |
| Net realised gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss  | 758,408            | 637,539            |
| Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss | 82,416             | (590,704)          |
| Other income                                                           | -                  | 4,709              |
| Total income                                                           | 1,045,062          | 236,395            |
| Expenses                                                               |                    |                    |
| Management fees                                                        | 58,763             | 68,050             |
| Brokerage expenses                                                     | 79,180             | 78,812             |
| Custodian and administrator fees                                       | 6,296              | 7,291              |
| Performance fees                                                       | 5,743              | 10,000             |
| General and administration                                             | 14,849             | 24,922             |
| Fund Management Body fee                                               | 17,356             | 17,481             |
| Foreign exchange loss (net)                                            | -                  | -                  |
| Total Expenses                                                         | 182,187            | 206,556            |
| Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year                 | 862,875            | 29,839             |
| Net profit per unit                                                    | 0.113              | 0.004              |

### Statement of financial position As 30 June 2023

|                                                  | 30 June 2023<br>RO | 30 June 2022<br>RO |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| ASSETS                                           |                    |                    |
| Investments at fair value through profit or loss | 8,985,646          | 6,666,033          |
| Cash and cash equivalents                        | 38,340             | 2,050,549          |
| Other receivables                                | 12,319             | 13,591             |
| Total assets                                     | 9,036,305          | 8,730,173          |
| LIABILITIES                                      |                    |                    |
| Current liabilities                              |                    |                    |
| Accruals and other payables                      | 62,141             | 72,500             |
| Total liabilities                                | 62,141             | 72,500             |
| Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders | 8,974,164          | 8,657,673          |
| Net asset value per unit                         | 1.179              | 1.137              |

For more information please contact:

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# Jabal Akhdar anticipates bountiful pomegranate harvest in August

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Farmers in Jabal Akhdar, Dakhliyah are preparing for the pomegranate harvest season beginning in August.

According to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the wilayat, the number of pomegranate trees in the region exceeds 27,000.

Last year, the pomegranate crop reached a market value of RO18.7mn. More than 90% of the fruit harvested were healthy, following the implementation of an effective pest control programme by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

As part of this initiative, over 42mn beneficial insects were released during the 2023 season. This method, a component of the integrated management of the pomegranate fruit borer butterfly, utilises alternative and modern control techniques.

Omar bin Mohammad al



*In 2022, the pomegranate crop reached a market value of RO18.7mn. This year, a surge in yield is anticipated due to favourable conditions*

OMAIR AL FAHDI

Fahdi, head of the Agriculture Development and Water Resources Department in Jabal Akhdar, reported that the average yield of viable trees was



(Supplied photos)

88.7% in the 2022 season. On average, each tree produced an estimated 55 fruits.

Fahdi also noted that in the upcoming season, a surge in

pomegranate yield is anticipated due to favourable rain and plentiful water. "The harvest is set to coincide with the 2023 Jabal Akhdar Festival, attracting an in-

flux of visitors."

Jabal Akhdar's pomegranates, coveted in the Nizwa market and neighbouring wilayats, have seen increasing demand over past seasons. Prices, however, fluctuate based on the season, production volume and market demand.

To tackle the pomegranate pest, MAFWR initiated a programme to propagate *Trichogramma* eggs, a parasite aiding in pest control. The effort not only curbed the prevalence of the fruit pest but also improved yield and fruit quality.

This programme also developed a precise system to monitor pest activity across all the wilayat's villages through early detection teams.

The pomegranate harvest season in Jabal Akhdar not only enriches the local economy but also diversifies the governorate's tourism appeal, Fahdi added. "Visitors can learn about and partake in the pomegranate harvest, experiencing a unique aspect of Jabal Akhdar."



(Supplied photo)

## NSA unveils advanced drone for survey, exploration works

Muscat - National Survey Authority (NSA), under the Ministry of Defence, has announced the launch of a state-of-the-art unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). It is expected to significantly improve NSA's capabilities for survey and exploration operations.

The project aligns with NSA's vision to keep pace with international advancements and changes in the geospatial field, enabling it to fulfil its national role effectively.

This technological advancement reflects NSA's commitment to bolster topographic surveys and manage geospatial data of the sultanate, ONA stated.

*The UAV is expected to significantly improve NSA's capabilities*

The UAV aims to provide precise aerial images quickly, ultimately delivering accurate and up-to-date information and data sources for various map updates. Furthermore, the device will facilitate aerial photography services for different sectors and offer timely imaging solutions during emergency situations.



(Supplied photo)

## 1,400 wells to be surveyed for groundwater salinity

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is executing a project to assess the groundwater salinity of several wells in the wilayats of Barka and Musannah in South Batinah.

The objective is to monitor the water quality changes in wells situated along the coast and to understand the effects triggered by the interplay of fresh and saltwater.

Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al Esayi,

Director of Water Resources Department in the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, South Batinah, stated that the project aligns with ongoing efforts to safeguard and develop water resources, both in terms of quantity and quality.

"One of the critical objectives is to tackle the seawater intrusion phenomena in coastal areas."

Esayi elaborated that the groundwater salinity measurement project, spearheaded by MAFWR, targets approximately 1,400 wells along the Batinah coast and the Salalah Plain.

The project intends to regularly monitor the water quality changes in wells located in these regions every five years, providing an insight into the effects induced by the interaction of fresh and saltwater.

Currently, samples are being collected from wells in Barka and Musannah on the Batinah coast. "The sampling will continue till the end of this month. The collected data will provide a current overview and reveal the degree of saltwater intrusion, following the specific methodology adopted for this study."

## Oman offers two scholarships to Indian students

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has announced two scholarships for Indian students for engineering and business administration studies.

Students residing in Oman having a general education

diploma or its equivalent from one of the schools in the sultanate are eligible. Both the scholarships are for University of Technology and Applied Sciences for the academic year 2023/2024.

Registration and admission will be done directly through the website of the Higher Education Admission Centre (www.heac.

gov.om). Students can find further information on the website under the section 'Omani Programme for Cultural and Scientific Cooperation'.

Registration commenced on July 24 and will continue till August 17. The scholarship winners will be announced on August 24.

According to MoHERI, the Omani Programme for Cultural

and Scientific Cooperation involves participation with countries that have a friendly relation with the sultanate.

The programme provides grants covering tuition fees of undergraduate studies for qualified students who are residing in Oman and completed Grade 12 or Year 13 at one of the government or private schools in the country.

## Decline in number of low-wage workers

Continued from Page 01

The government's Omanisation efforts to replace expatriate workers with Omanis is progressing in earnest and the Ministry of Labour has intensified its efforts to create employment opportunities for citizens by training and equipping them with additional skills.

Notwithstanding the positive trends in the medium and higher salary brackets, the overall total number of Omanis working in the private sector, registered with PASI, witnessed a decline of 3.6%. The data showed a decrease from 286,026 in December 2022 to 275,623 as of June 2023.

As per the NCSI figures, 44.5% of Omanis registered with PASI - as of end of June 2023 - have insured monthly wages ranging from RO325 to RO500. Nearly 32% of Omanis registered with PASI work in Muscat governorate.

Free home delivery & timely service

# Oman's financial system resilient: CBO

## CBO's financial stability report says banks continue to hold ample capital buffers to 'mitigate potential risks'

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Omani financial system exhibited remarkable resilience to the heightened volatility and liquidity stress that permeated a large part of the global financial system.

This was the observation that the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) made in its Financial Stability Report (FSR) this year.

The FSR 2023 reaffirmed that in Oman 'the short-term risks to financial stability remain muted' and that the 'Omani financial system remains strong and well-poised to support the economy'.

The 11th edition of the FSR mentions that since Oman follows a fixed exchange rate regime, its policy rate is closely aligned with the US target federal funds range. As a result, Oman's



policy rate increased in tandem with the US Fed's policy rate.

On the health of the banking sector, the report mentions that banks continued to hold ample capital buffers to 'mitigate potential risks and withstand adverse economic conditions', and 'with the upturn in the economy, the profitability indicators for banks also improved'. The report also mentions that the 'asset

quality of the banking sector remains strong after the implementation of the exit strategy from loan deferment scheme'.

The report also states that the 'banking system continued to maintain ample liquidity buffers and systemic liquidity remained adequate amid monetary policy tightening'.

The FSR also presented the results of the two annual surveys conducted by CBO 'Systemic Risk Survey-2023' and the 'Credit Conditions Survey-2023'. The systemic risk survey affirmed an improvement in confidence in the Omani financial system and the credit conditions survey illustrated that credit conditions in the Sultanate of Oman are expected to improve in 2023.

The report also recognises the emergence of new challenges for financial stability, specifically in the areas of climate change and cybersecurity. To address these challenges, CBO is actively working on developing policies and frameworks that promote sustainable financial practices while ensuring the stability and security of the financial system.

The Composite Financial Stability Indicator (CFSI) of Oman has revealed positive trends largely driven by favourable factors, particularly higher oil prices, improved debt sustainability and systemic risk indicators.

Moreover, FSRs are an important communication tool by Central Banks across the globe to disseminate information on potential points of distress for financial stability.

In Oman, publications of FSR was made a part of the overall macro-financial surveillance system since 2013.

## MSX dips 15 points; trading value rises by 38.6%

Muscat - Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) general index-30 on Wednesday lost 15.2 points, comprising a drop by 0.32% to close at 4,767.47 points, compared to the last session, which stood at 4,782.69 points.

The trading value on Wednesday stood at RO1,944,267, comprising a rise by 38.6%, compared to the last session, which stood at RO1,403,074.

The report released by MSX pointed out that the market value went down by 0.105% to reach about RO23.85bn.

The report added that the value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached RO469,000, comprising 24.14%. The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached RO287,000, comprising 14.78%. The net non-Omani investment increased by 9.36% to RO182,000.

Oman's oil price for September delivery reached US\$84.36 on Wednesday, comprising a rise by 10 cents from Tuesday's price, which stood at US\$84.26.

The average price of Oman oil's July delivery stabilised at US\$74.94 per barrel, thus US\$8.34 per barrel lower than June delivery this year.

### Oman oil price rises 10 cents

## Oman Cables identifies 50 projects to boost its sustainability efforts

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman Cables has identified 50 projects over the next three years and dedicated investments have been approved for 2023, boosting its sustainability efforts.

Oman Cables Industry (OCI), the leading manufacturer of energy cables and innovative service provider in Oman, along with its strategic partner Prysmian Group, unveiled its vision for a sustainable future, highlighting the group's dedication to environmental responsibility, social progress and innovation.

A recently held special event on 'Sustainability Day' brought together industry leaders from across the GCC region.

'The OCI reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to sustainable growth and its resolute alignment with the ambitious Oman Vision 2040', the group stated.

Demonstrating their proactive approach, OCI took a pioneering step by organising the event under the theme 'Going Green, Going Digital'. With sustainability firmly integrated into its business strategy, the event served as a powerful platform to explore innovative pathways towards a greener and digitally driven future. Through insightful discussions, experts explored the latest trends in embracing sustainable transformation within the industry.

OCI's dedication to sustainability has been integral to its growth strategy, leading to the Climate Change Ambition and adherence to the Science Based Target initiatives in 2021.

In the opening address, Cinzia Farise, Oman Cables CEO outlined the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) approach. This was followed by COO Muhammad al Lawati, who detailed Oman Cables Climate Ambition, outlining the organisation's projects to combat climate change. The Social Ambition was illustrated by CSO Giancarlo Esposito, with numerous projects and specific KPIs in term of diversity and inclusion.

The last chapter was dedicated to Innovation4Sustainability, with an excursus of main innovation and innovative projects of a company that recently established in Oman the Renewables Excellence Centre - solar,



*H H Dr Adham al Said highlighted the key drivers of sustainability and explained how sustainability plays a crucial role in shaping the future economic development of Oman*

wind and hydrogen - for the entire region.

The event was graced by H H Dr Adham al Said as Guest of Honour. In his address, H H Dr Said highlighted the key drivers of sustainability in the sultanate. His insightful address explained how sustainability plays a crucial role in shaping the future economic development of Oman.

Cinzia Farise, CEO, said, "Sustainability is at the heart of our business strategy and through innovation, decarbonisation and customer-centricity, our technology plays a key part in the energy and digital transition processes.

"We engage stakeholders, prioritize the entire value chain and continuously innovate to anticipate Customers' needs. With a circular economy focus and an inclusive work environment, we

are committed to driving positive change. As we align our efforts with Oman Vision 2040 and the nation's net-zero emissions goal by 2050, we are determined to create a sustainable world that thrives economically while safeguarding our environment for future generations."

OCI aims contribute effectively to the ambitious target of Prysmian Group: to cut scope 1 and 2 emissions by 47% and scope 3 emissions by 28% by 2030, compared to baseline of 2019. Long-term goals involve achieving a 90% reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2035 and scope 3 emissions by 2050. The Group is also advancing a circular economy roadmap, prioritizing sustainable revenue streams and increasing the use of recycled content.

Speakers highlighted how OCI seamlessly integrates sustainability into production processes across the entire value chain, anticipating customer needs and fostering stronger supplier collaboration to drive continuous innovation. As clean energy and digital infrastructures converge, OCI is committed to empowering technological advancements for efficiency, innovation and progress.

Oman Cables has also set clear targets to enhance gender representation in the workforce and aims to participate effectively to Prysmian Group target to increase the percentage of women to 47-49% by 2025 and 50% by 2030.

'The group is proud of its ESG plan, which is supported by a steering committee with leaders who meet regularly to drive sustainability efforts,' OCI stated.

شركة زجاج مجان ش.م.ع.ع

MAJAN GLASS COMPANY S.A.O.G.

P.O Box 17, Postal Code 327, C.R.No:3/19456/6, Sohar Industrial Estate, Sultanate of Oman.

Tel: +968 26751654/5/6, Fax: +968 26751658, E-mail: info@majanglass.com

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON THE UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED ON 30 JUNE 2023

The Board of Directors of Majan Glass Company SAOG is pleased to present Company's unaudited financial results for the period ended on 30 June 2023.

