

OMAN-EGYPT TIES IN HIGH GEAR



H M, PRESIDENT SISI REVIEW AREAS OF COOPERATION, OPPORTUNITIES TO BOOST THESE TO NEW HORIZONS

Cairo, Egypt - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik concluded his visit to the Arab Republic of Egypt and returned home on Monday.

Earlier in the day, His Majesty the Sultan met President Abdul Fattah el Sisi of Egypt at Qubba Palace in Cairo.

During the meeting, the two leaders reviewed areas of cooperation between the two countries and opportunities of boosting these towards broader horizons in a manner that serves the joint interests of the two countries. They also touched on several matters of common concern.

Later in the day, His Majesty paid a visit to the new administrative capital, including the government quarter. He inspected the yard of the Grand Mosque, an Islamic architectural edifice that takes centre stage in the area, and Dar al Quran (Holy Quran House) at the Islamic Cultural Centre, where entire chapters of the Holy Quran are carved on walls of the dar.

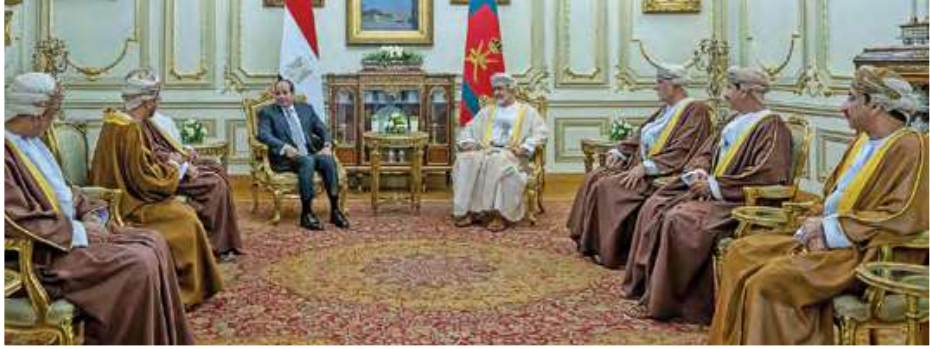
His Majesty also toured the City

of Arts and Culture, intended to be a global destination, comprising a range of modern buildings and facilities. There, His Majesty visited the Opera House and viewed a presentation about it. There after, His Majesty the Sultan visited the Capitals Museum, which narrates stories of Egyptian capital cities and their evolution over the ages.

On the return journey, His Majesty the Sultan sent a cable of thanks to President Sisi. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere appreciation to the president for the warm welcome and hospitality.

His Majesty lauded the opportunity offered by the visit to review bilateral relations and means of enhancing these in various spheres to serve the joint interests of the Omani and Egyptian peoples.

His Majesty the Sultan prayed to Allah the Almighty to protect President Sisi and grant him good health and a long life to achieve further aspirations of progress and prosperity for the Egyptian people.



Oman, Egypt sign pact to avoid double taxation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Within the framework of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Egypt, the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt signed an agreement and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in Cairo on Monday.

The agreement is related to the elimination of double taxation on income and prevention and avoidance of tax evasion.

As for the MoU, it is related to cooperation in areas relevant to financial policies and developments.

The agreement and the MoU were signed by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, on behalf of the Government of Oman, and Dr Mohamed Moait, Minister of Finance, on behalf of the Government of Egypt.

Oman-Egypt business forum

On the sidelines of the visit, an Oman-Egypt business forum was held in Cairo to introduce the available investment opportunities in the sultanate and to establish economic partnerships.

Addressing the forum, Habsi said it would enhance development of joint economic work between the two countries in accordance with the aspirations and directives of the leaders of the two countries.

According to Habsi, Oman intends to build a solid partnership in the strategic economic sectors of interest to the two countries, and highlight efforts to enhance investment and trade exchange to achieve desired economic integration.

He confirmed that Oman has adopted numerous measures to facilitate business activities in the country and improve the business environment.

OMAN-EGYPT TIES IN HIGH GEAR



ROSES NAMED AFTER HIS MAJESTY, HON LADY UNVEILED IN LONDON



The sultanate unveiled roses named after His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Honourable Lady Sayyida Ahad bint Abdullah bin Hamed al Busaidi as part of its participation in the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023 being held in London till May 27. The two roses are among the finest varieties in the world. The rose named after His Majesty the Sultan is red in colour, while the one after the Honourable Lady is white. The roses resulted from several hybridisation experiments conducted in Salalah and European countries. The unveiling ceremony was attended by Badr bin Mohammed al Mandhari, Ambassador of Oman to the UK and Northern Ireland, Hilal bin Mohammed al Wa'eli, Head of Royal Horses, Camels, Farms and Gardens Affairs at Royal Court Affairs, and Abdullah bin Ali al Kathiri, Director General of Dhofar Municipality (ONA)

SCHOOL EDUCATION LAW

Fines, imprisonment for parents failing to enrol children in school

Our Correspondent Muscat

Parents who fail to register their children in school will now face penalties under the new School Education Law. They may be subjected to fines of up to RO1,000 or imprisonment for a period of up to three months. The law, issued by Royal Decree No 31/2023 last week, includes 97 articles divided into

ten chapters covering various topics related to education. According to the law, education is mandatory for all children starting at the age of six, and Arabic is the official medium of instruction in all schools. The law strictly prohibits members of teaching staff from using corporal punishment on students for disciplinary violations. In cases where circumstances

demand it, the Ministry of Education may allow home study or distance learning for students who cannot attend regular classes. Any student who disrupts public order in a school or hinders its educational activities may face imprisonment of up to one month and/or a fine ranging from RO100 to RO500. Parents who fail to present valid reasons for not registering



their children within 14 days of the last date of registration may face imprisonment for a minimum of one month and a maximum of three months and/or a fine of no less than RO500 and not exceeding RO1,000. The law emphasises the obligation of educational staff to promptly report any crime committed on school premises to the school principal or their representative. The incident should

be reported in writing to the nearest police station within 24 hours of coming to notice. Violators of this article may face imprisonment for a period of no less than 24 hours and not exceeding ten days and/or a fine ranging between RO200 and RO1,000. Additionally, the Minister of Education will issue executive regulations and necessary decisions to implement the provi-

sions of the School Education Law, as mandated by the decree. The School Education Law aims to ensure proper registration and attendance of students, maintain discipline in schools and facilitate an environment conducive to learning. By imposing fines and penalties, it seeks to encourage compliance with educational regulations and strengthen the education system in the country.

MODERN EXCHANGE “OMAN’S MOST TRUSTED BRAND” PARTNERS WITH VISA TO LAUNCH A FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND REMITTANCE SERVICE IN OMAN REMITTANCES TO VISA CARDS GLOBALLY IN NEAR REAL-TIME



Modern Exchange, the winner of Oman's Most Trusted Brand award, specializes in worldwide remittance services has rolled out its new cross-border remittance service, Visa Direct, in partnership with Visa, the world's leader in digital payments. The innovative solution will allow Modern Exchange customers to transfer funds to Visa cards globally in near real-

time. Modern Exchange has enabled Visa Direct, Visa's payment platform, for countries in the MENA region, Europe, UK, etc. Mr. Lijo John, General Manager of Modern Exchange, said, "Modern Exchange's initiative to offer remittance service by partnering with Visa would augment the efforts to uphold its leadership position in the Sultanate of Oman in the sector of money

transfer. Modern Exchange has always been pioneer financial technology accelerator in Oman. We are proud to launch this product in collaboration with Visa and this association will facilitate customers to instantly transfer money anywhere in the world by just using the beneficiary's Visa Card number even beyond banking hours. We have a strategic commitment for seek-

ing, establishing and developing partnerships with international players like Visa in order for us to remain at the forefront of remittance industry." Manish Gautam, Visa's Country Manager for Oman, said: "We are delighted to partner with Modern Exchange to launch Visa Direct for international remittances to Visa cards. With the rise of digital pay-

ments, this partnership strives to bring digital-first solutions and we will continue to provide services that enable seamless money movement globally – and with Visa Direct, Modern Exchange customers have access to our billions of cardholders worldwide and the backing of our trusted global network for fast and secure transfers." Modern Exchange is popular

with its customers, across the country, for a wide range of services offered across its 40-branch wide and strong network. In a very short span of time, Modern Exchange has emerged as a favorite remittance service provider due to its excellence in customer services and bringing innovative products in the remittance industry. Customers trust Modern Exchange for

meeting their multiple financial requirements like money transfer, foreign currency exchange and bill payments. They can also choose to send money from anywhere anytime through its Mobile App, online money transfer portal and Payment Link services. This online channel enables customers to send money to any corner of the world easily at their convenience.