**Performance overview:**  
Sales revenue amounted to RO 6.355 Million, which remained flat compared to the Previous Year's Sales of RO 6.495 Million. There was a dip in sales volume given excess inventory carryover in certain markets driven by excess ordering given supply chain issues in 2022 and expected to correct by Q3 2023.

Exports amounted to 87% of the total sales for the quarter that ended 30 June 2023

The company was exposed to cost headwinds in Q2 2023, given the global price of Raw materials and Packing materials due to the ongoing geopolitical issues and higher energy prices. This is expected to ease from Q3 2023 onwards, given the easing of the geo-political and energy situation compared to Q4 2022. The company was able to pass on a significant amount of cost increase to its customers, which fully came into effect in various stages in H1 2023, depending upon contractual commitments.

During the period that ended on 30 June 2023, the company faced some production constraints due to some unforeseen breakdowns in the plant which adversely affected the production capacity, sales and the bottom line. However, the company has taken immediate action to address the issue and expects improvements in the coming months.

The Gross profit amounted to 732 thousand Omani riyals for the period ended on June 30, 2023, compared to a Gross profit of 1,087 thousand Omani riyals for the same period of the previous year, 2022.

Net Loss after Tax for the current period amounts to RO 228K as against Net Loss after Tax of RO 274K for the same period in the previous year, 2022.

**Quarter-wise Performance Highlights:**

| Particulars                | Q1 03-23 | Q2 06-23 | Total YTD June 2023 | Total YTD June 2022 |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Sales Million Bottles      | 79.22    | 82.25    | 161.47              | 176.78              |
| Production Million Bottles | 74.89    | 82.87    | 157.76              | 183.52              |

**OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS - (ALL AMOUNTS ARE IN RO MILLION)**

|                              |         |         |         |         |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Sales                        | 2,999   | 3,356   | 6,355   | 6,495   |
| Cost of Goods Sold           | (2,762) | (2,861) | (5,623) | (5,408) |
| Gross Profit                 | 0.237   | 0.495   | 0.732   | 1.087   |
| Net Profit/(Loss) Before Tax | (0.275) | 0.067   | (0.208) | (0.181) |
| Income Tax                   | (0.010) | (0.020) | (0.093) | (0.093) |
| Net Profit/(Loss) After Tax  | (0.285) | 0.057   | (0.228) | (0.274) |
| EBITDA                       | 0.002   | 0.354   | 0.356   | 0.546   |

**Future Outlook:**  
The company order book is full for the year's balance as per current customer orders and projections. Raw Material rates are stabilizing, given the volatile conditions in energy and logistics costs.

The demand from specific markets carrying excess inventory from Q4 2022 is returning, further helped by a reduction in global shipping rates. However, caution needs to be exercised given the rate-tightening cycle happening in economies worldwide, which could lead to consumers cutting back on spending but should have a minimal impact on the company, given that most of its SKUs are for daily-use staple products.

The company continues to focus on new product development to enhance its product/category portfolio and market diversification with positive results to enhance its competitiveness and profitability

**Acknowledgement:**  
On Behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour and his Government for their continuous assistance and generous support extended to the industry. We pray to the Almighty Allah to bestow His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour with the best of health and long life to lead the country to the path of prosperity.

**On Behalf of the Board of Directors,**  
**Mohammed Abdullah Mohammed Al-Farsi**  
**Chairman**  
**Dated: -25 July 2023**

Statement of Comprehensive Income for Six months period ended on 30th JUNE 2023 (UNAUDITED):

|                                        | 30th June 2023 | 30th June 2022 |
|----------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                        | RO ' 000s      | RO '000s       |
| Sales                                  | 6,355          | 6,495          |
| Cash Cost of Sales                     | (5,237)        | (4,850)        |
|                                        | 1,118          | 1,645          |
| Cost of Sales - depreciation           | (385)          | (557)          |
| Gross Profit / (Loss)                  | 733            | 1,088          |
| Other income                           | 135            | 42             |
| Expenses                               |                |                |
| Administration and general expenses    | (881)          | (1,122)        |
| Finance charges                        | (180)          | (175)          |
| Depreciation                           | (15)           | (14)           |
| Profit /(Loss) Before Tax              | (208)          | (181)          |
| Deferred / Income tax for current year | (20)           | (93)           |
| Net Profit / (Loss)                    | (228)          | (274)          |

Statement of Financial Position as at 30th June 2023 (UNAUDITED):

|                                              | 30th June 2023 | 30th June 2022 |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                              | RO ' 000s      | RO '000s       |
| ASSETS:                                      |                |                |
| Non-current Assets                           |                |                |
| Property, Plant & Equipment                  | 3,900          | 3,611          |
| Capital work in progress                     | -              | -              |
| Fixed Assets                                 | 3,900          | 3,611          |
| Deferred tax asset                           | 358            | 616            |
| Total Non-current assets                     | 4,258          | 4,227          |
| Current Assets                               |                |                |
| Inventories                                  | 3,847          | 4,528          |
| Trade & other receivables                    | 3,935          | 3,453          |
| Bank balances & cash                         | 45             | 42             |
|                                              | 7,827          | 8,023          |
| Assets held for sale                         | -              | -              |
| Total Current assets                         | 7,827          | 8,023          |
|                                              | 12,085         | 12,250         |
| Total Assets                                 |                |                |
| Current Liabilities                          |                |                |
| Term loan / Bank overdraft - current portion | 3,262          | 3,460          |
| Trade & other payables                       | 4,947          | 4,508          |
| Employees and Directors' Payables            | 629            | 611            |
|                                              | 8,838          | 8,579          |
| Non-current Liabilities                      |                |                |
| Term loan                                    | 2,331          | 1,817          |
|                                              | 2,331          | 1,817          |
| Total Liabilities                            | 11,169         | 10,396         |
| Net Assets                                   | 916            | 1,855          |
| Shareholders' equity                         |                |                |
| Share capital                                | 4,202          | 4,202          |
| Statutory reserve                            | 1,273          | 1,273          |
| Retained earnings                            | (4,559)        | (3,620)        |
| Total shareholders' equity                   | 916            | 1,855          |

**Notes:**

1. All amounts are in RO '000s.

2. Previous year figures are regrouped /rearranged wherever required.

3.The complete Financial statements of the Company would be made available to any shareholder or interested party on request in Arabic or in English within 7 days from the date of request. The request applications can be sent on the above mentioned address.

# Saudi hunts for critical minerals in energy shift

Dubai, UAE - Saudi state mining giant Ma'aden and US-based Ivanhoe Electric have closed a deal to investigate 48,500sqkm of under-explored lands in the Arabian Shield for 'critical minerals' that are key to powering the global energy transition.

Surveys could begin as soon as in September in the new joint venture, which is worth nearly US\$130mn, reports AGBI.

The Saudi region is understood to be rich in critical minerals such as copper, nickel, gold, silver and possibly lithium.

Lithium is of great interest to Saudi Arabia as it is a key component of EV batteries. The kingdom wants to develop a significant industry around electric vehicles and to produce 500,000 electric cars a year by 2030.

Last month, Australian startup European Lithium and

- ▶ Saudi Arabia wants lithium to fuel its electric vehicle ambitions
- ▶ Ma'aden and Ivanhoe Electric to explore for minerals in Arabian Shield
- ▶ Ma'aden and Saudi PIF have a fund of up to \$3bn for overseas mining

Saudi Arabia's Obeikan Investment Group announced a joint venture to build and operate a lithium hydroxide refinery in Saudi Arabia.

A long-term supply agreement has also been signed with BMW.

The plan builds on an agreement signed in 2021 with EV Metals Groups to build a battery chemicals complex in Yanbu Industrial City in Al Madinah.



**Refinery ambitions**

Ionut Lazar, principal consultant at CRU Consulting, said Saudi Arabia could play a big part as a primary processor.

He said the kingdom is considering development of a large-scale copper smelter, plus smelters or refineries for silicon, aluminium and nickel.

"The kingdom continues to offer attractive power tariffs and financial incentives to create industrial clusters," Lazar explained. "These advantages have

attracted market-leading players to the region."

Experts believe that while Saudi Arabia has enough mined copper to justify smelting facilities, the prospects for critical mineral refining projects that would rely on imported material are less certain.

Christopher Ecclestone, strategist and principal at Hallgarten & Company, said Saudi Arabia might have the funds to become a player but not yet the expertise.

"They need to put their money where their mouth is and quickly," he said, referring to a fund set up by Ma'aden and the Public Investment Fund earlier this year to invest in mining assets overseas.

Initially sized at US\$50mn, the fund could grow to over US\$3b, the two parties said in January.

**Fast growing market**

Last week, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said the market for minerals that help power electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar panels and other technologies key to the clean energy transition has doubled in size over the past five years.

It said record deployment of clean energy technologies is propelling huge demand for minerals such as lithium, cobalt and nickel.

From 2017 to 2022, demand for lithium has trebled, while cobalt (70%) and nickel (40%) have also gained. The market for energy transition minerals reached US\$320bn in 2022.

Saudi Arabia sees mining as central to its Vision 2030 strategy to diversify its economy outside of fossil fuels. The kingdom values its mineral wealth at more than US\$1.3tn.

## SME company signs Sharakah for bill discounting services

Muscat - Muscat based Ticket Travel & Tourism company has signed an agreement with Oman's premier SME development company Sharakah to receive bill discounting solutions.

As per the agreement, Sharakah will deliver customised services to meet short term investment requirements and improve cash flow and business liquidity. SME company Ticket Travel & Tourism offers exceptional and distinctive travel experiences to its customers.

Sharakah aims to support Ticket Travel & Tourism by actively contributing to the realisation of the company's future strategies and plans. Additionally, it will leverage partnership programmes designed to provide support specifically for small and medium enterprises, thereby reaping mutual benefits.

Ali bin Ahmed Muqabail, CEO of Sharakah, said, "We recognise the company's potential and are



impressed by the owner's dedication. The company's inherent potential, coupled with the commitment we have witnessed, has raised our expectations for its prospects. We firmly believe our bill discounting solutions will steer the SMEs to grow and evaluate their performance."

Nasser, CEO of Ticket Travel & Tourism, said, "We are thrilled and grateful to receive support from Sharakah, an eminent com-

pany, to facilitate our bill discounting process. Looking ahead our plans involve focusing on the inbound market to attract more tourists to Oman."

Sharakah's bill discounting scheme is a 120-day credit period, offers a facility for SMEs engaged in providing products or services to large public or private sector organisations, allows for investment amounts ranging from RO25,000 to RO200,000.



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**MUSCAT CITY  
DESALINATION  
COMPANY SAOG**

Interim condensed financial statements  
for the six-month period ended  
30<sup>th</sup> June 2023

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

**Dear Shareholders,**

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Muscat City Desalination Company SAOG ("MCDC" or the "Company"), I am pleased to present the Directors' Report together with the unaudited financial statements of the Company for the six-month period ended on 30 June 2023.

**Health, Safety and Environment (HSE)**

The HSE performance of the Company to date has been satisfactory, with no Lost Time Accidents ("LTA"). The operator entity, Muscat City Desalination Operations and Maintenance Company LLC ("MCDOMC") has completed 2679 days without any LTA since the plant's commercial operations commenced on 19 February 2016. Similarly, there were no environmental incidents for the same period.

**Operations**

During the first half of 2023, the Company achieved a lower availability of 94.43%, as compared to 98.39% during the same period in 2022. The water dispatch during the first six months of 2023 was 32,696,414 m<sup>3</sup>, a decrease of 3.97% as compared to 34,050,370 m<sup>3</sup> during the same period in 2022. The total forced outage rate for the six-month period ending on 30 June 2023 is 0.11% (30 June 2022: 0.34%).

**Financial Results**

The Company's revenue for first half of 2023 was RO 9,056 million whilst the direct operating cost was RO 5,876 million. Accordingly, the gross profit for the period was RO 3,180 million, which is 1.2% higher as compared to the corresponding period last year. General and administrative expenses for the first half of 2023 was RO 0.476 million, which is higher by 12.3% as compared to the corresponding period last year. Finance costs for the first six months of 2023 was RO 1.409 million, which is 5.3% higher than the finance costs incurred for the corresponding period last year.

The Company recorded profit before tax (PBT) of RO 1.297 million which is 6.1% lower than the PBT for the same period last year. Overall, the Company achieved profit after tax of RO 1.092 million for the period as compared to profit after tax of RO 1.163 million for the corresponding period in 2022.

As at 30 June 2023, the share price of MCDC was 99 Baizas (30 June 2022: 113 Baizas).

Pursuant to the authority granted by the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting held on 23 March 2023, the Board of Directors, at its meeting held on 18 April 2023, have resolved the distribution of cash dividends of value 3.210 baizas per share out of the retained profits for the period ended 31 December 2022 to the shareholders who are registered in the Company's register as at 15 May 2023. The dividend was paid in May 2023.

**Corporate Governance**

The Board of Directors and Management of the Company believe in the importance of the internal control system. The Company has a comprehensive system of internal controls in place. The Company has periodically carried out comprehensive review of its key internal policies and procedures in order to ensure its compliance.

The Audit Committee has approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2023 which will be implemented throughout the year.

**Information Security**

The Company has developed information technology ("IT") and security policy and procedures pursuant to the Capital Market Authority ("CMA") Circular No. E/1/2022 on Information Security Guidelines for Public Listed Companies. Some enhancements to the Company's IT systems and controls have been implemented, whereas some longer-term enhancement projects are being implemented.

During the second half of the financial year, assessments of the policy, procedures and IT infrastructures will be conducted by consultants who are accredited by the relevant authorities in Oman to ensure that the company's information security measures are robust, compliant with regulations, and effectively protect against potential threats and vulnerabilities.

The Internal Audit Unit will review the implementation of the enhancement projects with supervision by the Audit Committee.

**Future Outlook**

All reasonable and prudent measures have been and will continue to be taken by the Company to ensure high standards of health, safety and environmental compliance, and to sustain and improve reliability and availability going forward.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to extend our utmost appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment that allows the Company to participate effectively in the growth of the Sultanate's economy and to contribute in the building of a strong nation.

**Tamer Cankardes**  
Chairman of the Board

Unaudited interim condensed statement of  
financial position as at 30 June 2023

|                                                                       | Unaudited<br>30 June<br>2023 | Audited<br>31 December<br>2022 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                                                                       | RO'000s                      | RO'000s                        |
| <b>Assets</b>                                                         |                              |                                |
| <b>Non-current assets</b>                                             |                              |                                |
| Property, plant and equipment                                         | 80,726                       | 81,973                         |
| Lease asset (right of use assets)                                     | 232                          | 236                            |
| Non-current portion of fair value of derivative financial instruments | 2,075                        | 2,070                          |
| Deferred tax                                                          | 622                          | 594                            |
| <b>Total non-current assets</b>                                       | <b>83,655</b>                | <b>84,873</b>                  |
| <b>Current assets</b>                                                 |                              |                                |
| Trade and other receivables                                           | 1,941                        | 1,585                          |
| Cash and cash equivalents                                             | 2,541                        | 2,438                          |
| Current portion of fair value of derivative financial instruments     | 171                          | 160                            |
| <b>Total current assets</b>                                           | <b>4,653</b>                 | <b>4,183</b>                   |
| <b>Total assets</b>                                                   | <b>88,308</b>                | <b>89,056</b>                  |
| <b>Equity and Liabilities</b>                                         |                              |                                |
| <b>Equity</b>                                                         |                              |                                |
| Share capital                                                         | 15,555                       | 15,555                         |
| Legal reserve                                                         | 2,549                        | 2,440                          |
| Retained earnings                                                     | 2,340                        | 1,856                          |
|                                                                       | 20,444                       | 19,851                         |
| Hedging Reserve                                                       | 1,909                        | 1,895                          |
| <b>Net Equity</b>                                                     | <b>22,353</b>                | <b>21,746</b>                  |
| <b>Non-current liabilities</b>                                        |                              |                                |
| Non-current portion of term loans                                     | 44,525                       | 46,346                         |
| Provision for decommissioning obligation                              | 263                          | 254                            |
| Deferred tax                                                          | 6,147                        | 5,912                          |
| Lease liability - non-current portion                                 | 247                          | 249                            |
| Shareholders' bridge loans                                            | 6,984                        | 6,988                          |
| Shareholders' stand-by equity loans                                   | 754                          | 754                            |
| End-of-service benefits                                               | 26                           | 21                             |
| <b>Total non-current liabilities</b>                                  | <b>58,946</b>                | <b>60,524</b>                  |
| <b>Current liabilities</b>                                            |                              |                                |
| Current portion of term loans                                         | 3,652                        | 3,555                          |
| Lease liability - current portion                                     | 3                            | 3                              |
| Shareholders' bridge loans                                            | 730                          | 730                            |
| Trade and other payables                                              | 2,624                        | 2,498                          |
| <b>Total current liabilities</b>                                      | <b>7,009</b>                 | <b>6,786</b>                   |
| <b>Total liabilities</b>                                              | <b>65,955</b>                | <b>67,310</b>                  |
| <b>Total equity and liabilities</b>                                   | <b>88,308</b>                | <b>89,056</b>                  |
| <b>Net assets per share (RO)</b>                                      | <b>0.144</b>                 | <b>0.140</b>                   |

Unaudited condensed statement of profit or loss and other  
comprehensive income for the six-month period  
ended 30 June 2023

|                                                                                                                           | Unaudited<br>2023 | Unaudited<br>2022 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                                                                                                                           | RO'000s           | RO'000s           |
| Operating revenue                                                                                                         | 9,056             | 9,155             |
| Operating cost                                                                                                            | (5,876)           | (6,014)           |
| <b>Gross profit</b>                                                                                                       | <b>3,180</b>      | <b>3,141</b>      |
| Other income                                                                                                              | 2                 | 2                 |
| Administrative and general expenses                                                                                       | (476)             | (424)             |
| Finance costs (net)                                                                                                       | (1,409)           | (1,338)           |
| <b>Profit for the period before tax</b>                                                                                   | <b>1,297</b>      | <b>1,381</b>      |
| Income tax                                                                                                                | (205)             | (218)             |
| <b>Profit for the period</b>                                                                                              | <b>1,092</b>      | <b>1,163</b>      |
| <b>Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period</b> - Items that may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss |                   |                   |
| Changes in fair values of derivative financial instruments                                                                | 17                | 4,483             |
| Deferred tax on changes in fair values of derivative financial instruments                                                | (3)               | (672)             |
| <b>Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period net of income tax</b>                                               | <b>14</b>         | <b>3,811</b>      |
| <b>Total comprehensive income / (loss) for the period</b>                                                                 | <b>1,106</b>      | <b>4,974</b>      |
| <b>Earnings per share - basic and diluted</b>                                                                             | <b>0.007</b>      | <b>0.007</b>      |

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English to the company's address at PO Box: 1935, PC: 114, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman or go to our website [www.mcdcoman.com](http://www.mcdcoman.com)

# Bank Muscat's training programmes for students this year cross 250 mark

To enhance its leading role in the development of human resources and contribute to provide training opportunities for students of various educational institutions, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has provided more than 250 training opportunities for students from various universities and colleges since the beginning of this year 2023.

During the internship period, the students worked closely with the bank employees in different departments and branches of the bank. The training was designed in sync with the academic programmes pursued by students aiming to provide relevant work experience that will help them in their respective careers in the future.

This annual initiative reaffirms Bank Muscat's keenness to contribute and cooperate with various educational institutions to provide the best opportunities and training programmes for students in order to refine their practical skills in various fields and job specialties, especially those related to the banking and finance sector.

The bank's training department distributes students to the bank's various departments and branches spread across the sultanate and a report is made on the student's daily performance



during the training period.

The students were accordingly able to familiarise themselves with various topics including banking, finance, audit, IT and branch operations as well as gain broad experience and a deeper understanding of Bank Muscat's operations and the financial services sector in the sultanate.

Said bin Salim al Aufi, General Manager, Human Resources & Administration, Bank Muscat, said, "Bank Muscat is keen to provide such training opportunities to students from various educational institutions annually through coordination with universities and colleges in various disciplines.

"This comes out of the bank's belief in the importance of collaborating with government and private institutions in order to

provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills for the job market, and enrich them with the banking knowledge they need in order to nurture their careers in the banking sector. The bank will continue to invest time and material to foster young talents, sharpening skills and expertise of the Omani youth."

Bank Muscat ensures to participate annually in the job fair and training organised by different educational organisations including the Career Guidance Center at Sultan Qaboos University and College of Banking and Financial Studies among others, as this is an opportunity to meet with students and introduce them to the quality of existing jobs and the bank's policy in the field of employment and training.

The bank is proud to be one of the leading financial institutions

in the sultanate that attaches great importance to this field and is keen to implement specialised policies and plans for the development of Omani human resources.

The bank is also keen to partner with various educational institutions from universities and colleges to achieve the sustainable human development goals, noting that Bank Muscat succeeded during the past year in providing 370 training opportunities for students representing various educational institutions in the sultanate.

The bank is proud of all its successes and achievements in the field of human resources.

The current Omanisation ratio is 94% which is above the mandated rate. The bank employs 3920 staff out of which almost half are female employees.

# Vodafone campaign: Come for khareef and stay for Dhofar

Vodafone Oman is extending the socio-economic impact of khareef, beyond the season, reaffirming its commitment to the nation and its most southerly governorate with its 'Come for Khareef, Stay for Dhofar' campaign.

The digital operator will capitalise on its strong presence in Dhofar and its main sponsorship of this year's Khareef Festival to support, promote and enable the growth of local businesses.

Sayyid Fahad Abdul Aziz Saud al Busaidi, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Vodafone Oman, said, "People come to Dhofar every summer to marvel at the region's lush green wonders during khareef, and while Vodafone will enjoy prominence during this time, it is also determined to stand side by side with Dhofaris and demonstrate that we are not only here for the season.

"We are a partner and our aim is to continue contributing to the growth and sustainability of the local economy and community, fostering long-lasting positive impact in Dhofar beyond the Khareef season."

He went on to explain that Vodafone has consolidated an extensive list of local SMEs, representing the richness of Dhofar, whom will reap the benefits of Vodafone's carefully designed campaign which includes nationwide marketing, social media collaborations and on-ground activations at touristic sites.

Vodafone will also consolidate and distribute a dedicated SME guide encouraging visitors to explore and engage with businesses including Mozart,



Dinero Café, Try Said App, Al Bahu Design, NF productions, and Meski, showcasing the vibrant and diverse offerings that Dhofar has to offer, not only until the end of August but beyond.

As well as supporting SMEs by providing ongoing opportunities for collaboration and growth, Vodafone's campaign also includes numerous other initiatives that will be running until the end of August. These include multiple youth empowerment activations through its partnership with the Youth Center; as well as the Dhofar Marathon scheduled to take place on August 5, promoting health, fitness and community participation.

Vodafone is also investing in entertainment across various locations in Dhofar for khareef. Through collaborations with several Theatre Groups, it will be offering engaging experiences and memorable moments for resi-

dents and visitors while enriching the cultural landscape of the season.

Throughout the khareef season and powered by its 5G Next network, Vodafone customers and international visitors will enjoy an all-together elevated mobile experience.

Its market-leading BLACK postpaid packages, Bonus Data for RED packages, Khareef Plan and Visitor packs, all guarantee continuous value-add and seamless connectivity wherever they are in Dhofar.

Following the successful debut of Vodafone Oman's 'Do More in Dhofar' campaign last year, the 'Come for Khareef, Stay for Dhofar' campaign continues the company's commitment to working with communities in Oman to address their unique needs and aspirations, all the while fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

# Purshottam Kanji introduces RO1 commission for remittance

Purshottam Kanji Exchange has unveiled an exclusive bank transfer remittance service that redefines affordability.

With an incredibly low commission fee of RO1 for transfers up to RO250, individuals can now send money to India, Bangladesh, or the Philippines without the burden of substantial fees. The commission charges for remittances vary based on the transfer amount. For India and the Philippines, commissions are RO1 for transfers up to RO250 and RO1.5 for amounts above RO250.

In the case of Bangladesh, commissions are RO1 for transfers up to RO250 and RO2 for amounts above RO250.

These gainful rates are exclusively applicable to bank remittances, further enhancing the value and accessibility of this innovative service.

This groundbreaking offering presents a remarkably cost-effective solution, ensuring convenient and affordable remittance options for all.

Supin James, General Manager, Purshottam Kanji Exchange said, "The competitive exchange rates offered by Purshottam Kanji Exchange will maximise the value of each remittance, providing significant financial advantages to the senders and recipients alike. With a reputation for providing seamless and efficient cross-border money transfer solutions, we have consistently stayed ahead of the curve, and this new initiative reinforces their commitment to customer satisfaction."

Purshottam Kanji Exchange's bank transfer remittance offer marks a groundbreaking milestone in the realm of international money transfer.

With a focus on speed, affordability, and security, this transformative solution is set to empower individuals from India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, providing them with a seamless means to support their loved ones and contribute to the economic growth of their respective countries.

With a wide-reaching network of 28 branches strategically positioned and an array of innovative digital solutions, Purshottam Kanji Exchange ensures that customers have seamless access to their comprehensive services.

Whether it's sending money to family and friends, exchanging currency, or even purchasing gold, customers can confidently rely on Purshottam Kanji Exchange to cater to their diverse financial requirements, the exchange group stated.

# ABF names OAB retail bank of the year

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has been recognised as Domestic Retail Bank of the Year - Oman and the SME Payment Solutions of the Year - Oman, earning two wins at the prestigious Asian Banking & Finance (ABF) Retail Banking Awards 2023.

A distinguished panel of judges from the banking and financial industry bestowed the bank with top honors in these two categories.

The SME Payment Solutions of the Year - Oman award reflected the successful introduction of OAB's state-of-the-art Mobile Pay Soft POS solution for SME customers, which represented the first of its kind in Oman and gained an extremely high initial customer penetration rate.

Among its innovative elements, the solution provides an enhanced option allowing customers to enter their PIN through their mobile device, increasing



customer convenience and confidence on security, as well as allowing the merchant to carry out real-time stock management, tax calculations and liquidity management.

The bank acquired a total of 116 new merchants in the first three months from launch.

Continuing to uphold its customer-first vision, OAB has launched numerous other new

products and services in recent months, including an instant debit card issuance machine; increased limits to its Digital Instant Loan; and several seasonal offers for customers.

The process of optimising its branches has also continued, including the installation of state-of-the-art digital banking technology to enhance the customer experience and allow customers to bank more efficiently.

OAB's brace of awards were the latest recognition for the bank, which also recently won Best Online Platform in Oman at the 2022 MEA Business Awards and received the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) certification, which confirmed OAB's security measures meet the highest standards of protecting customers' payment card data, as set by the PCI Security Standards Council and most recently being accredited by the ACCA.

# Al Mouj Marina survey reveals snorkelling trips proving huge draw for Europeans

Al Mouj Marina, the 5 Gold Anchor harbour at the heart of premier leisure destination Al Mouj Muscat, has welcomed 20,000 people so far this year and new research provides insight into the profile of tourists visiting from overseas and the activities that are most in demand.

Europeans aged between 25 and 55 make up the majority of visitors according to Mola Mola, Daymaniat Shells and Oman Sea Tours with snorkelling and a trip to the Daymaniat Islands by far the most popular of the many sea going adventures offered.

The three operators are among 13 located at the world-class marina and the findings in the survey give them a clearer understanding of the appeal of different trips, helping them to

tailor their services to keep pace with demand and ensure visitors always enjoy truly memorable experiences.

Both Daymaniat Shells and Mola Mola have won a TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Award, international recognition which puts them in the top 10% of tourist attractions worldwide and, along with Oman Sea Tours, they all reported that their most frequently booked activity is snorkelling with a trip to the Daymaniat Islands the most popular destination.

Snorkellers are drawn to the incredibly clear and warm sea which has an abundance of underwater marine life hugely enhanced by new species found around the artificial reef, a joint venture between Sultanate's



Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Al Mouj Muscat in place since 2014.