Omani writer wins Arabic Booker

Muscat - Omani writer and poet Zahran al Qasimi has won the 16th International Prize for Arabic Fiction for his novel *The Water Diviner*. Results of the competition were announced on Sunday in Abu Dhabi, the UAE.

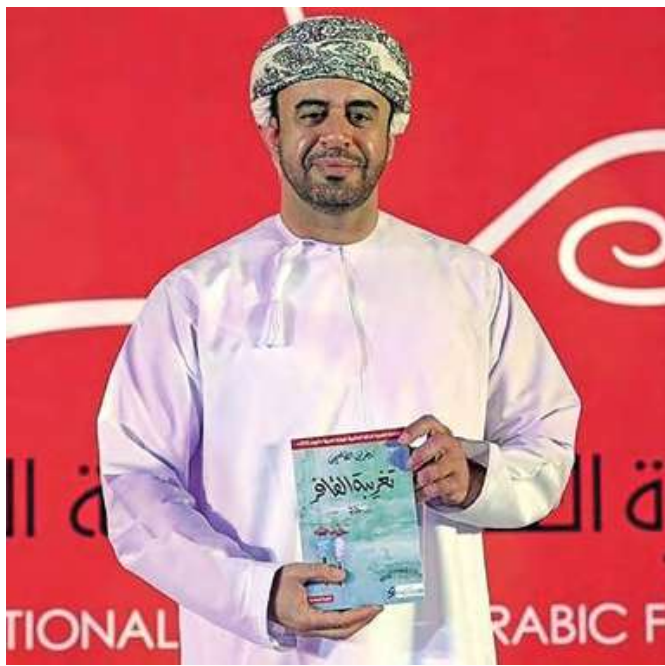
Qasimi won a cash prize of US\$50,000 and funding for translation of the novel into English, an initiative intended to promote the book on a global scale and boost its sales.

Qasimi was born in 1974 in Dima Wa al Taein. His previous works include *Mountain of the Horseradish Tree* (2013), *The Sniper* (2014) and *Hunger for Honey* (2017), alongside published collections of poetry, short stories and nonfiction.

The Water Diviner tells the story of a man who travels to a remote village in search of his missing son. Along the way, he learns about the importance of water and the power of women. The novel was praised by the jury for its "perfect structure", "fine poetic language" and "exciting characters". The jury also said that the novel "sculpted an unfamiliar theatre of narratives circulating in the Arab world".

In a statement, Qasimi said that he was "humbled and honoured" to win the prize. He said that he wrote the novel to "explore the relationship between humans and water", and that he was "grateful to the jury for recognising the novel's importance".

Head of Jury Mohammed al Ash'hari said that the novel was chosen because it tackled a new domain in modern fictional writing. He explained that the writer focused on the topic of water due



Humbled and honoured to win the prize. [I wrote] the novel to explore the relationship between humans and water... grateful to the jury

ZAHARAN AL QASIMI

to its significance to the natural environment and human life, notably in difficult areas.

He added that the writer presented this topic by harmonising reality and myth.

About the novel, Qasimi said, "Human beings throughout history have had a strong connection with water. For this reason, we find that great civilisations grew up on riverbanks, and anthropologists affirm that the beginning of life on the face of the Earth commenced with water. But what happens when this substance which gives life also becomes the cause of death through scarcity or flooding? How does water become a

killer?"

Qasimi added, "The other symbolic connotation is that water is a natural resource and frittering it or not using it properly will lead to its depletion. This is a very important message: To look at natural resources upon which life is based, and upon which the stability of many countries depends."

The International Prize for Arabic Fiction, also known as the Arabic Booker, is regarded as the most prestigious and important literary prize in the Arab world.

It was established in 2007 to promote Arabic literature and to encourage the translation of Arabic novels into other languages.

32nd COMEX focuses on boosting digital investment in Oman

Muscat - The 32nd edition of the communications and information technology exhibition COMEX 2023 kicked off on Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre with spotlight on digital investment.

The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The four-day exhibition aims to boost the concept of digital investment in the sultanate. Over 150 local and international establishments concerned with information technology and communications in the region are taking part in it.

"This year, COMEX focuses on boosting digital investment in Oman and promoting available opportunities in major companies in the market," said H E Eng



Said bin Hamoud bin Said al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

According to H E Ma'awali, the exhibition will witness the inauguration of the first forum for digital proficiency in the govern-

ment sector. The forum aims to highlight the efforts made by government institutions in the field of digital transformation, and to learn about the best regional and global practices, in addition to exploring the future to benefit from innovative solutions.

The Minister informed that the National Programme for the Digital Economy includes eight ambitious and serious executive programmes aimed at creating a thriving digital economy and increasing its contribution to the gross domestic product.

These executive programmes include projects such as government digital transformation, cybersecurity industry, digital industry, artificial intelligence and advanced technologies, space, infrastructure, technofinance, and e-commerce, he explained.

COMEX 2023 is being organised by OITE in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the implementation follow-up unit of Oman Vision 2040.

ITHCA launches startup pitch battle at COMEX

Muscat - ITHCA Group announced the launch of its highly anticipated pitch battle startups at COMEX 2023 on Monday. This competition aims to provide exclusive support and motivation to startups participating in this year's COMEX, fostering their development and growth.

"We are organising the ITHCA pitch battle for startups to offer crucial support to aspiring entrepreneurs," said Eng Said Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group.

By showcasing their companies before a judging committee and engaging with an interested audience and potential investors, Mandhari said the participants will receive valuable consulta-



tions and guidance to advance their businesses.

"It's an opportunity for them to promote their products and services on a larger platform."

Underlining the significance of COMEX as a platform for promotion and advertising of IT companies, Mandhari affirmed that the participating companies would have the opportunity to attract investments, forge contracts, and

establish partnerships within their respective sectors.

ITHCA Group's commitment to being part of this vital technology show, which serves the telecommunications and IT sector, is of high priority, the CEO reiterated.

COMEX welcomes specialised startups from diverse technical fields such as games, online trading, lifestyle, business, entertainment, health and fitness, education, travel, facilities, financial technology, biotechnology, logistics technology, and many more.

Participating startups have the chance to showcase their products and services, and in turn gain valuable insights and guidance

tailored to their specific business and offerings from the judging committee.

The selection process begins with the filtering stage, where 25 startups are chosen to present their companies, services, and activities to the committee. Subsequently, ten startups are selected to advance to the finals.

In the final ceremony, each company has three minutes to present their services and products before the committee and audience.

Top three winners will be announced during the final ceremony. Notably, 50 per cent of the final results will depend on instant and direct voting from the audience present at the ceremony.

CPA launches campaign against prohibited goods

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) on Monday launched a campaign called 'Your awareness protects you' to safeguard customers and markets from prohibited goods.