The most popular destination is to the Daymaniat Islands, a location of such outstanding natu-

ral beauty that it is becoming known as the Maldives of the Middle East. An archipelago of nine islands with exceptional beaches located around 18km off the coast of Barka is a protected

Nature Reserve which can be reached by boat in under an hour from Al Mouj Marina, the closest and best placed departure point in Oman.

Nasser bin Masoud al

Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, comments: "We are delighted that our superb marina is attracting visitors from across the region and the world. It has set a new standard in excellence, with people able to enjoy its waterside restaurants and cafes as well as exceptional maritime experiences.

"Welcoming more than 20,000 visitors to date in 2023, Al Mouj Marina is an asset which continues to have a positive impact for Oman, helping to drive tourism and economic diversification, with a variety of fantastic marine tour operators now based at, and enjoying support from our marina."

In addition to snorkelling and boat excursions to the Daymaniat, Al Mouj Marina's sea tour

operators offer a variety of fun activities and ocean-going adventures from wake boarding, jet-skiing and paddle-boarding to fishing charters, diving courses and sailing lessons.

Opened in 2011, Al Mouj Marina was the first in the region to be awarded International Clean Marina and 5 Gold Anchor accreditation, and it will ultimately provide 400 berths to make it one of the largest marinas in the Middle East.

Located in Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's first Integrated Tourism Complex, the thriving lifestyle community is now home to 8,000 people from 85 countries, and attracts over 4.9mn annual visitors to its boulevard style, world-class retail, dining and leisure experiences.

# Iran enforcing ‘intensified’ hijab crackdown: Amnesty

Paris, France - Iranian authorities have in the last months launched an intensified crackdown against women deemed to have violated the Islamic republic’s strict dress rules, Amnesty International said on Wednesday.

Iran was convulsed for months by unprecedented protests sparked by the September 2022 custody death of Mahsa Amini, 22, who had been arrested by the morality police for purportedly breaking the rules. Some politicians inside Iran had argued in the wake of the protests that the rules should be loosened and there were even indications - never confirmed - that the morality police could be abolished. But with the intensity of protests diminishing over the last months, Amnesty said Iranian authorities had launched a new crackdown on women’s dress since April.

“The Iranian authorities are doubling down their oppressive methods of policing and punishing women and girls to quell widespread defiance of degrading and discriminatory compulsory veiling laws,” Amnesty said. It has been obligatory for women to cover their heads and necks since shortly after the Islamic revolution of 1979 that ousted the secular shah.

### Police patrols

Viral images posted online during the protest movement showed women removing their headscarves as well as carrying



Iranian women shop in Tehran on July 18, as the police relaunched patrols to catch the increasing number of women leaving their hair uncovered in public in defiance of a strict dress code (AFP)

*The enforcement was intensified by mass surveillance technologies capable of identifying unveiled women in cars and pedestrian spaces*

AGNES CALLAMARD

out daily tasks such as shopping bareheaded. Some images showing women without headscarves at cafe tables in relatively secular northern Tehran had suggested a more permissive attitude in some areas.

But Amnesty said there is in fact ‘an intensified nationwide crackdown’, and noted that police this month announced the return of car and foot patrols enforcing compulsory veiling

across the country.

According to Amnesty, more than a million women have received SMS warnings threatening that their vehicles will be confiscated if they are found travelling in a car while unveiled.

“Morality policing in Iran is back,” said Agnes Callamard, Amnesty International secretary general. She added the stepped-up enforcement was ‘intensified by mass surveillance technolo-

gies capable of identifying unveiled women in their cars and pedestrian spaces’.

Hundreds of businesses such as hotels, restaurants, pharmacies and shopping centres have been forcibly closed for refusing to enforce compulsory veiling laws while women have been denied access to education, banking services and public transport, Amnesty said.

AFP



People walk along a street as smoke billows from burning tires during an Israeli army raid west of Nablus in West Bank, on Wednesday (AFP)

## Palestinian killed in Israel West Bank raid, says ministry

Nablus, Palestinian Territories - Israeli troops killed a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, the Palestinian health ministry said, as the army confirmed it was conducting “counter-fighting activity” in a Nablus refugee camp.

“A young man died of his wounds as the occupation forces stormed the city of Nablus at noon (0900 GMT),” the ministry said. “The martyr, Mohammed Abd al-Hakim Nada, was shot in the chest.”

The Israeli army confirmed troops were conducting ‘counter-fighting activity in Al-Ain camp’ in Nablus but did not give further details.

A Palestinian fighter group, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, said its fighters had ‘ambushed a unit of special forces in the alleys of Al-Ain camp ... and managed to inflict casualties’ among the Israeli troops.

In a statement on its Telegram channel, the group, which is linked to Palestinian

president Mahmud Abbas’s Fatah movement, did not specify whether the dead man was one of its fighters. The Palestinian fighter group Hamas, which controls the coastal enclave of Gaza, condemned what it said was a ‘Zionist crime in Nablus’.

The group called on all ‘Palestinian factions to confront the terrorist settlers’ government’.

Wednesday’s death came a day after Israeli troops killed three Palestinians in an exchange of fire in Nablus, the Palestinian health ministry said.

Hamas said the three were members of its armed wing.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967. Since early last year, the territory has seen a string of attacks by Palestinians on Israeli targets, as well as violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian communities. Earlier this month, Israeli forces conducted a two-day raid on Jenin refugee camp that killed 12 Palestinians.

AFP

### TURNED TO ASHES



A woman walks with a jerry can on her back through the remains of charred trees in the aftermath of a forest fire near the town of Melloula in northwestern Tunisia close to the border with Algeria on Wednesday. At least 300 people were evacuated from Melloula, as fires raged on Monday (AFP)

## Kenyans hope for end to demonstrations as the president offers to meet opposition

Nairobi, Kenya - Weary Kenyans on Wednesday voiced cautious optimism for an end to political unrest after President William Ruto said he was ready to meet opposition leader Raila Odinga ‘anytime’ following months of anti-government protests.

Since veteran politician Odinga urged Kenyans to take to the streets in March, his Azimio alliance has held nine days of protests against the government, with the demonstrations sometimes spiralling into looting and deadly clashes with police.

Late on Tuesday, Ruto expressed his willingness to meet Odinga in a social media post addressing the opposition leader.

“As you have always known, am available to meet one on one with you anytime at your convenience,” Ruto posted on Twitter,



Kenyan opposition leader Raila Odinga addresses supporters outside the Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi, on Wednesday (AFP)

which is being rebranded as ‘X’. There was no immediate response to the offer from Odinga, who has urged Kenyans to ‘come out’ for parades and vigils on Wednesday for anti-government protesters killed in the

demonstrations.

Odinga called off demonstrations in April and May after Ruto agreed to dialogue, but the talks broke down, with several demonstrations held this month.

Several Kenyans told AFP they

were fed up with the disruptions.

“I have not been coming to work every time there are protests because I fear being attacked on the road and being stolen from,” receptionist Cate Wafula, 29, told AFP, urging the two sides to make ‘peace’.

Motorcycle taxi driver Josphat Ng’atho, 36, echoed her views, saying: “Let them sit and talk.”

“If they don’t, the stalemate will never end and our suffering will continue forever.”

The violence has sparked outrage among rights groups, with campaigners condemning the police for firing tear gas and live rounds to disperse stone-throwing protesters. Twenty people have been killed, according to official figures, although Azimio puts the toll at 50.

AFP

## North Korea gives Russian defence ministry delegation ‘warm welcome’

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea rolled out the red carpet for the Russian defence minister, state media said on Wednesday, with delegations from Moscow and Beijing set to attend Korean War anniversary events, the country’s first-known foreign visitors since its pandemic border closure.

Pyongyang is on Thursday marking the 70th anniversary of the signing of the July 27, 1953 Korean War armistice, which ended open hostilities and is celebrated as Victory Day in the North. The Russian national anthem blared throughout Pyongyang International Airport, which was ‘wrapped up in a warm welcome atmosphere’ to greet Moscow’s Sergei Shoigu and his delegation on Tuesday evening, the state-run Korean Central News Agency said.

Shoigu was greeted by North

Korean Defence Minister Kang Sun Nam, and photos carried by the official *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper showed hundreds of uniformed soldiers of the Korean People’s Army lining the airport holding signs welcoming the Russians. Shoigu laid flowers in front of giant bronze statues of former leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, video by the Russian defence ministry showed.

“For Russia, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is an important partner, with which we share a common border and a rich history of cooperation,” Shoigu said according to a ministry statement, which added that the meeting would ‘contribute to strengthening cooperation between our ministries of defence’.

Russia, a historic ally of North Korea, is one of a handful of na-



Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu visiting the statues of the late North Korean leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il at Mansu Hill in Pyongyang on Wednesday (AFP)

tions with which Pyongyang maintains friendly relations.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been steadfast in his sup-

port for Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine, including, Washington says, supplying rockets and missiles. The fact that Russia’s de-

fence minister flew to Pyongyang while his country is at war was ‘very significant’, said Park Won-gon, director of Ewha Univer-

sity’s Institute of Unification Studies. “Even though the emergency quarantine system remains in place, Kim Jong Un may have felt the need to show something to his people at the Victory Day celebrations,” he told AFP.

For the Chinese and Russians, their presence could send a ‘strong unified message’ to the United States, Park added. But Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University, said the visit was unlikely to result in any arms deals or diplomatic advances, calling it ‘a symbolic show of solidarity on a war anniversary’.

### Change in border policy?

Satellite imagery indicates North Korea has been preparing for the kind of large-scale military parade with which it typically fetes such anniversaries.

South Korea’s Yonhap news agency reported that there were ‘clear signs’ of preparations for a midnight parade at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang in recent days, citing multiple unnamed government sources.

The inclusion of foreign guests at this year’s celebrations is a post-pandemic first and hints at new flexibility towards enforcing border controls.

China also said it would send a delegation led by Politburo member Li Hongzhong that was due to arrive in Pyongyang on Wednesday, suggesting they would not be required to undergo an extensive quarantine ahead of the Thursday anniversary event. North Korea has been under a rigid self-imposed blockade since early 2020 to protect itself from COVID-19.

AFP

# Rescuers ‘optimistic’ on survival of stranded whales in Australia

**Sydney, Australia** - More than 50 pilot whales died after stranding themselves on a beach in Western Australia, but authorities said on Wednesday they were ‘optimistic’ that the other 45 whales in the pod could survive.

The pod of almost 100 long-finned pilot whales was spotted in shallow water off Cheynes Beach, about 400km southeast of Perth on Tuesday.

Fifty-one of them died overnight, despite the efforts of volunteers and staff from the state’s Parks and Wildlife Service. Late on Wednesday after-

noon, incident controller Peter Hartley said the surviving whales were being monitored and, once they have been assessed as being strong enough, they would be released.

Volunteers in kayaks will help to herd them past the rocky part of the coast and out into deeper water, he added. “We’re optimistic - we’ve got to be optimistic in this game,” he said.

“It’s highly stressful for all the people here - volunteers and staff - and you’ve got to have something to hold onto.”

A spokesperson said the Parks and Wildlife Service had



Volunteers helping pilot whales, with more than 50 whales dying after stranding on Cheynes Beach in Western Australia, on Wednesday (AFP)

been ‘overwhelmed with hundreds of offers of help’ but that it had enough volunteers and the public should ‘stay away’ from the beach ‘for safety reasons’.

“The priority focus of the Incident Management Team is to ensure the safety of staff and volunteers and the welfare of the whales,” they said.

“The response zone has a range of hazards, including large, distressed and potentially sick whales, sharks, waves, heavy machinery and vessels.”

Mass strandings of pilot whales are not uncommon in Australia and New Zealand.

Last October, around 500 pilot whales died when they beached on the remote Chatham Islands in New Zealand. Scientists do not fully understand why mass strandings occur, but pilot whales - which can grow to more than six metres (20 feet) long - are highly sociable, so they may follow pod-mates who stray into danger.

Bec Wellard, a marine mammal scientist at Project Orca, said the reasons for whale strandings were still not known.

“We still don’t know why - if we did, we could perhaps do

more to prevent it,” she told AFP. “But with pilot whales, they frequently strand en masse - an individual might be ill or in trouble and the rest of the pod follows them - that can lead them to strand.”

She said that, because of the pilot whales’ ‘strong family bonds’, it was important to try to re-float them together.

But she added that, if the surviving whales’ health is compromised, an assessment needs to be made as to whether efforts to refloat them ‘could just be prolonging their suffering’.

AFP

# Hardline Cambodian PM Hun Sen to resign after 4 decades

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia** - Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, one of the world’s longest-serving leaders, said on Wednesday he will resign and hand power to his eldest son after almost four decades of hardline rule.

The former Khmer Rouge cadre has run the kingdom since 1985, eliminating all opposition to his power, with opposition parties banned, challengers forced to flee and freedom of expression stifled.

His Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) won a landslide victory in an election on Sunday with no meaningful opposition, taking 82 per cent of the vote, paving the way for a dynastic succession to his eldest son that some critics have compared to North Korea.

“I would like to ask for understanding from the people as I announce that I will not continue as prime minister,” the 70-year-old said in a special broadcast on state television.

Election authorities disqualified the only serious challenger, the Candlelight Party, on a technicality in advance of the election, and the CPP is expected to win all but five lower house seats.

The government hailed the 84.6 per cent voter turnout as evidence of the country’s ‘democratic maturity’ but Western powers including the United States and European Union condemned the poll as neither free nor fair.

Hun Sen said Hun Manet, a 45-year-old four-star general, would take over as prime minister



People watch as Cambodia’s Prime Minister Hun Sen speaks during a special statement on television at a restaurant in Phnom Penh on Wednesday (AFP)

*I would like to ask for understanding from the people as I announce that I will not continue as prime minister*

## HUN SEN

ter at the head of a new government on the evening of August 22. “I ask people to support Hun Manet who will be the new prime minister,” he said.

## Chinese influence

Hun Sen has trailed the handover

to his son for a year and a half, and the 45-year-old played a leading role in campaigning for Sunday’s vote.