"The campaign aims to spread awareness on the risks of prohibited goods and encourage a stable and safe market among both suppliers and consumers," said CPA in a statement.

The authority has carried out several inspections in shops and commercial centres in various governorates in its efforts to monitor markets.

Recently, it also organised an awareness lecture - Safe Consumer Culture - at a mosque in Rustaq, South Batinah.

CPA reiterated to suppliers the importance of continuing to cooperate with the authority and its personnel in order to maintain a market safe for all, and for them to fulfil their responsibilities towards the country and society.

MARKET WATCH

MSX304,703.12

SENSEX61,963.68

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian	215.14
Pakistan	744.72
Bangladesh	278.67
Philippines	144.65
Sri Lanka	795.10

*Rates as on May 22

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Ukraine grain deal keeps global supplies flowing: WFP

The Black Sea grain deal, which was set to expire May 18 but was extended for two months, is important to keep global food supplies flowing and stabilise markets for all customers, according to the World Food Programme (WFP).

"We don't see prices rising again and hitting the poorest people the hardest," the UN organization told Anadolu Agency, underlining that the continuation of the initiative was good news for the entire world.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan confirmed the deal's extension last week after talks with Kyiv and Moscow.

Turkey, the UN, Russia and Ukraine signed the initial agreement in Istanbul last July to resume grain exports from three Ukrainian Black Sea ports, which were halted after the Russia-Ukraine war began in February 2022.

A Joint Coordination Center with officials from the three countries and the UN was set up in Istanbul to oversee the shipments.

More than 30mn tonnes of grain have been transported by more than 950 ships at part of the deal.

Vale to develop integrated industrial complex in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat¹

Brazilian mining giant Vale has signed a land reservation agreement with the Port of Duqm Company and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Marafiq to develop an integrated industrial complex (Mega Hub) to produce low-carbon products for the steelmaking industry in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The signing ceremony took place at the Invest Oman Hall, in the presence of H E Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Vice President of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), H E Dr Mansoor bin Talib al Hina'i, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation, and H E Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Farooji, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, for Investment Promotion.

Signed by Eduardo Bartolomeo, Vale's CEO, and Reggy Vermeulen, Port of Duqm Company's CEO, the land reservation agreement between Vale and the Port of Duqm also commissions joint studies to build a Mega Hub in Oman.

Additionally, an MoU was signed by Bartolomeo and Abdullah al Hashmi, Managing Director of Marafiq, a leading utilities service provider in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. The MoU aims to provide the project with access to all the utilities and services required for its operations, while promoting



Reggy Vermeulen (left) and Eduardo Bartolomeo signed the land reservation agreement (ONA)

the use of clean energy and green hydrogen at the Port of Duqm.

The stakeholders have proposed the use of clean energy and green hydrogen in the up-

planned Mega Hub presents in supporting the steel industry's drive towards greener operations. The Port of Duqm, a growing key industrial hub in Oman, is perfectly positioned to sup-

port our expansion plans, and we are excited to demonstrate the potential of Oman and Duqm as an attractive proposition for foreign direct investment."

The Port of Duqm's Vermeulen said, "We are pleased that Vale, a world-renowned mining company, chose to establish its Mega Hub in the Port of Duqm. The strategic location

of our port on key international trade routes, its proximity to large regional markets including India, Africa, and GCC countries, and its world-class infrastructure make it an ideal location to establish such major industrial projects."

"The Port of Duqm is also set to be a future hub for green hydrogen and its derivatives," Vermeulen said. "We are optimistic that it will quickly emerge as a destination of choice for green steel manufacturing and are proud to call ourselves the 'green port'. We are committed to supporting the national goals of Oman, including de-carbonisation, commitment to net-zero, and realising the sustainable development goals laid out in Oman Vision 2040."

Marafiq's Hashimi said that Marafiq is keen to sign this MoU with Vale and provide the project with vital utility services, including power. Hashimi also highlighted the importance of Vale's Mega Hub plans in the

Development of Vale's Mega Hub project is expected to produce HBI and steel products to supply both local and export markets while significantly reducing CO2 emissions

coming Mega Hub. The planned industrial complex will cover an estimated total area of 6.78 sqkm and produce hot briquetted iron (HBI) and other steel products.

"The signing of these agreements marks a significant milestone in establishing Vale as a leader in sustainable mining," Bartolomeo said. "We are thrilled about the prospects the

OQ signs 8 deals for digital transformation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ, the sultanate's global integrated energy group, signed eight agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) on Monday focused on digital transformation and technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

OQ signed the agreements on the sidelines of the COMEX 2023 Exhibition with specialised international companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), demonstrating the group's commitment to staying abreast of technological advancements and enhancing operational efficiency across its facilities and assets.

Ashraf bin Hamad al Mamari, Chief Executive for People, Technology, and Culture at OQ, and



OQ Group signed partnership agreement with Oman Data Park to optimise its cloud systems (Supplied)

Maryam bint Ahmed al Shaibani, OQ's Vice President of Integrated Digital Solutions, signed the agreements with eight companies.

The first agreement involved a partnership with Oman Data Park (ODP) to optimise cloud systems. The second agreement, signed with global technology giant Accenture, will facilitate

the development and operation of OQ's digital factory, accelerating the group's digital transformation journey.

Furthermore, OQ forged alliances with Deloitte and SAP to introduce the SAP ERP 2.0 system, along with Ariba, Concur, and other innovative applications.

In an effort to enhance remote

support capabilities, OQ signed agreements with Marmol Integrated Company and Data Capture Systems Company, enabling technicians to utilise augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technology through devices like virtual reality headsets and camera-equipped helmets. These tools will enable seamless communication with experts in remote areas.

Additionally, OQ entered into an agreement with BHC3i, aiming to leverage advanced artificial intelligence technology for predictive maintenance operations.

Another MoU was signed with SAP to explore the potential transition to the SAP S4-Hana system, which offers improved business processes and streamlined data, transaction, and analytics management.

The eighth agreement was inked with Cisco to explore avenues for enhancing the security of OQ's networks.

In a press statement, Mamari said, "OQ seeks to partner with international companies, national firms, and SMEs in the technology and digital transformation fields to enhance the in-country added value. We believe in the importance of sharing experiences and knowledge, as well as developing the expertise of individuals in these areas."

He emphasised that OQ is guided by a digital transformation strategy that enhances work efficiency, reduces costs, and prioritises personnel safety. Mamari highlighted that OQ awards digital transformation contracts to specialised national companies, empowering them in these domains.

Oil prices drop amid concern over demand

Muscat - Oil prices fell on Monday as economic data raised concerns about oil demand in the world's largest oil consumers, the US and China.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$74.60 per barrel in early morning trade in London, a 1.29 per cent decrease from the closing price of US\$75.58 a barrel in the previous trading session on Friday.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at US\$71.84 per barrel, down 1.39 per cent from the previous session's close of US\$70.84 per barrel.

Last week's mixed macro-economic data signals worldwide also contributed to the

increased perception of market risk.

In the US, retail sales fell below market expectations by 0.4 per cent month-on-month in April, while industrial production exceeded forecasts with a month-on-month rise of 0.5 per cent.

In addition, talks on raising the US debt ceiling have also put pressure on oil prices.

On the supply side, the markets monitored the G-7 leaders' meeting held during May 19-21.

At the meeting, the G-7 group discussed sanctions evasion involving third countries with the aim of limiting Russia's future energy production and curbing trade that supports Russia's military.

Agencies

Europe charges up car battery drive with new plants

Frankfurt, Germany - Europe's efforts to build up its battery-making capacity got a major boost recently as Sweden's Northvolt and Taiwan's ProLogium announced projects to build factories in Germany and France.

The continent has been racing to produce more electric vehicles as part of its green transition, with the clock ticking down on an EU deadline of 2035 to phase out the sale of cars using fossil fuels.

A flurry of new battery plant projects are in the pipeline in Europe, but it is still playing catch up and faces tough competition from both the United States and China.

So the announcement by bat-

tery-maker Northvolt on Friday that it would go ahead with building a multi-billion-euro plant in northern Germany, after months of uncertainty, came as a major boost.

"Germany can look forward to one of the most significant... projects of the energy and transport transition, which will create thousands of green tech jobs," said German Economy Minister Robert Habeck.

The so-called gigafactory will be able to supply around one million electric vehicles with batteries a year, and will create 3,000 jobs in Heide, in Schleswig-Holstein state, Northvolt and Berlin said in a statement.

Construction is expected to



start this year, with deliveries of batteries from the plant to begin in 2026.

After initially announcing the project in early 2022, Northvolt boss Peter Carlsson had warned recently it could be postponed due to surging energy costs in

Germany following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

He also noted that the United States was offering enticing subsidies, as part of a huge programme to accelerate the country's transition to a low-carbon future.

But Northvolt ultimately decided to push on with the project in Germany, home to leading carmakers including Volkswagen - whose 10 brands include Audi, Porsche and Skoda - BMW and Mercedes-Benz.

The German economy ministry said the federal government and Schleswig-Holstein state will provide subsidies for the project.

Subsidies will be provided in part under a EU scheme that was recently introduced as the bloc raced to come up with response to the generous funding on offer from Washington.

The European Commission has to approve the funding, but if it does it will be the first time the scheme has been used in Ger-

many, the economy ministry said.

US subsidy threat

Shortly after confirming it would go ahead with the German project, Northvolt also said it was considering a new factory in Canada or the United States, with a decision expected in the coming months. Canada is also covered by Washington's vast subsidy scheme.

Northvolt already has one battery plant in Sweden, and is building a second. In France meanwhile, Taiwanese battery maker ProLogium announced it will invest 5.2bn euros (US\$5.7bn) in building a new factory in Dunkirk.

Its first European plant, the group hopes it will start production at the end of 2026, and ramp up over several years until it has some 3,000 employees.

The factory will produce batteries for hundreds of thousands of cars once at full capacity.

The group specialises in the development of "solid-state" batteries which are considered more powerful, safer and quicker to charge than the lithium-ion cells often used in electric vehicles. The Taiwanese company said it decided on Dunkirk because it allows proximity to its customers, with many electric vehicle factories located in northern Europe.

AFP

June 1 'hard deadline' to raise US debt ceiling

Washington, US – June 1 remains a “hard deadline” for raising the US debt ceiling, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said, warning that unless the standoff with Republicans in Congress is resolved, the government would be unable to pay its bills through the middle of next month.

The Treasury Department says the government could run out of money and default on its US\$31tn debt as early as June 1 if Congress, where Republicans control the House of Representatives, does not authorise more borrowing.

“We expect to be unable to pay all of our bills in early June, and possibly as soon as June 1st,” Yellen said on NBC’s Meet the Press. “I think that that’s a hard deadline.

The White House and Republican legislators have been locked in tense negotiations for weeks,

with the increasingly hard-right Republican party demanding heavy spending cuts in exchange for raising the debt limit.

A default, the first in US history, would trigger devastating consequences for the global economy, including, the White House says, a US recession.

President Joe Biden has refused to yield to Republican demands, accusing his opponents of putting the US economy at risk for political point scoring.

In the latest spat, on Sunday he slammed Republican demands as “unacceptable” but said a solution can still be found before a default.

Anxiety grew in Washington Monday as President Joe Biden prepared to meet again with Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy for negotiations on raising the US debt ceiling, 10 days before a key deadline to



A billboard in Washington, DC shows the US national debt (AFP)

avoid a disastrous default. After a weekend of near deadlock, Biden arrived back in Washington late Sunday, cutting short a trip to Asia to resume talks ahead of the US Treasury’s June 1 cutoff date for Congress to authorize more borrowing. Stock indexes opened no clear

direction, with the Dow Jones adding 0.02 per cent as Wall Street focused on the standoff.

Biden and McCarthy spoke as the president flew back to the United States from the G7 summit in Japan on Air Force One.

“It went well,” Biden told reporters of the phone call as he arrived at the White House Sunday night. “We’ll talk tomorrow.”

And earlier in the day, McCarthy had said the conversation was “productive” -- in contrast to the sharp words exchanged in a previous round of negotiations.

Still, the two sides seemed far from a final compromise, as Biden said Republicans’ latest demands for spending cuts as a condition for raising the US government borrowing authority were “frankly unacceptable.”

“It’s time for the other side to move from their extreme positions,” he said at a press conference before leaving the G7 summit in Hiroshima.

McCarthy said his own position remained unchanged.

“Washington cannot continue to spend money we do not have at the expense of children and grandchildren,” he said on Twitter after talking to Biden.

Biden said he was looking into an obscure constitutional clause in the 14th Amendment, which states that the validity of public debt “shall not be questioned” – and potentially authorising the president to circumvent Congress and raise the debt ceiling himself.

“I think we have the authority. The question is could it be done and invoked in time,” he said, noting the likelihood of legal challenges to this and the rapidly approaching debt deadline.

AFP

Meta hit with record fine over EU data rules

Dublin, Ireland – Facebook owner Meta has been fined a record 1.2bn euros (US\$1.3bn) for transferring EU user data to the United States in breach of a previous court ruling, Ireland’s regulator announced on Monday.

The Irish Data Protection Commission (DPC), which acts on behalf of the European Union, said the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) had ordered it to collect “an administrative fine in the amount of 1.2bn euros”.

The DPC has been investigating Meta Ireland’s transfer of personal data from the EU to the United States since 2020.

It found that Meta, which has its European headquarters in Dublin, failed to “address the risks to the fundamental rights and freedoms of data subjects” that were identified in a previous ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

The CJEU interprets EU law to make sure it is applied in the same way in all member states.

In response, Meta said it was “disappointed to have been singled out” and the ruling was “flawed, unjustified and sets a dangerous precedent for the countless other companies”.

Meta said it hopes to see the US and EU adopt a new legal framework for the use of personal data in the coming months, following an agreement in principle last year, which could allow it to continue its data transfer



practices.

EU regulators have hit Meta with four fines in six months – and three this year – over data breaches by its Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook services.

In January, the DPC fined the social media giant 390mn euros for breaking data rules in its use of targeted advertising on its apps.

In March, Meta was made to pay 5.5mn euros for breaching the GDPR with its WhatsApp messaging service.

Online trader Amazon was fined 746mn euros in Luxembourg in 2021 for infringing the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In the latest case, the DPC had initially wanted to force Meta to suspend the offending data transfers, saying that a fine “would exceed the extent of powers that could be described as being ‘appropriate, proportionate and necessary’”.

AFP

Britain cuts stake in bailed-out NatWest bank

London, UK – Britain has further cut its stake in bailed-out banking giant NatWest to below 40 per cent, the lender said Monday as it eyes a full return to the private sector.

The government has sold off more shares for almost £1.3bn, taking its holding to just under 39 per cent from about 41 per cent, NatWest said in a statement.

The bank purchased the shares for 268.4 pence each, which was the closing level on Friday. That values the lender at about £25.4bn.

The transaction “demonstrates positive progress on the... path to privatisation”, said chief executive Alison Rose.

London retained a significant stake after it rescued NatWest from collapse during the global financial crisis.

The lender, known at the time as Royal Bank of Scotland, received £45.5bn of taxpayers’ cash in the world’s biggest banking bailout at the height of the 2008 meltdown.