But the outgoing leader has made it clear that he still intends to wield influence, even after he steps down, scotching the notion the country could change direction. In his announcement on Wednesday, he said he would become president of the senate and act as head of state when the king is overseas.

Under Hun Sen, Cambodia has tacked close to Beijing, benefiting from huge Chinese investment and infrastructure projects, including the redevelopment of a naval base that has alarmed

Washington.

China welcomed Sunday’s election, with President Xi Jinping sending Hun Sen a personal message of congratulations.

But the flood of Chinese money has brought problems, including a rash of casinos and on-line scam operations staffed by foreign workers, many trafficked and toiling in appalling conditions. Critics say his rule has also been marked by environmental destruction and entrenched graft.

Cambodia ranks 150th out of 180 in Transparency International’s corruption perception index. In Asia, only Myanmar and North Korea rank lower.

Rights groups accuse Hun Sen of using the legal system to crush any opposition to his rule - including critical activists and troublesome union leaders as well as politicians.

Scores of opposition politicians have been convicted and jailed during his time in power and the law was changed ahead of Sunday’s election to make it illegal to call for voters to spoil ballots.

Five days before polling day, authorities banned exiled opposition figurehead Sam Rainsy from running for office for 25 years for urging people to void their ballot papers.

AFP



Australia’s PM Anthony Albanese (right) speaks beside his New Zealand counterpart Chris Hipkins in Wellington on Wednesday (AFP)

# New Zealand open to conversations about possible role in AUKUS pact: PM

**Wellington, New Zealand** - New Zealand is ‘open to conversations’ about a possible role in the AUKUS defence pact, its prime minister said on Wednesday, opening the door to cooperation that could rile trade partner China.

Speaking to reporters in Wellington after meeting his Australian counterpart, Chris Hipkins said New Zealand could participate in the Australia-UK-US pact as long as it did not relate to the development of nuclear submarines.

“I think there’s no question that we have a different position around nuclear, in terms of nuclear propulsion (which is) also covered by New Zealand’s nuclear-free arrangements,” Hipkins said.

New Zealand has been nuclear-free since the mid-1980s.

But he indicated that cooperation with AUKUS could take place on defence technologies such as cyber, artificial intelligence and hypersonic weapons -

the agreement’s so-called ‘pillar two’. New Zealand’s participation had been ‘an ongoing topic of conversation between our two countries over the last couple of years, and particularly in the last six months’, Hipkins said.

“But in terms of pillar two... we’re open to conversations with the AUKUS partners around what New Zealand’s involvement might look like.”

Hipkins said no proposals had been tabled, as it was ‘early days yet’, but ‘we ultimately are open to continuing that conversation’.

New Zealand and Australia are the main allies of the United States in the South Pacific.

But New Zealand has recently been accused of putting its trading relationship with China ahead of its friendships with fellow FiveEyes spy group members the United States, Britain Canada and Australia. Beijing has vehemently opposed AUKUS, describing the pact as destabilising for the region.

AFP

# Japan witnesses record drop in population in 2022

**Tokyo, Japan** - Japan’s population fell by a record in 2022, government data showed on Wednesday, as the country struggles to reverse its perennial low birthrates.

While many developed countries face low birthrates, the problem is particularly acute in Japan where the population has now fallen for 14 straight years.

The country has the world’s second oldest population, after tiny Monaco, and in January, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida warned Japan was ‘on the verge of whether we can continue to function as a society’.

Last year, the number of Japanese fell by 800,523, or 0.65 per cent, to 122,423,038 from a year earlier, a survey by the internal affairs ministry shows.

For the first time, the population fell in all 47 prefectures.

The overall drop was the

steepest decline recorded since 1968, when the government survey began, the ministry said.

In contrast, Japan’s foreign population increased by a record 289,498, or 10.7 per cent, to 2,993,839 - the highest since 2013, when comparative figures were available.

Japan has relatively strict immigration rules but the government has been gradually loosening them to address labour shortage issues.

The sharp increase also coincided with the government’s relaxation of its COVID-19 pandemic border controls.

“Decline in the number of children and population is an important issue that involves Japan’s social, economic, and social welfare issues,” top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters on Wednesday.

AFP

# Ecuador forces wrest back control of prison

**Guayaquil, Ecuador** - Some 2,700 soldiers on Tuesday stormed a prison in Ecuador, retaking control of the facility as the death toll from a riot that started over the weekend rose to 31 inmates, authorities said.

The latest battle between rival gangs at the overcrowded, violence-hobbled Guayas 1 prison in the port city of Guayaquil has left 31 people dead and 14 wounded, the public prosecutor’s office said, updating an earlier death toll from 18.

Riots regularly pit prison gangs with links to drug traffickers against one another in Ecuador, a country that has recently emerged as a key player in the South American cocaine trade.

A string of bloody clashes has claimed at least 420 lives in Ecuadoran prisons since 2021 - many of the victims beheaded or burnt alive, others shot as widespread corruption among guards allows inmates to obtain guns and explosives.

Among those wounded in the



Military forces walk outside the Guayas 1 prison in the port city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, on Tuesday (AFP)

latest round of violence was a police officer, said the prosecutor’s office.

The armed forces, for its part, said soldiers and police entered Guayas 1 on Tuesday to put down the riot that started on Saturday and had left an initial toll of six dead inmates.

At least one of the dead had been beheaded, according to a government decree issued on

Tuesday announcing a 60-day state of emergency in all Ecuador’s prisons.

The government, via its communications secretariat Segcom, said ‘total control’ had been regained at Guayas 1, which houses over 5,600 inmates.

Officers seized nine rifles, a grenade launcher, four pistols, two revolvers and 1,000 rounds of ammunition, according to of-

ficials. The public prosecutor’s office on Tuesday announced the opening of a murder investigation over the deaths as well as a terrorism probe, due to the ‘ex-

*The latest battle between rival gangs at the overcrowded Guayas 1 prison in the port city of Guayaquil has left 31 people dead*

plosions and the quantity of weapons and ammunition found inside the prison’.

**‘We want peace’**

Dozens of people gathered outside Guayas 1 on Tuesday, frantic for news about their loved ones inside.

Some carried white balloons and placards proclaiming: “We want peace.”

“The prisoners don’t interest them (the authorities),” said a woman desperate for news on her husband, and who did not want to be named as she feared for her safety.

“It’s as if they (the inmates) were rats. They are human beings!” she told AFP.

Family members said they feared the prisoners would be moved to other facilities - something which in the past has resulted in deadly clashes between newcomers and the old guard, who are often aligned with rival groups.

President Guillermo Lasso in a message on social media insisted the government ‘will never yield’ to criminal violence. He posted photos of heavily-armed security forces standing guard over dozens of prisoners with naked torsos and hands tied.

The Prison Observatory, a rights group, claimed on social media that inmates at Guayas 1 have been ‘without food and water for more than three days’.

AFP

# At least 2 people dead as typhoon Doksuri hits northern Philippines

Manila, Philippines - A powerful storm pounded the northern Philippines on Wednesday, killing at least two people, toppling trees and knocking out power as thousands sheltered with neighbours or in emergency evacuation centres.

Typhoon Doksuri was 'slowly moving away from Dalupiri Island', off the northern tip of the main island of Luzon, and into open waters, the state weather agency said in its 0900 GMT update.

The agency earlier warned of 'violent, life-threatening conditions' as severe maximum sustained winds of 175km an hour (110 mph) and heavy rain pounded the lightly populated region.

A woman selling bread rolls died when she was hit by a falling coconut tree in the northern province of Isabela on Wednesday, provincial disaster official Constante Foronda told AFP.

A 16-year-old boy was crushed to death on Wednesday when a landslide struck a house in the northern mountain city of



Vehicles are seen submerged as water rises along Chico River in Bontoc, Mountain Province, as Super Typhoon Doksuri passes close to the northern tip of Luzon Island on Wednesday (AFP)

Baguio, city disaster official Julius Santos told AFP.

Rey Aguinaldo, a retired government official in the coastal Ilocos Norte province, said: "The wind and rain were so strong overnight I could not sleep well."

"When I got up today, I saw fallen trees and broken branches

outside. We have no electricity," he told AFP.

Doksuri had been a super typhoon as it swept across the Pacific Ocean on Tuesday but weakened as it neared the Philippines.

The storm is expected to weaken as it moves across the

South China Sea, grazing Taiwan before making landfall in south-east China on Friday.

High waves lashed south-eastern Taiwan coast on Wednesday, with the Central Weather Bureau issuing warnings and heavy rain advisories.

China also issued its highest

alert for Doksuri, stopping trains and calling fishing boats to shore as the storm approaches.

## Thousands flee homes

In the Philippines, around 12,000 people were evacuated from their homes in Cagayan

province, including 431 in the Babuyan islands, following warnings of three-metre storm surges, Cagayan disaster official Ruelie Rapsing told AFP.

Dalupiri is one of the five islands that make up the tiny Babuyan archipelago.

Widespread flooding and power cuts were reported in the north of Luzon, while landslides blocked key arteries in its mountainous interior.

About 1,500 people were also evacuated from coastal communities in neighbouring Isabela, Foronda said.

"We won't allow them to go home until we get the all clear from the experts," he said.

Some evacuees have sheltered with neighbours who had concrete houses, while others were taken to municipal halls.

"The roof of the Sanchez Mira municipal hall was blown off," Rapsing added.

"The windows of an evacuation centre there also broke so we had to move them to multi-purpose halls back in their villages," he said.

AFP

## Senegal bus crash: 23 people killed

Dakar, Senegal - Twenty-three people died on Wednesday when a bus crashed in northern Senegal, President Macky Sall announced on social media.

"I call for even more caution on the road", Sall said in a message posted on Twitter.

Earlier, a national fire brigade official and a first responder told AFP that 22 people had died and 52 others were injured.

The accident happened in the village of Ngeune Sarre in Louga region, they said. They did not specify the cause or time of the accident.

Interior Minister Antoine Felix Abdoulaye Diome was on his way to the accident site, a staffer told AFP.

In January, 19 people were killed and 24 injured in a collision in the same area, near Louga.

The previous week, around 40 people died in a bus collision in the centre of Senegal.

That tragedy, on January 8, prompted a wave of criticism against authorities over the frequency of accidents on Senegal's roads, and the lack of action taken to prevent them.

The government responded by announcing a long list of measures, including a ban on overnight bus journeys. But transport professionals said that many of the measures were unrealistic.

Across many countries in Africa, dilapidated vehicles, reckless driving and corrupt law-enforcement officials all contribute to tragedies on the road.

AFP

# Car transport ship fire could 'burn for days' off Netherlands



A fire is seen aboard the Panamanian-registered car carrier ship *Fremantle Highway*, off the coast of the Dutch island of Ameland on Wednesday (AFP)

Ameland, Netherlands - The blaze raging aboard a ship carrying 3,000 cars off the Netherlands could burn for days, officials said on Wednesday, as fears built that the fire could damage to a fragile nearby island chain.

The cargo aboard the vessel includes electric vehicles and a coastguard official told Dutch media that authorities were looking into whether the fire could started with one of them.

Rescue personnel received a call early on Wednesday reporting a fire on the *Fremantle Highway*, a Panamanian-registered ship with 3,000 vehicles on board, about 14.5 nautical miles off the northern Dutch island of Ameland. All 23 crew members were evacuated from the ship, but one person died and several were injured, the coastguard said.

At least seven jumped overboard and were rescued from the water, while the rest were airlifted by helicopter.

"The fire could still burn for days," a coastguard official who spoke on condition of anonymity told AFP. "The ship is being cooled to keep it stable," said the official. "Only the side of the ship is being sprayed, not the deck."

A coastguard official told the NOS public broadcaster that the fire was possibly sparked by an electric vehicle, one of some 25 on board.

"We are taking into account

all scenarios," the official said.

The *Fremantle Highway* is currently close to Ameland, one of four ecologically sensitive Frisian islands, situated in the Waddensee area just north of the Dutch mainland.

## Environmental risk

Also called the Frisian Islands, the area has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has a rich diversity of more than 10,000 aquatic and terrestrial species. This included more than 140 species of fish of which some 20 spent their entire life in the tidal areas along the islands' famous mud flats.

The area also has a large seal and porpoise population.

Should the *Fremantle Highway* sink, 'it would be a disaster of the highest order', the daily tabloid *De Telegraaf* said.

Salvage vessels were on the scene trying to put out the blaze and prevent the ship from sinking, the coastguard said.

A tug vessel has managed to attach a cable to the stricken ship to prevent it from drifting and blocking an important sailing route into Germany.

The *Fremantle Highway* is an 18,500-tonne car carrier ship and was sailing between Bremerhaven in Germany and Port Said in Egypt when the blaze broke out, according to the marinetraffic.com website.

AFP

## IMPOUNDED & STACKED



A pedestrian walks past confiscated and impounded vehicles stacked at a roadside during rainfall in Mumbai, India, on Wednesday (AFP)

# Danish man back home after visiting every nation in the world

Aarhus, Denmark - A Danish man who claimed to be the first to visit every country in the world in a single trip without flying landed home on Wednesday after 10 years away.

Torbjorn Pedersen stepped off a Maersk container ship in the Danish port city of Aarhus, after visiting his 203rd country and final country - the Maldives - in late May.

"I've been dreaming about coming back home and having it over with and done. So that's today. At the same time, I'm anxious about the future," Pedersen told AFP, describing the return as bittersweet. "A lot of things are up in the air and in the unknown, mixed emotions," he said while listing concerns about restarting his career and trying to adjust to everyday life.

Known as 'Thor', he has travelled by train, bus, boat or even on foot on the voyage he set off on October 10, 2013.

The 44-year-old - who previously had a career within the shipping sector - is the first to make the feat.

Leaving Micronesia in January 2020, he continued to Hong Kong, where he found himself stuck for two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once the borders were open again, he set off for the island country of Palau, then continuing



*I've been dreaming about coming back home and having it over with and done. So that's today*

TORBJORN PEDERSEN

the countries of Oceania and the Pacific islands.

## Took longer than expected

"Three have been to every country twice. Two have been to every country without returning home in between. And now, one has done it completely without flying. What can I say? Good luck to the second," he wrote on his blog.

Keen to meet new people, the former UN peacekeeper never hired a car, preferring to instead to travel on public transport.

Despite the geographical distance, Thor and his partner have

managed to keep their relationship alive.

During the decade of travel, she travelled to visit him 27 times. On the 10th occasion, he got down on one knee and asked for her hand in marriage - but unfortunately the pandemic forced them to get married online.

His wife Le Gjerum said she found his stubbornness in completing the task admirable but added she was looking forward to having a 'daily life together'.

The inspiration for the trip came from an article his father emailed him.

He was first apprehensive but didn't want the regret of not doing it, he however conceded that he originally thought the trip would be completed in less than half the time.

"I thought it would take a maximum of four years in total, maybe three and a half if I went a little fast."

Thor, who documented his journey on social media and in a blog, was also an ambassador for the Red Cross.

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, Britain's Graham Hughes was the first person to circumnavigate the globe without a plane, but his journey was interspersed with two returns home, which Thor did not do.

AFP

# India developing its own long-range surface-to-air missile

New Delhi, India - India is indigenously developing a three-layered long-range surface-to-air missile (LRSAM) defence system which would be able to strike down enemy aircraft and missiles at around 400km ranges.

The proposal for developing the system is at an advanced stage in the Defence Ministry and is expected to be taken up for clearance soon, defence sources told ANI. The over US\$2.5bn project will help India to be part of an elite group of militaries with indigenous capabilities to shoot down enemy assets in the air from such ranges, they said.

The missile system will have three layers of surface-to-air missiles, which would allow it to hit targets at different ranges.

The surface-to-air missile system development work has been taking place as India worked with Israel to develop the medium-range surface-to-air missile (MRSAM) system which can hit aerial targets at 70 plus kms.

The Indian system, sources said, would be very capable and would certainly be in the

class of the S-400 air defence system already acquired from Russia and deployed along the China and Pakistan border.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has made significant success in terms of developing air defence weapons for both ground-based and warship-based systems, the sources said.

After the LRSAM project was taken up by the DRDO, the Indian Navy changed the name of its indigenous LRSAM system to MRSAM.

The Army and the IAF already had named a similar indigenous system as MRSAM. The Indian defence forces already have the S-400 air defence systems, which can hit targets at 400km maximum distance and also have the capability to take out targets at shorter ranges too.

The system is used by the Chinese military as well, which has deployed it along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India. The Chinese also have their indigenous air defence systems, but are less capable than the S-400, sources said.

ANI

## Ukrainian fencer hands Russian walkover at world championships

Milan, Italy - Ukrainian Igor Reizlin's hopes of an epee world fencing title were dashed on Wednesday as he withdrew from his bout with Vadim Anokhin in line with his government's policy of barring athletes from facing Russians. A source within the International Fencing Federation (FIE) told AFP the Tokyo Games bronze medalist had presented a medical certificate to justify his withdrawal. A minor consolation for Reizlin is that the certificate safeguards the small number of qualifying points he has obtained for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Anokhin, like his compatriots and Belarusian fencers, are obliged to compete as neutral athletes due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year - their countries are not permitted to fence in the team competitions.

Reizlin's fellow star Olha Khar-



Igor Reizlin

lan faces the same problem on Thursday because the four-time individual sabre world champion has been drawn against Russia's Anna Smirnova. Kharlan, though, will be able to take part from Saturday in the team event -- in which she won Olympic gold in 2008 and silver in 2016.

Ukraine's government has taken a tough stance since Russian and Belarusian athletes were permitted to return to competition earlier this year.

## HOLY MOLLIE!

Fukuoka, Japan - Australia's Mollie O'Callaghan said she was "a wreck" after breaking the women's 200m freestyle world record at swimming's world championships on Wednesday, while French superstar Leon Marchand claimed more gold.

O'Callaghan beat Olympic champion Ariarne Titmus and Canada's Summer McIntosh to touch the wall in 1min, 52.85sec in Fukuoka, breaking a world record that had stood since 2009. The 19-year-old injured her knee five weeks before the championships in Fukuoka and she said she was "really shook" to break the record.

"I couldn't really explain it in the moment," said O'Callaghan, who had fired a warning shot when she beat Titmus over 200m at the Australian trials last month.

"There were tears, there was happiness. It was very mixed

emotions."

There was more glory for Marchand, who added the 200m butterfly title to the 400m individual medley gold he won in record-breaking time on the opening day.

Tunisia's Ahmed Hafnaoui took revenge on Australia's Sam Short to win the men's 800m freestyle, while China's Qin Haiyang picked up his second gold in the men's 50m breaststroke. China then claimed another title when they won the mixed 4x100m medley relay.

O'Callaghan came out on top after another epic women's freestyle battle. Titmus was looking to grab her second gold of the championships after winning the 400m in a world record time on the opening night.

She led for most of the race but O'Callaghan turned on the afterburners over the home straight to reel her in.



Australia's Mollie O'Callaghan celebrates after winning the women's 200m freestyle on Wednesday (AFP)

Titmus finished second in a personal-best time of 1:53.01, ahead of McIntosh on 1:53.65.

O'Callaghan's time beat the world record of 1:52.98 set by Italian Federica Pellegrini -- wearing a supersuit -- at the 2009 world championships. "Heading into this, I just really

wanted to have fun and enjoy it and try my best and try some new race plans," said O'Callaghan. "To come out with a world record was really unexpected for me."

Marchand made headlines on Sunday when he beat Michael Phelps's legendary 400m IM

world record, a mark that had stood since the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

He picked up his second title in the 200m butterfly, coming home in 1min, 52.43sec, ahead of Poland's Krzysztof Chmielewski on 1:53.62 and Japan's Tomoru Honda on 1:53.66.

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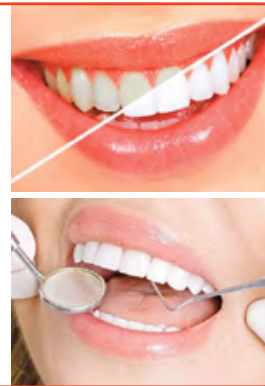
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Spain's Alexia Putellas controls the ball during their match against Zambia at Eden Park in Auckland on Wednesday (AFP)

## Spain crush Zambia 5-0 to join Japan in World Cup last 16

Auckland, New Zealand - Jennifer Hermoso and Alba Redondo both scored twice as Spain qualified for the last 16 of the Women's World Cup with a 5-0 win over Zambia on Wednesday, a result that also propelled Japan into the knockout phase.

The fit-again Alexia Putellas was handed a start by Spain coach Jorge Vilda and she played a part in early goals by Teresa Abelleira and Hermoso at Eden Park.

Substitute Redondo then scored twice in the second half, either side of another Hermoso, goal as Spain cruised to victory. Reigning Ballon d'Or Putellas, who recently returned from over nine months out with a serious knee injury, was taken off at half-time, with Vilda looking to preserve his star player for the Group C decider against Japan next Monday.

Japan had beaten Costa Rica 2-0 earlier and they and

Spain are now locked on six points each. However, Spain's margin of victory means they now have a better goal difference and so just need a draw to finish in first place when the sides clash in Wellington.

Zambia are already condemned to a first-round exit in their debut appearance at the World Cup after a second successive 5-0 hammering. Putellas had made a series of cameo appearances for Barcelona in the final weeks of the season following her return from a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament suffered prior to last year's European Championship.

She then started for Spain in a pre-World Cup friendly against Panama before appearing off the bench in last Friday's 3-0 defeat of Costa Rica. Here she came in from kick-off, with Mariona Caldentey also handed a start by Vilda.

AFP

# FEELS LIKE A DREAM

## Messi scores twice as Miami crush Atlanta

Fort Lauderdale, United States - Lionel Messi's instant impact in the United States continued on Tuesday as he scored twice in Inter Miami's 4-0 victory over Atlanta United, firing his team into the knockout rounds of the Leagues Cup.

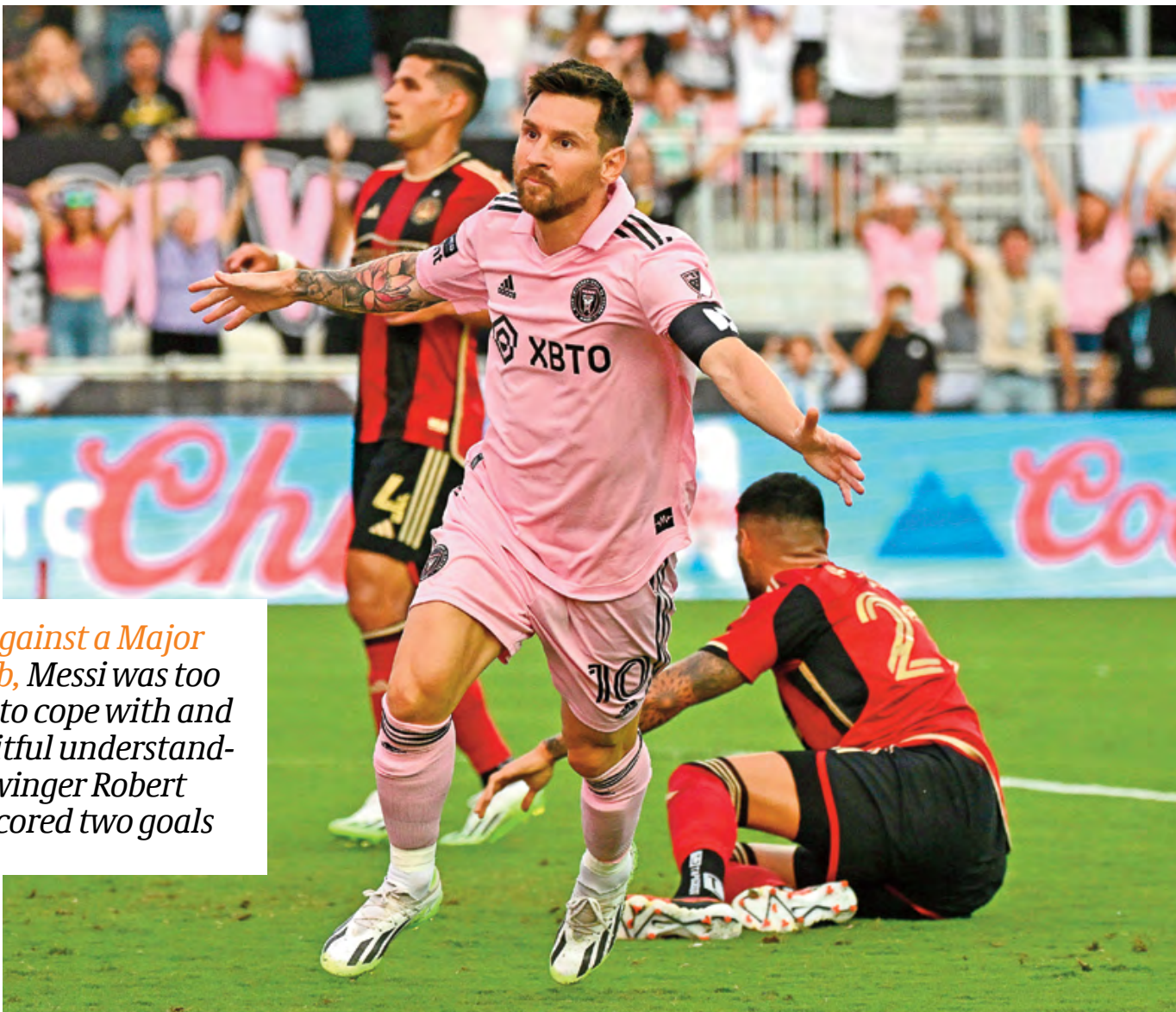
The Argentine World Cup-winner was handed his first start for his new club after coming off the bench and grabbing a 94th-

*In his first game against a Major League Soccer club, Messi was too much for Atlanta to cope with and he struck up a fruitful understanding with Finnish winger Robert Taylor, who also scored two goals*

minute winner in Friday's game against Mexican club Cruz Azul.

In his first game against a Major League Soccer club, Messi was simply too much for Atlanta to cope with and he struck up a fruitful understanding with Finnish winger Robert Taylor, who helped himself to Miami's other two goals.

The Leagues Cup is a tournament which brings together all the top flight teams from MLS and Mexico's Liga MX and with two wins Miami top their group and with their new arrival looking settled so quickly, they will surely



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi (C) celebrates after scoring against Atlanta United FC in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on Tuesday (AFP)

believe they can get their first ever trophy.

Atlanta fatally began the game playing a high-line, hoping to compress the space for Messi, but the approach simply allowed Miami to pick their moments to go over the top and exploit the space behind.

It was via such a route that

Messi put the home side ahead in the eighth minute when he was sent free by a ball over the top from his former Barcelona teammate Sergio Busquets. Messi burst into the box and although his low shot struck the post, he made no mistake with the rebound, side-footing into the goal.

The seven-times Ballon d'Or

winner then doubled the advantage in the 22nd minute, the first of three goals that saw him combine with Finnish winger Robert Taylor. Messi ran at the back-peddalling Atlanta defence before switching to Taylor who slid the ball back into the path of the 36-year-old who slotted home.

Another Busquets ball over

the top found Messi but the off-side flag was raised after he shot straight at Atlanta keeper Brad Guzan.

Miami made it 3-0, a minute before the interval, when Messi fed Benjamin Cremaschi, who cleverly flicked the ball to Taylor who defied the tight angle with a fierce blast.

## Man City beat Bayern in Tokyo friendly

Tokyo, Japan - Goals from James McAtee and Aymeric Laporte gave Manchester City a 2-1 victory over Bayern Munich on Wednesday, and secured the European champions their second win of a pre-season tour in Japan.

Mathys Tel was on target for Bayern, who lost 4-1 on aggregate to City in the quarter-finals of the Champions League last season.

Pep Guardiola's men ultimately went on to win that competition for the first time, beating Inter Milan 1-0 in last month's final in Istanbul to complete a historic treble.