Following a lengthy turnaround, the government had last year cut its stake to below 50 per cent for the first time since the rescue.

Monday’s news comes one month after the lender posted surging first-quarter net profit thanks to rising interest rates in the wake of soaring inflation.

Profit after tax jumped 52 per cent to nearly £1.3bn in the January-March period from a year earlier.

The sector has been boosted as higher interest rates attract savers and also increase returns on loans.

AFP

اس ام ان باور القابضة ش.م.ع.ع. SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG				
Unaudited Consolidated Financial Statements For the Period Ended 31 March 2023				
BOARD OF DIRECTORS’ REPORT				
Dear Shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors (“the Board”) of SMN Power Holding SAOG (“the Company”), I have the pleasure to present the Board of Directors’ Report for the period ended 31 March 2023.				
Corporate Governance The Company has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and applicable circulars issued from time to time by the Capital Market Authority (CMA).				
Operations Providing a safe working environment is a key priority and the Board is pleased to share that during quarter one of 2023, the Health & Safety (“H&S”) performance was excellent with no Lost Time Accident (“LTA”) in line with previous years. SMN Barka power plant completed 5,629 days and Al Rusail power plant 5,153 days without LTA.				
The commercial performance of both plants, SMN Barka Power Company SAOC (“SMN Barka”) and Al Rusail Power Company SAOC (“Al Rusail”), is measured by their reliability which is the ability to deliver the declared capacity as per the contract.				
In quarter one 2023, the reliability at SMN Barka Power and Desalination Plant was 98.7% (98.8% for the same period in 2022) for power and 99.5% (92.3% for the same period in 2022) for water. The reliability at Al Rusail Power Plant was 99.95% (99.7% in 2022) for the same period.				
The Company produced an aggregate net power volume of 710.21Gwh (248.99. GWh for the same period in 2022) and a total volume of 7,563,584 m3 of potable water was delivered (7,857,552 m3 for the same period in 2022).				
All necessary maintenance activities of key equipment were performed in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers’ recommendations, while applying the best industry standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance, during the period.				
Financial Results Total Revenues for the three-month period amounted to RO 16.56 million (RO 12.59 for the same period in 2022), representing an increase of RO 3.97 million. Total Revenues include fixed revenues (Fixed Capacity Fees) and variable revenues (Fuel Charge and Variable Operating & Maintenance Charge).				
The Company generated a consolidated net profit of RO 2.90 million during the three-month period of 2023 compared to a net profit of RO 1.36 million for the same period of 2022. The increase in net profit of RO 1.54 million is mainly due to the following favorable variances compared to the same period in 2022: - Reduction in operating expenses. - Higher other income mainly due to the sale of fuel oil at Al Rusail plant.				
The reduction in Non-Current Assets is driven by the depreciation of the plant (fixed assets). The decrease in Current Assets is due to scheduled debt repayment to lenders.				
Future Outlook The Company will continue its focus on H&S and maintain excellent reliability at both plants.				
In terms of the latest development on the initiatives to prepare for the future of Al Rusail and SMN Barka power plants: - As stated in the OPWP Seven Years Statement 2022-2027, OPWP has launched the Power-2024 and Water-2024 procurement tenders. SMN Barka and Al Rusail have communicated to OPWP about their interests to participate in power 2024 and Water 2024 procurement projects. - SMN Barka is participating in the spot market, however, such participation has no material impact on the Company’s revenue until the expiry of the PWPA framework. - For Al Rusail, the Ancillary Service Agreement with OPWP to sell a capacity of 184.972 MW is active from 1st November 2022 to 31st December 2023 which was disclosed to the market. - Al Rusail has appointed a consultant to assist with the sale and decommissioning process of the retired plant’s equipment. The tender for the sale of RPC plant equipment was announced in May 2023, and the decommissioning process is expected to commence by quarter three of 2023. - The sale of approximately 16 million liters of fuel oil at Al Rusail Plant commenced in March 2023 and is expected to be completed by July 2023. - In terms of dividend distribution, as previously disclosed and in line with the financing arrangements during the IPO, the excess cash generated by SMN Barka is now paid to the lenders and will not flow to the Shareholders until the loans are fully settled or until the time the loans can be restructured. The P(W)PA extension for SMN Barka will be a key factor to potentially restructure the debt in the coming years, remove or defer the cash sweep and allow further dividend distribution. Al Rusail has declared and paid a dividend distribution of RO 3 million in 2022 and any future dividend will be subject to any end of term obligations and other commitments.				
As Chairman of the Board, I would like to thank our Shareholders, not only for their confidence, but also for their continued support and for the expertise they bring into the Company. The Board of Directors expresses its gratitude to OPWP, APSR, the Capital Market Authority (“CMA”) and other governmental and non-governmental bodies for their guidance and support.				
Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment allowing us to contribute effectively to the growth of the Sultanate of Oman.				
Dr. Abdullah Al Yahya’ey Chairman of the Board				
Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2023 (Unaudited)				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	31 March 2023	31 December 2022	31 March 2023	31 December 2022
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	-	-	128,566	130,523
Right-of-use-assets	-	-	280	297
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	166	-
Investment in subsidiaries	27,405	27,405	-	-
Goodwill	-	-	14,952	14,952
	27,405	27,405	143,964	145,772
Current assets				
Inventories	-	-	2,612	2,984
Trade and other receivables	67	50	9,910	8,367
Fixed term cash deposits	-	3,000	2,900	6,711
Cash and bank balances	3,010	60	5,313	8,950
	3,077	3,110	20,735	27,012
TOTAL ASSETS	30,482	30,515	164,699	172,784
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	19,964	19,964	19,964	19,964
Statutory reserve	6,655	6,655	6,691	6,691
Retained earnings	797	3,790	53,029	53,126
Hedging reserve	-	-	141	(178)
Net equity	27,416	30,409	79,825	79,603
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	28,568	45,858
Lease liabilities	-	-	364	365
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	-	15
Provision for end of service benefits	-	-	56	54
Provision for site restoration	-	-	3,041	2,965
Deferred operating income	-	-	808	808
Deferred tax liability	-	-	15,422	15,381
	-	-	48,259	65,446
Current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	23,734	14,705
Lease liabilities	-	-	45	52
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	-	195
Trade and other payables	3,066	106	9,270	9,856
Current tax payable	-	-	3,566	2,927
	3,066	106	36,615	27,735
Total liabilities	3,066	106	84,874	93,181
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	30,482	30,515	164,699	172,784
Net assets per share (RO)	0.137	0.152	0.399	0.400
Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 31 March 2023 (Unaudited)				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	31 March 2023	31 March 2022	31 March 2023	31 March 2022
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000
Revenue	-	-	16,563	12,593
Operating costs	-	-	(12,577)	(9,931)
GROSS PROFIT	-	-	3,986	2,662
General and administrative expenses	(58)	(61)	(224)	(267)
Reversal of expected credit loss	-	-	5	6
(LOSS)/PROFIT FROM OPERATIONS	(58)	(61)	3,767	2,401
Finance charges	-	-	(952)	(936)
Other income	61	61	707	145
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	3	-	3,522	1,610
Income tax	(1)	-	(624)	(254)
NET PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	2	-	2,898	1,356
Other comprehensive income				
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods:				
Change in fair value of cash flow hedge	-	-	319	1,346
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-	319	1,346
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	2	-	3,217	2,702
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.000	0.000	0.015	0.007
SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG, P.O. Box 121, Postal Code 134, Sultanate of Oman, Qurum Building, Building No.1022, 1st Floor, Office No.15, Way No. 1013, Al Qurum – Muscat. Tel. +968 2493 5800, Fax: 2493 5830, E-mail: info@smnpower.com, www.smnpower.com				

Oman takes part in Arab Health Ministers' meeting

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, took part on Sunday in the 59th regular session of the Arab Health Ministers, headed by Algeria. The session was held in Geneva, Switzerland, prior to the 76th session of the World Health Assembly participated by the Arab health ministers.