The two European heavy-



Manchester City's Erling Haaland controls the ball ahead of Bayern Munich's Josip Stanisic during their friendly match in Tokyo on Wednesday (AFP)

weights spent most of the opening quarter of an hour sizing each other up in stifling conditions at Japan National Stadium in Tokyo.

Leroy Sane danced into the City penalty area and cut back for Jamal Musiala in the 17th minute, but his attempt was blocked at the last by Nathan Ake.

Two minutes later Sane cannoned a free-kick against the bar from 25 yards out.

McAtee - who spent last season on loan at Championship side Sheffield United, opened the scoring for City in the 21st minute.

## Philippines ready for 'monumental' last-16 bid at Women's World Cup

Wellington, New Zealand - Philippines head coach Alen Stajcic said the Women's World Cup debutants faced a "monumental" task to beat Norway and squeeze into the tournament's knock-out stages.

Ranked 46th in the world, the Philippines blew Group A wide open with a shock 1-0 win over co-hosts New Zealand on Tuesday. Sarina Bolden scored the winning header in Wellington to claim her country's first goal at a Women's World Cup - which also sealed the Philippines' maiden victory at either a men's



Philippines players celebrate their victory against New Zealand

or women's finals. The side can reach the last 16 by beating Norway on Sunday, the same day

New Zealand face Switzerland.

Stajcic said his team, who bounced back after losing their opening game to the Swiss, had to quickly shift focus to their final pool game. "The job is not done," he said. "It's very important we switch back into competition mode and think what we have to do in the last game to try and squeeze out of this group."

Stajcic said the Philippines face a tough assignment against 1995 world champions Norway, who have 2018 Ballon d'Or winner Ada Hegerberg in their squad.



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# Oman Sail’s J/70 team heads to South Korea for the 2023 ASAF Keelboat Cup

Muscat – Four sailors from Oman Sail’s national team will compete at the ongoing 2023 ASAF Keelboat Cup in Boryeong, South Korea. Taking place at the Boryeong Sailing Centre at Daechun Beach, the event brings together 12 international teams and three qualifying teams from within Korea to race over four days of racing – as well as the Awesome Islands Race which kicks off the event.

The mid-distance offshore race features teams from hosts Korea, France, Denmark, Turkey, Australia, New Zealand, China, Thailand, and Malaysia, as well as Oman. Oman team, captained by Nasser al Mashari, comprises Yaser al Rahbi, Ali al Bulushi and Hussain al Jabri.

Mohsin al Busaidi, Oman Sail’s Head of Performance, said, “This is a great chance to test ourselves against crews from around the world and some of the best in South Korea. The

J/70 is a popular keelboat used at high profile events in Kiel and Hyères, as well as at the World Championships later this year, and the 2023 ASAF Keelboat Cup will give us invaluable experience ahead of a busy season. We are looking forward to gauging our progress and working on the technical aspects of the boat in a highly competitive environment off the coast of the Yellow Sea in South Korea.”

Al Mashari, Skipper of the



Nasser al Mashari

*We are looking forward to gauging our progress and working on the technical aspects of the boat in a competitive environment off the coast of Yellow Sea in South Korea*

MOHSIN AL BUSAIDI

team, said, “Racing in South Korea is a great chance for us to put into practice the tactics and training we have been working on and gain much-needed experience ahead of a busy winter season. Building a connection as a team is vital in order to perform at our very best, both now and in the future, and the 11

rience ahead of a busy winter season. Building a connection as a team is vital in order to perform at our very best, both now and in the future, and the 11

races will help to identify areas to improve on and learn more about the boat.”

The 2023 ASAF Keelboat Cup is the first Asian Yachting Federation (ASAF) accredited yachting competition to be held in Korea and features 240 sailors and officials across three events. There will be 13 countries competing in 11 races in the J/70 class and youth squads from 10 countries represented in the Optimist competition.

# EXPECTED A BETTER PERFORMANCE FROM THE BOYS: MENDIS

Oman A lost all their matches at the recent ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Sri Lanka

Muscat - After reaching the high of a top-six place in the ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe earlier this month, much was expected from the Oman A side at the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Sri Lanka.

However, they failed to make an impression and lost all the three matches in the group stage to make a tame exit.

National chief coach Duleep Mendis, who was delighted with his team’s display at the ICC World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe, admitted that the boys failed to perform in Sri Lanka but added that it is a learning curve for the team.

In his remarks at the conclusion of the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup, which was won by Pakistan on Sunday, Mendis said: “I expected a much better performance from my boys. We rested a few of our senior players for the Emerging Teams Asia Cup with an aim to provide exposure to newcomers. The Oman A team was a mix of seniors and a few newcomers but the team’s performance disappointed me.

“We had an exceptional tournament in Zimbabwe where we belied the expectations of many by qualifying for the Super Six stage. The players performed brilliantly and I am proud of what they achieved in the ICC World



Ayaan Khan



Cup Qualifier.

“I expected the senior players to continue their good form in Sri Lanka and hoped that would rub off on the newcomers. It didn’t

*I expected the senior players to continue their good form in Sri Lanka and hoped that would rub off on the newcomers. It didn’t happen. I am not offering excuses but the long tour of Zimbabwe led to senior players being exhausted.*

DULEEP MENDIS

happen. I am not offering excuses but the long tour of Zimbabwe led to senior players being exhausted. They failed to do justice to their talent.”

The Sri Lankan great, who has been with Oman for more than a decade, and led the Team Red to two T20 World Cups and guided the team to ICC ODI World Cup

Qualifier, added: “We did pick few newcomers and gave them a chance to play against some good sides in the Emerging Teams Asia Cup. We may not have got the desired results but this is the only way forward – to provide a platform for newcomers at the international stage.”

In Sri Lanka, Oman A were placed in Group A with hosts Sri Lanka A, Bangladesh A and Afghanistan A.

Oman A began their campaign on July 13 against Afghanistan A and went down by 72 runs. Chasing a target of 268 to win after Afghanistan A scored 267/8, Oman A were dismissed for 195 in 40.3 overs with Ayaan Khan top-scoring with 47.

In the next game, Bangladesh A cruised to an eight-wicket win. Oman A were all out for 126 in 46 overs with Ayaan again the top run-getter with 26. Bangladesh A raced to win in 17 overs scoring 130/2.

And in the concluding group match, Oman A had a game to forget as they were bundled out for a paltry 42 in 17.1 overs against hosts Sri Lanka A, who had batted first and hammered 259/8 in 50 overs. It was the second ever lowest List A score of Oman.

Ayaan emerged as team’s top scorer with 74 runs from three matches followed by Shoaib Khan (70). Both the batters also had an excellent tour to Zimbabwe. In bowling, captain Aqib Ilyas picked a total of eight wickets with best figures of 4/58 against Sri Lanka A.

The Sri Lanka tour gave national team List A debuts for wicketkeeper Abdul Rauf, Shubo Pal and Muhammad Bilal Shah, who were called up for their maiden national team tour.



Pakistan's Abdullah Shafique (L) celebrates after scoring a century against Sri Lanka on the third day of the second Test on Wednesday

# Shafique double ton puts Pakistan in command of second Test

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Opener Abdullah Shafique’s maiden double century and an unbeaten 132 by Agha Salman put Pakistan in the box seat Wednesday on day three of the second Test against Sri Lanka.

The tourists reached 563-5 at stumps, leading Sri Lanka by 397 runs in their first innings at Colombo’s Sinhalese Sports Club. Salman and concussion substitute Mohammad Rizwan, on 37, were batting in an unbeaten stand of 95 after Shafique’s departure on 201.

Salman played attacking cricket to reinforce Pakistan’s new aggressive style in this series and reached his second Test ton with a boundary.

Shafique led the mammoth reply in response to Sri Lanka’s 166 as he put on three century stands including a 124-run sixth-wicket partnership with Salman.

Shafique, who began the day on 87, reached 200 in the final session with a single off Asitha Fernando, taking off his helmet and pointing to his name on the back of his jersey.

But he was soon caught out at deep mid-off by left-arm

spinner Prabath Jayasuriya, who also had skipper Babar Azam for 39 earlier in the day.

Fernando cut short Saud Shakeel’s knock on 57 in the afternoon session to take his wicket tally to three.

The fast bowler came around the wicket to trap the left-handed Shakeel lbw and end a 109-run partnership with Shafique.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Sarfaraz Ahmed made 14 before he retired hurt after feeling dizzy, likely due to a blow he received on his helmet on the first ball faced from Fernando.

He was finally substituted by Rizwan. Shafique passed 150 for the second time against Sri Lanka with a single off Ramesh Mendis, and then went past his previous Test best of 160 not out.

Pakistan resumed on 178-2 after Tuesday’s downpours restricted the action to just 10 overs. Shafique started cautiously but soon hit two successive boundaries off Fernando before a single got his hundred.

AFP

# Australia eager to end long wait for Ashes series win in England

London, United Kingdom - Australia may have retained the Ashes but a chance to win a Test series in England will spur them on after they “got away” with a draw in Manchester.

Ashes-holders Australia have arrived in London for a series finale at The Oval starting Thursday with the urn secured at 2-1 up with one to play after England dominated the fourth Test at Old Trafford, only for rain to ensure the match ended in a draw.

Australia also led 2-1 in 2019 only for England to win at The Oval and end the series all square at 2-2.

Pat Cummins’s squad, which contains several survivors from that trip, are determined to avoid a repeat as they bid to end Aus-

tralia’s 22-year wait for an Ashes series win in England.

“The feeling around it was yes, we have got away with one, but ultimately we have come here to win the Ashes and we have gone a huge way to doing that,” Australia batsman Travis Head said at The Oval on Tuesday.

He added: “I think there are a lot of similarities with ‘19...But I also think off the back of that, it probably showed us how much it meant and how much winning the Ashes would actually really mean instead of retaining them.”

Australia will consider recalling specialist spinner Todd Murphy, omitted from an attack plundered for 592 at Old Trafford - a total featuring Zak Crawley’s 189.



Pat Cummins

*Michael Neser could make his first appearances of the series after a successful stint with Glamorgan*

It was less than two months ago that now injured off-spinner Nathan Lyon helped bowl Australia to victory at The Oval in the World Test Championship final against India, taking 4-41 in the second innings.

All-rounder Mitchell Marsh, who returned to Test cricket after a four-year absence with a hundred in England’s win in the

third Test at Headingley, is struggling with “soreness”, while fast bowler Mitchell Starc has a shoulder problem.

As a result, fellow paceman Michael Neser could make his first appearances of the series after a successful stint with Glamorgan in the English County Championship.

Meanwhile, England captain Ben Stokes has no doubts over James Anderson keeping his place in an unchanged side for the finale, hailing the veteran seamer as “the greatest fast bowler to play the game”.

Anderson, 41 on Sunday, has taken just four wickets in three matches this series at a costly average of 76.75 apiece.

AFP



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**OATS FOR DINNER**  
It's not merely a 'break-fast cereal', bring out the oats for dinner, too



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**ENTERTAINMENT**  
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

DATE HARVEST



TIME FOR 'TABSEEL'

Oman celebrates its bountiful date harvest with traditional chores and fanfare

There is a rich, sugary fragrance of ripe dates all around, the farmers are all smiles, and the barns are getting ready to store Oman's bountiful date harvest that has exceeded expectations this year.

June and July bring about the much-anticipated date harvest season in Oman, marked by the important agricultural festival known as 'Tabseel'.

This is a time when farming families, women, and children included, unite in the fields to collect the year's crop. Not just a chore, the harvest is infused with festive spirit, with folk songs echoing as everyone works together.

In the past few years, the jubilant atmosphere was slightly dampened by challenges of COVID-19 and unpredictable rains. However, this year tells a different tale. Favourable weather, characterised by intense heat and minimal rainfall before fruit ripening, contributed to a surge in date production.

This joyous turn of events was mirrored in the vibrant festival celebrations. Little girls and youths enhanced the festivities, turning out in colourful, traditional Omani attire.

The process of Tabseel spans around three weeks. It commences as the dates turn a ripe yellow

The process of Tabseel spans around three weeks. It commences as the dates turn a ripe yellow. Harvesters ascend the palm trees, skillfully snipping the bunches with a sharp, sickle-like knife. The bunches are carefully lowered using ropes and are then transported, often by camel or donkey, to the processing site.

At the processing site, women and children eagerly wash the harvested dates, discard the damaged fruits, and prepare them for drying. Then dates are cooked in large pots, within a specially designed shed known as a 'tarkiba'. After a half-hour of boiling over firewood at a controlled temperature, the dates are spread out to dry on a specially prepared area called a 'mastina'. Here, the dates bask in the sun for five to ten days. The length of this drying process is subject to weather conditions.

Once dried, the dates are ready for the market. Oman's dates are a sought-after commodity in the local and international markets alike, with demand stretching to India, other Asian countries, and increasingly, Europe. Despite a shortage last year due to the rain-affected crop, this year promises a robust supply, thanks to the rich harvest.

For many foreign workers, predominantly from Bangladesh, the harvest season is also a time of joy. Their earnings during this period can be three to four times their regular wages. As another successful harvest season draws to a close, smiles adorn the faces of farmers, their joy reflecting the year's fruitful yield.

(Text and photos: V K Shafeer)



cook-up

Oats for dinner

Do you loathe the health freaks who can't stop talking about the benefits of oats? You, too, can follow suit without letting them know – but don't dismiss oats as merely a 'breakfast cereal'. If you use it outside the box, you can get it onto your dinner table in many interesting ways



Oats Kebabs

Ingredients

- 1 cup elephant yam (suran) or crumbled paneer/tofu
- 1 cup raw banana – boiled and chopped
- 1 cup carrots chopped, 1 onion - chopped fine
- 2cm piece ginger – chopped fine
- 4 cloves garlic - chopped fine
- 1tbsp red chilli powder
- 1tsp turmeric powder
- 1tbsp cumin powder, 1tbsp coriander powder
- 1tbsp dried mango powder (amchur)
- 1 cup instant Oats – divided
- ½ cup milk, salt and pepper, to taste
- Oil for shallow frying

Method

First, clean and chop up the yam and raw banana, and pressure cook till tender with a pinch of salt and turmeric. If using paneer/tofu instead of yam, then boil only the skinned and chopped banana

till tender. Set aside.