The meeting was attended by H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, along with H E Idris Abdul Rahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations Office and Dr Ahmed Salim al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The meeting touched upon several topics, including the topics submitted by the Executive Office such as the health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan, and adopting the Arab strategy for a health-friendly



budget.

In addition, the meeting highlighted the Arab Pharmaceutical Industries and Medical Supplies Conference and Exhibition, which the Kingdom of Bahrain will host in December this year.

The meeting also approved the unified word project for the Council of Arab Health Ministers and the activation of the pink portfolio initiative for the health of Arab women.

Furthermore, the meeting discussed the strategy of improving the women's, children's and adolescents' health in the Arab.

It is worth mentioning that the meeting approved new formation of the executive office of the Arab Health Ministers Council with the membership of Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Sultanate of Oman.

Oman Cables partners with Fujairah Gold to achieve concrete sustainable goals

Oman Cables Industry (OCI), leading company in the cables and systems industry which is part of Prysmian Group, visited Fujairah Gold, Vedanta Group, to strengthen its partnership towards sustainable goals.

The two companies, represented by Cinzia Farisè, CEO of Oman Cables, and Puneet Khurana, CEO of Fujairah Gold, signed a collaboration agreement at the presence of Sharief Habib al Awadhi, Director General of Fujairah Free Zone Authority, as guest of honour, with the scope to explore potential opportunities in different areas of collaboration: From jointly develop green copper rod from 100% secondary copper, to establish acceptability of Green Copper rod for cable manufacturing and jointly develop a value proposition for Green Copper to achieve sustainability goals and support Net Zero Carbon targets by 2050.

OCI's 'Innovation for Sustainability' approach has three fundamental principles and ambitions: Environmental, social and innovation responsibility. The company believes in minimising its environmental impact and has established a set of guiding criteria that directs its innovation efforts involving all value chain, from upstream - through responsible sourcing - to downstream, partnering up with Customers to reduce losses during use phase.

This requires the adoption of a design for sustainability approach that includes strict criteria on carbon footprint, potential recyclability, hazardous substances, recycle input rate, transmission efficiency and environmental benefits in all products and new technologies. By prioritising these criteria, OCI can develop products that are eco-friendly, energy-efficient and cost-effective, enabling Customers to choose greener options.

After a recent successful Innovation Day titled 'Powering a Sustainable Future' conducted together with all Customers across the GCC Region, OCI is now focusing a responsible sourcing. Oman Cables CEO Cinzia Farisè said, "We are embarking on a transformational journey. Our ambition towards sustainability requires a joint effort with all our key stakeholders. While pursuing our net zero ambition, we must partner with the best ESG providers who embrace our same values and commitment to sustainability."

Puneet Khurana, CEO of Fujairah Gold concluded, "Vedanta is committed to delivering sustainable and responsible growth, which creates value for both our shareholders and all our stakeholders. We proactively engage to incorporate sustainability in all our practices, Embracing the philosophy of 'Zero Harm, Zero Waste, Zero Discharge. We are very happy to associate with Oman Cables, Prysmian group and will work closely with them to pursue our net Zero ambition."

Oman Cables Industry



SAOG) is a leading cable manufacturer based in the Sultanate of Oman, with over 35 years of experience in the industry. The company develops, manufactures, and markets a wide range of electrical products, including medium voltage power cables, low voltage power & control cables, instrumentation cables, pilot cables, overhead power transmission line conductors, and building wires.

Oman Cables Industry is listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and is part of the Prysmian Group, a global leader in the cable industry. With offices in Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and KSA, the company also has an extensive network of distributors and agents throughout the Middle East, Africa, Turkey & India (MEAT) region.

The company's commitment to quality and innovation has led to its success in the global market, with Oman Cables Industry ranking among the Top Global Wire and Cable Producers. The company also offers cables with unique specifications to meet various applications and environmental conditions, as well as customer requirements.

MoE organises seminar on 'positive citizenship' for building responsible society

The Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development 'Citizenship Department', implemented on Monday morning a training seminar entitled 'Positive Citizenship towards Building a Responsible Society'.

The training seminar targeted twenty members of the Parents Councils in the Governorate of Muscat and took place at the training centre in Al Khuwair, Muscat.

Sabaha al Haimli, an educational researcher in the Citizenship Programmes Department at the Citizenship Department carried out the seminar presenting



two papers.

The first paper was entitled 'The Role of Educational Institutions in Promoting Positive Citizenship Values (The Family as a Model)'.

The paper dealt with the concept of positive citizenship, its importance at the level of individuals and society, its values, the importance of promoting it, the manifestations of strengthening it in the family and the school, and the challenges facing educational institutions in applying it, as well as ways to overcome them.

The second paper was titled 'The Role of Social Media in Promoting the Values of Positive Citizenship', which addressed the concept of social media, models of which are used in our society, their importance in promoting the values of positive citizenship, and the topics and issues they address and affect positive citizenship.

The training seminar aims to educate parents about the necessity of promoting the values of citizenship, not spreading rumors, maintaining public order and respecting laws, and instilling a positive outlook towards the achievements gained.

OHA signs Badr Al Samaa as medical partner for men's junior Asia Cup in Dhofar



Oman Hockey Association (OHA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals making the latter official medical partner for the 10-nation Dhofar Municipality Men's Hockey Junior Asia Cup - 2023.

The ninth edition of the Men's Junior Asia Cup is set to take place in Salalah, Oman. The event will start on May 23 and conclude on June 1.

The official MoU signing ceremony was done at the headquarters of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals in Ruwi, a release stated.

On behalf of Badr Al Samaa, the MoU was signed by its managing directors Abdul Latheef and Dr P A Mohammed, and executive director Moideen Bilal.

Dr Marwan al Juma, president Oman Hockey Association, signed the MoU from the association's side in presence of other top officials from the two groups.

In a joint statement, Abdul Latheef and Dr P A Mohammed hailed the initiatives taken by OHA to develop hockey in Oman and congratulated them for hosting numerous international hockey events for top repute. They assured all possible medical support in all the events of the association.

"The Asian Junior Competitions aim to set a benchmark, creating a significant exposure and developmental opportunity for our young athletes in Asia. We aspire our youth to experience only the best," said OHA chairman Dr Marwan al Juma. He appreciated continuous efforts and support of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals in ensuring safety of the players.

Badr Al Samaa's executive director Moiden Bilal said that the association with sporting events, like this, helps Badr Al Samaa spread the awareness and importance of good health and fitness. He said the fitness and safety of players is paramount in the success of any sport and Badr Al Samaa takes us all initiatives to ensure the safety of players.

Ten junior national teams from around Asia will participate in this tournament. The contestants include Bangladesh, Chinese Taipei, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan, Thailand and Uzbekistan.

Top three teams from the title tournament, apart from Malaysia which has already qualified as the host, will qualify for the FIH Men's Junior Hockey World Cup 2023.



Indian Embassy with Oman's G20 team holds beach cleaning drive at Shatti al Qurum

Embassy of India, Muscat in association with Oman's G20 team successfully organised a beach cleaning drive at Shatti al Qurum beach on Sunday.

The initiative was taken as part of India's ongoing G20 Presidency, with the objective of promoting environmental sustainability and community engagement.

The beach cleaning drive witnessed a participation of more than 100 volunteers, including students and members of Oman's G20 team.

The volunteers actively contributed their time and efforts towards the cleaning and rejuvenation of Shatti al Qurum beach, making it a more pleasant environment for all.