Heat 1tbsp oil in a pan, add in the onions, garlic and ginger, and saute till the onions become translucent. Then add the carrot and keep frying till the carrot gets tender. Add all the spice powders and mix well. Saute till the raw smell of the chilli goes away.

Add this to the boiled yam and raw banana mixture (or banana and paneer/tofu) and mix well. Add half cup of oats to this mixture and reserve half cup of oats for coating. Adjust seasoning, if required. Take small portions onto wet palms, shape them into lemon sized balls, and flatten them into cutlets. Place the remaining half cup of oats on a plate with the milk on the side. Dip each cutlet in milk and coat it well with oats.

Heat a fry pan, drizzle some oil and toast the cutlets on medium heat on both sides till they turn golden brown. Serve the Oats Kebabs as a snack or as an appetiser for dinner.



Oatmeal Soup

Ingredients

- ½ cup oatmeal, 1 cup chopped mixed veggies
- ¼ cup onion - chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic - chopped finely
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 or 3 spring onions - white and green parts chopped separately
- 1/3tsp Italian seasoning
- A pinch of nutmeg
- 1½ cups milk
- 1 cup water, 1tbsp olive oil
- ¼tsp sugar
- Salt, to taste
- Chilli flakes and cheese – for garnish

Method

Heat oil in a pot and add the bay leaf, garlic, onions, and white part of spring onions, and saute until the onions turn translucent. Now, add the chopped veggies and salt, and mix. Then, add the oats, 1 cup water, Italian seasoning, and cook for 8-10 minutes on medium flame. Add milk, nutmeg, sugar, green part of spring onions and adjust salt, as needed. Add more milk if you need it thinner in consistency. Pour in soup bowls and serve garnished with chilli flakes and cheese.



Masala Oats

Ingredients

- ½ cup oats - instant oats
- ¼ cup vegetables (chopped carrot, peas)
- ¼ cup onion - finely chopped, 2tbsp tomato - finely chopped
- ½tsp ginger garlic paste, ¼tsp turmeric powder
- ½tsp red chilli powder, ½tsp garam masala powder
- ¼tsp coriander powder, 1tbsp coriander leaves
- 2½ cups water, salt, to taste, 1-2tsp butter

For tempering

- 2tsp oil, ½tsp cumin seeds

Method

Heat oil in a pan – when it is heated add cumin seeds and let it splutter. Add onion, tomato and ginger garlic paste. Saute until it shrinks and tomatoes turn mushy. Now, add vegetables, turmeric powder, red chilli powder, coriander powder, and garam masala powder along with required salt.

Saute for 2 minutes, then add water, mix it and let it come to a boil. Cook covered until the veggies are tender. Now, add oats and mix. Continue cooking till the mixture turns like porridge consistency. Remove from flame, garnish with coriander leaves, and serve hot with a dollop of butter.

Optional - top with shredded, boiled chicken.



Oats Bhel (spicy muesli)

Ingredients

- 1 cup rolled oats, 1 small onion - minced
- ½ cup minced cucumber
- ½ cup minced carrot
- 1 tomato – minced
- 1 green chilli – minced (optional)
- ¼ cup skinned, toasted peanuts
- ½tsp chaat masala
- 2tsp date and tamarind chutney
- 2tsp green chutney
- 2tbsp cilantro/coriander - finely chopped
- Juice of half lemon
- ½ cup nylon sev

Method

Heat a pan, and when it is hot, add the oats and toast them until they are crisp - 3 to 5 minutes. Let them turn light golden brown but don't let them burn.

Transfer the toasted oats to large bowl and let it cool. Meanwhile, chop all the veggies. Add the chopped onion, carrot, cucumber, tomato, and peanuts. Then, toss in the chutneys and chaat masala. Mix well.

Garnish with cilantro, drizzle the lemon juice, top with a sprinkle of nylon sev, and serve right away when crunchy.



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take a break

IN TOWN

BASTILLE DAY



(Photos: V K Shafer)

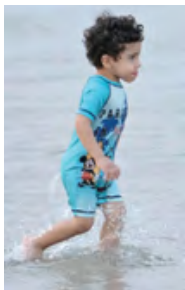
The Embassy of France hosted a reception to celebrate Fete nationale de la Republique Francaise (National Day of France) on July 14



Long weekend revelry



People enjoyed the long weekend - due to an additional Muharram holiday last week - at parks, beaches, and paid visits to the floating library – Logos Hope



(Photos: V K Shafer)

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Perk up your energy today with good old-fashioned physical exercise! And before you start worrying about how to fit in a marathon before lunch, relax. Your feats don't have to be huge ones. Just take a walk someplace you ordinarily would drive to. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Do some sit-ups while you watch television.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

No matter who they are, there's no reason for you to tolerate a pompous person whose arrogance verges on rudeness today. If you feel you're being talked down to by the higher-ups, you owe it to yourself to push back, diplomatically, of course. You are good at this, and you can easily put this person in their place without offending them or putting them on the defensive.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Arguments bring out the worst in people, so if someone takes a cheap shot at you during a spat today, you have to let it roll off your back. Don't ignore it, but don't use it as an excuse to start hitting below the belt yourself. Rise above this. Keep the conversation about the problem at hand, not their personal issues.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Something shocking and a bit outrageous could happen today, and you need to be prepared for it. When it happens, don't overreact. Stop everything just for a moment and review the situation thoroughly. It isn't what it looks like at first glance, so if you give in to a knee-jerk reaction now, you'll be regretting it in a big way later.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Try not to edit what you say too much today. You shouldn't say everything that comes into your head, but you should be more open. You'll get what you want much more quickly if you speak honestly from the heart. Whether you're in a business situation, at school, or cuddling with your sweetie, you need to be frank and even a little bit vulnerable.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You've just climbed one heck of a mountain, and you deserve a big pat on the back for rising to the challenge. Just make sure that pat is delivered by someone else's hand, though. Being too quick to boast about your achievement could make people think that you only did it for the bragging rights, and that cheapens it.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Try not to overthink things today. You will only get paralyzed by the details, and the details won't really matter in the long run anyway. Nothing is set in stone right now, so spending any energy getting all hyped up about something is a total waste of time. Your hopes should stay planted firmly on the ground.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

There is always a balance of power in any relationship. Someone is always calling the shots while the other person goes along with the plan. Who does what should be shifting back and forth regularly. If it's not, today is the day to bring that up. If you're the one always making plans in one of your relationships, ask the other person to think of something for you two to do.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If you're in a romantic relationship right now, expect things to change dramatically soon. The growth spurt that you were hoping for is coming. You two are about to shoot ahead a little bit faster than you imagined, so be ready for the shock. If you aren't in a romantic relationship, you'll be finding more joy than ever in your independent status.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today, you need to be aware that people are putting on a bit of a show for you, either because they want to impress you or because they want to trick you. The distinction is fairly irrelevant, though. If they aren't being genuine, they aren't being genuine. Whenever others appear to be something they are not, you must beware. So accept their flattery with a smile, but don't buy into it.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's that they often distract you from what really matters. It's not important who's behind the wheel right now. What really matters is finding a solution to the problem. The first step is to admit this and act accordingly. You have to put your own desires aside and think of the greater good today.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If you want to make today a productive day, you're going to have to get opinions from other people while at the same time avoiding inflicting your opinions on them. It sounds like tricky business, but if anyone can pull it off with grace, you can. Your thoughts are only going to take things off track and cause conversations to go off on fun yet time-consuming tangents, so focus on getting input from others.

BOGGLER

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| T | L | A | N |
| M | I | L | W |
| L | S | O | E |
| B | G | B | U |

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

**Solution** 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

Quiz on interesting Facts

Alaska was part of which country before being sold to the United States?

- a. Denmark  
b. Tanzania  
c. Russia  
d. Paraguay

Answer - In 1867, Tsar Alexander II of Russia sold the Alaskan territory to the United States for US\$7.2mn - or about US\$120mn today.

Royalty



The name of the ancient Egyptian queen Nefertiti meant 'the one and only ruler' - True or False?

Answer - False: One of ancient Egypt's few female rulers, Nefertiti reigned in the mid-1300s B.C. Her name actually meant 'the beautiful one has arrived'.

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

**Rules:** Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

entertainment



CELEBS  
FLAUNT  
'BARBIE  
PINK'

Everyone is talking 'Barbie-core' this summer. Since summer started, sassy pink ensembles plucked straight from a Barbie doll's closet have been all the rage. And the celebrities have been hot on the trend.

From bubble gum to fuchsia, stars like Anne Hathaway, Kim Kardashian, Kelly Rowland, and more are packing the punch in shades of pink. These celebs have proven the hue is not just for little girls, as they've rocked the bright, bold colour to perfection on the red carpet, on the sidewalks, and beyond.

HELEN MIRREN PLAYS  
GOLDA MEIR IN 'GOLDA'



Helen Mirren is transformed into blunt, stubborn Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in the official trailer for *Golda*, director Guy Nattiv's ticking-clock thriller recalling true events set during the tense Yom Kippur War in 1973.

*Golda* had its world premiere in Berlin as it portrays the only woman in the Israeli cabinet becoming a surprisingly effective military leader after her country faced an unexpected twin attack from the Arab powers of Syria and Egypt on the morning of Jewish holiday Yom Kippur in 1973.

DOLLY PARTON - EASY  
TO IMPERSONATE

Dolly Parton has declared she's one of the easiest singers to impersonate due to her massive hair and appealing physique. The 77-year-old *Jolene* icon told lookalikes all they had to do if they wanted to copy her trademark style was buy a cheap wig and pad themselves up.

She made the remark as the Guinness Book of World Records decides if a gathering of 1,137 'Dollys' in Ireland qualifies as history's biggest ever mob of Parton lookalikes. Dolly was quoted in the *Daily Mail* saying about the record-setting bid, "Thank you for liking me that much. But I'm easy to do. You can buy a cheap wig anywhere, you can pad yourself up..."

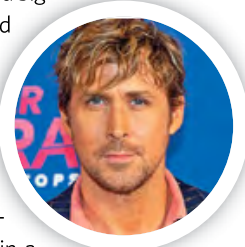


GRETA GERWIG ON  
'BARBIE' SEQUEL

Following *Barbie*'s massive debut weekend, Greta Gerwig is opening up about the film's success, criticism and if she sees a sequel in her future. During an interview with The New York Times, published online Tuesday, when asked if she sees the Margot Robbie-led film as the start of a franchise or a complete story, the director responded, "At this moment, it's all I've got. I feel like that at the end of every movie, like I'll never have another idea and everything I've ever wanted to do, I did," she explained. "I wouldn't want to squash anybody else's dream, but for me, at this moment, I'm at totally zero."

RYAN GOSLING - THE  
TRUE A-LISTER CELEB

Ryan Gosling, you bet, is now kind of a big deal. The La La loverboy has jumped back on the silver screen in his sterling role as Ken in Greta Gerwig's highly anticipated *Barbie* film alongside Margot Robbie, but the Canadian heartthrob has been in the reckoning for long. The 42-year-old is a true A-list celeb, starring in a steady stream of seven blockbusters for over a decade alongside some of Hollywood's best.



UPS STRIKE AVERTED

The Teamsters union and shipping giant UPS announced Tuesday that the two sides had reached a tentative agreement on a five-year contract that would avert a crippling strike across the United States. Some 340,000 UPS workers had stood poised for a stoppage as Teamsters leaders pressed for increased wages. The proposed deal now faces rank-and-file workers who will vote on August 3 to 22.

Top films to be screened at Venice film fest

Emma Stone as a Frankenstein-like creature and biopics of Priscilla Presley and Enzo Ferrari will premiere at next month's Venice Film Festival. The lineup for the 80th edition of the prestigious festival on the beach-lined Lido also includes the latest films from Roman Polanski and Woody Allen, both sure to raise eyebrows due to long-time sexual abuse allegations dogging the directors.

Among the 23 films competing for the top Golden Lion prize is Bradley Cooper's *Maestro* about legendary conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein. The festival's artistic director, Alberto Barbera described the film as a 'biography of an extraordinary genius' that focuses on Bernstein's tormented relationship with his wife, played by Carey Mulligan.

COMING SOON

MEG 2: THE  
TRENCH

Exploring the depths of the ocean, a research team must take on a daring operation and survive megaladons.

Genre: Action  
Starring: Jason Statham, Sienna Guillory, Jing Wu, Sophia Cai  
Language: English  
Release Date: August 3



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW  
OPPENHEIMER

Genre: Biographical thriller  
Starring: Cillian Murphy, Florence Pugh, Robert Downey Jr, Emily Blunt, Tony Goldwyn

Master blaster

When people come to watch a star in a new release it is a blockbuster, but when people come to watch a director for a new release, it is a classic. That's Christopher Nolan and his magic.

The auteur has shaped the visual story of one of the most contested legacies of the 20th century - that of J Robert Oppenheimer (played by Cillian Murphy) the 'father of the atomic bomb'. He is designated the task to create and denote the first ever atomic



bomb that had a devastating impact on Japan and ended World War II.

A treat to the visual medium, the three-hour film is not a story of world war; it is but the war of human agonies and conflicts of inner conscious of the atomic scientist portrayed diligently by Murphy.

The film appeals to both, the intellect as well as the emotion. Narrated in a non-linear style of story telling, the film teases viewers with various concepts of life, death and ambition. The conversation between the heart and mind has been interestingly depicted by the torn apart Oppenheimer and intellectual Albert Einstein (played by Tom Conti).

The impressively grand scale *Op-*

*penheimer* exhibits are truly breathtaking (and deafening as well), especially since it was shot by Nolan's favourite DOP Hoyte van Hoytema (*Interstellar*, *Dunkirk*, *Tenet*) using massive IMAX cameras equipped with special 65mm film stock. The director did not use any special effects for the film but relied on practical effects including those of the grand atomic explosions.

Murphy, ever loved since his *Peaky Blinders* era, nailed his role to perfection. He transformed in his finest role to date, bringing to life all the complexities and contradictions of the tormented flamboyant scientist, J Robert Oppenheimer.

Rating ★★★★★

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