"The esteemed presence of



Pankaj Khimji Oman's Sherpa of the G20 Secretariat, and H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, further elevated the significance of this event,' the embassy stated

in a press release.

During the event, Khimji and H E Narang addressed the media, highlighting the importance of collective action in addressing environmental challenges and the need for continued cooperation between nations.

'The Embassy of India in Muscat would like to express its sincere gratitude to all the volunteers, students, and members of Oman's G20 team who selflessly contributed their time and energy to make the beach cleaning drive a resounding success. Their commitment and enthusiasm exemplify the spirit of collaboration and community engagement that is essential in achieving our common goals,' the embassy added.

COMEX 2023

Ministry of Health launches apps, online services as it participates in mega event

The Ministry of Health (MoH) is taking part in Oman's official technology show COMEX 2023, which kicked off on Monday under the patronage of H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The event - which is being held at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) - will continue until Thursday.

As digital transformation is part of the national trend, the Ministry of Health sought to implement digital strategies and techniques to promote procedures and performance. Therefore, the ministry launched several electronic systems and applications, including:

The personal health record, known as Al-Shifa app, is for every citizen and resident, providing the patient's health data from all health institutions using the civil number.

It is a special platform for individuals saving and exchanging medical information between patients and doctors and offers consultations with health service providers, said a press release.

The app provides many services such as booking appointments, the virtual clinic, access to health records and reports, medical history, dependents (view health records of children under 18 years old), prescriptions, lab investigations, immunization, procedure reports, blood donation details, vital signs, documents, organ donation, in addition to scheduled appointments and referrals among health institutions.

The appointment booking services has been activated in five health centres - Azaibah Health Centre, Bousher Health Centre, Firq Health Centre, Musanna Health Centre and Naseem Health Centre.

The virtual clinic service (telemedicine) is activated in the Royal Hospital and Khoula



Hospital.

Al-Shifa application can be downloaded from the known stores App Store, Google play, or Huawei App Gallery. The Civil number must be activated by the medical records in the health institution.

Al-Shifa Pulse system is one of the smart electronic systems developed by the Directorate General of Information Technology. It draws most of its data from the Al-Shifa system. It aims to review an interactive statistical dashboard on the

app links the government and private health institutions to the Royal Oman Police and the Directorate General of Planning & Studies. Ajyal system electronically notifies the Civil Status Centres of any hospital birth or death case.

This system, which the Directorate General of Information Technology developed, has significantly contributed to the electronic census 2020 by the vital data census system on birth and death reports with more than 120 health institutions using the Ajyal system.

The National Donor and Donation Registry (NBDR) system integrates the different blood banks within the Sultanate of Oman to build a central donor and donation registry, blood product inventory, and a transfusion database so that a nation-wide safe blood donation and transfusion environment can be achieved through this integration and sharing of data.

E-Health Portal: this project focuses on improving and implementing a new version of the e-health portal to maintain many of its current electronic services and improve content management and access features by using up-to-date technologies and best practices with the other sectors.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Health always seeks to facilitate health services for patients by utilising technology such as peritoneal dialysis.

Peritoneal dialysis is one of the treatments the Ministry of Health currently uses for patients with kidney failure. It is a home-based service in which the patient's presence at the dialysis centers is not required. Patient and their family are being trained on the dialysis method.

The patient is being followed once a month for medical check-ups and receiving medicines.

Omantel focuses on earth monitoring, ICT solutions

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, will once again demonstrate its cutting-edge solutions and its leadership status in ICT at COMEX, Oman's official technology, communications, innovation and digital transformation show.

The Omantel booth is themed on space and ICT, in view of its expanding horizons in creating solutions for diverse sectors, that aligns with the key pillars of Oman vision 2040. As such, visitors will get immersive glimpses of the different ICT solutions, earth monitoring solutions, Innovation labs start-ups and a wide range of different services, that illustrate the innovation and technology aspect of the booth.



Omantel CEO Aladdin Bait-fadhl said, "COMEX is a vantage platform to showcase to the region and the world Omantel's innovation-driven solutions that empower all sizes of enterprises to accelerate their digital transformation, as part of Oman's Vision 2040 which is

Bank Nizwa continues to champion Fintech as part of commitment to digital innovation

Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, is proud to announce its unwavering support for COMEX 2023, Oman's prestigious technology, communications, innovation and digital transformation show.

As the main Islamic Banking partner, Bank Nizwa aims to leverage Oman's fintech and banking sector to drive innovation and digitalisation in the industry.

The 32nd Annual Hybrid Event, taking place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), as well as through Virtual Support Platforms, will showcase a wide array of exhibitions, conferences, awards, workshops, seminars, certified



training programmes, gaming, B2B meetings and other engaging attractions.

Commenting on their participation at COMEX 2023, Bank Nizwa's chief executive officer Khaled al Kaye said, "At Bank Nizwa, we firmly believe that digitalisation and innovation go hand in hand with our core values."

Kayed asserted that the bank is committed to staying at the forefront of this transformative wave, continuously investing in cutting-edge technologies and nurturing a culture of creativity and collaboration.

"By doing so, we not only enhance customer experiences but also contribute to the growth and sustainability of the

communities we serve. We remain focused on delivering seamless digital experiences, empowering our customers with real-time access to their finances and providing secure and transparent transactions," the bank CEO further said.

At COMEX 2023, the bank presented its cutting-edge digital banking offerings to visitors, including a Digital Onboarding section that allows individuals to open an account with Bank Nizwa seamlessly through the use of a QR code.

This digital onboarding feature brings Islamic banking closer to a wider audience and simplifies the account opening process for prospective customers.

Al Mouj Marina makes boating more accessible with launch of Captain's Club

Al Mouj Marina is making boating more accessible with the launch of the Captain's Club, a subscription-based rental scheme where over 100 boats can be enjoyed at a collection of marinas across the MENA region, freeing boating enthusiasts from the cost of ownership.

Al Mouj Marina sits at the heart of the sultanate's premier lifestyle destination Al Mouj Muscat and the club opens up the award-winning harbour and the pleasure of ocean-going adventures off the coast of Oman to a wider group of people.

Boats can be taken out and enjoyed either on a month-by-month or annual basis, saving Captain's Club members from the responsibilities and expenses typically associated with ownership such as mooring fees and maintenance.

In addition to Al Mouj Muscat, the Captain's Club operates at five world-class marinas in the UAE and, once members have completed a two-day training course, they have the freedom and flexibility to pre-book a powerboat at any of the participating locations up to several months in advance.

Weekend or week-day use is determined by the type of membership and associated payment plans which include Silver, Pearl and Gold and where Silver membership costs only RO115 per month and RO1150 for the whole year for week day use only.



Pearl makes it possible for boats to be taken out during the week and over some weekends for RO155 per month or an annual fee of RO1600, and Gold provides 365-day use for a cost of RO186 per month or RO2000 for the year.

Boat availability at all of the harbours is guaranteed and other benefits include the option to cruise in the evening and stay overnight, enlist the expertise of experienced captains, enjoy complimentary trips, reserve boats in advance and freeze annual membership for 60 days to fit around plans.

"The Captain's Club brings this exhilarating leisure experience within the reach of a much wider audience to get the opportunity to experience what Al Mouj Marina and the sear of Oman has to offer, and is extremely good value and a stress free alternative to ownership," said Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, the chief executive officer of Al Mouj Muscat.

"It also opens up our wonderful marina to more people, many from further afield, and with an abundance of ocean-front cafes, restaurants and shops alongside at Al Mouj Muscat, members have the opportunity to make their experience truly memorable."

Al Mouj Marina is a 400-berth facility, the first in the region to be awarded International Clean Marina and 5 Gold Anchor accreditation and has one of the

Meethaq's Ikram for pensioners hailed for innovative facilities

The Ikram package launched by Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has been hailed by customers for its innovative facilities and services.

In line with its strategy to improve financial inclusion in Oman, Meethaq's Ikram package offers a specialised package of sharia'a-compliant financing products with attractive profit rates catering to Omani pensioners.

The Ikram package was launched earlier in the beginning of 2023 after a detailed study of the needs of retirees from government and private institutions.

On this occasion, Sami Bait Rashid, assistant general manager, Retail Banking - Meethaq, said, "Meethaq developed the Ikram pensioner package to offer a full suite of Islamic financial services and facilities that meet our customers' needs and aspirations. We are hence delighted to see the excellent response to this newly-launched package which is playing a key role in bringing about greater financial inclusion for retirees."

"In this context, I would like to mention that Meethaq will continue to introduce new financial products and services targeting different sections of



society in line with the changing needs of our customers to whom I extend thanks for their continuous trust in Meethaq's products and services."

Both current and new customers can benefit from the Ikram package which offers a wide range of services, competitive profit rates, exclusive financing offers, credit card offers and discounts at selected merchant partner outlets.

Under Ikram, pensioners can apply for different types of financing solutions and credit cards till the age of 70. Housing finance will be provided up to a maximum of 25 years or till the customer is 70 years old.

Meethaq is continuously introducing new financial solutions and services for different sections of society in line with the changing needs of its customers and the nation's continuous progress and development. With its innovative sharia'a based products, Meethaq's services continue to witness a remarkable growth.

It must be noted that every Meethaq product goes through the process of sharia'a-compliance certification by the Sharia'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

As the leader in the Islamic banking industry in Oman, Meethaq has a strong track record of winning many prestigious local, regional and international awards.

EU talks in Seoul: N Korea, Ukraine top agenda

The European Council president and the European Commission president are on their first visit to Seoul

Seoul, South Korea - Two European leaders met South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol for a summit in Seoul on Monday where they discussed trade agreements, Ukraine, and North Korea's banned weapons programmes.

European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen are on their first visit to the East Asian country as South Korea and Europe mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties.

"South Korea and the European Union are important cooperative partners that share the universal values of freedom, human rights, and the rule of law, and over the past 60 years, cooperation has developed in all areas, including politics, economy, and the global agenda," Yoon told a joint news conference after the talks.

The leaders agreed to increase cooperation in the face of global threats that include the war in Ukraine and North Korea's banned weapons programmes, according to a joint statement.

They condemned North Korea's 'repeated illegal ballistic missile launches as well as its ongoing nuclear development and references to the possible use of nuclear weapons' and expressed support for Seoul's efforts to persuade Pyongyang to give up such weapons.

"We shared the understanding that North Korea's nuclear and missile development poses a serious threat to global security beyond the Korean Peninsula, and agreed to closely cooperate for the international community's united response to North Korea's provocations," Yoon said.

The trio of leaders also agreed to boost trade ties with more talks on issues 'including supply chain resilience and... export controls and economic coercion'.

South Korea is one of the world's largest producers of crucial computer chips, securing supplies of which has become a key issue internationally, with



South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol speaks as European Council President Charles Michel (left) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (right) look on during a press briefing in Seoul on Monday (AFP)

the United States and China locked in a fierce battle for control of the chips market.

Ramon Pacheco Pardo, a professor of international relations at King's College London, said economic security was a key

discussion, with 'supply chain resilience' a priority for both Europe and South Korea.

"The EU would like to ensure greater investment, joint research and greater cooperation in sectors such as semiconduc-

tors, electric batteries or AI, where South Korean and other international firms are seen to be ahead of Europe," Pardo told AFP. "Also, both sides remain committed to the (World Trade Organization) in a way that

China and the US are not, and they will want to discuss how to reinforce trade multilateralism."

Ukraine agenda

The leaders also discussed support for Ukraine to meet financial, material, security and humanitarian needs', the statement said.

Seoul has a long-standing policy of not providing weapons to active conflict zones, although Yoon has hinted that this could change. The president's office warned last month that Seoul's decision on whether to send military aid to Kyiv depended on Russia's actions.

A large attack against civilians could tip the balance, it said. The leaders called for increased collective pressure on Russia and reaffirmed their commitment to stand by Ukraine.

Yoon held talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on the sidelines of the G7 in Japan on Sunday, following a meeting with Zelensky's wife, Olena Zelenska, in Seoul last week. During his meeting with Zelensky in Hiroshima, Yoon promised additional non-lethal aid to Ukraine, including demining equipment and ambulances, at the request of the Ukrainian president, according to South Korea's presidential office.

AFP

We agreed to cooperate for the international community's united response to North Korea's provocations

YOON SUK YEOL

Thailand coalition silent on royal insult law reform

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand's government-in-waiting on Monday announced ambitious plans to rewrite the constitution and end military conscription, but made no mention of highly controversial proposals to change royal insult laws.

The eight-party coalition, headed by the progressive Move Forward Party (MFP), inked a deal outlining nearly two dozen policies on which they all agree.

MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat said again on Monday that he was confident of becoming prime minister, but he faces an uphill battle because of opposition within the military-allied Senate to his plans to reform lese-majeste legislation.

"It's another historic moment that shows we can transform the government to democracy peacefully," Pita told reporters, noting the deal was being signed on the ninth anniversary of the military coup that brought Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to power. "The purpose of this MOU (memorandum of under-



Move Forward Party leader and prime ministerial candidate Pita Limjaroenrat speaks to the press in Bangkok on Monday (AFP)

standing) is to collect the agenda that all parties agree and are ready to push in government and parliament."

MFP and fellow opposition outfit Pheu Thai dominated the May 14 election, in which voters delivered a humiliating defeat to ruling conservative army-linked parties. Monday's wide-ranging agreement - which gives only broad policy topics - includes a commitment to rewrite the 2017 constitution, which was drawn up by the then-ruling military

junta headed by Prayut.

But it contains no mention of plans to reform the royal defamation laws that shield King Maha Vajiralongkorn from criticism.

Pita insists MFP will not back away from its campaign pledge to change the law, but the stance is spooking Thailand's conservative royalist-military establishment.

Even discussing lese-majeste reform was taboo until recently. AFP

At least 20 dead in Guyana school dormitory fire, says government

Georgetown, Guyana - At least 20 people were killed and several injured on Sunday in a school dormitory fire in Guyana, the government said in a statement, with the nation's president calling it a 'major disaster'.

"This is a major disaster. It is horrible, it is painful," the South American nation's President Irfaan Ali said on Sunday night.

The death toll had risen to 20 and several people were injured in the fire at the Mahdia Secondary School in central Guyana, the government statement said.

"We have lost many beautiful souls in that fire," it added. "We ask that our prayers continue to be with these children, their families, and communities."

Ali said he had ordered arrangements be made in the capital Georgetown's two major hospitals 'so that every single child who requires attention be given the best possible opportunity to get that attention'.

Private and military planes have been sent to Mahdia, lo-



Children rescued during a Mahdia secondary school dormitory fire are transferred by medical personnel, firefighters and policemen to hospitals in Georgetown, Guyana on Monday (AFP)

cated about 200km (124 miles) south of Georgetown, as the region is affected by heavy rains.

"Five planes have already taken off to Mahdia to support the regional health officials with additional medical supplies and medivacs," the government statement said.

"At this moment, seven children are prepared to be medivac-

ated to Georgetown."

At least one plane with three evacuees arrived in Georgetown, according to an AFP journalist.

The government said officials were supporting efforts at Ogle airport in the capital to 'receive the critical patients and coordinate an emergency plan of action'. "A full-scale medical emergency action plan has been

launched," it added.

Natasha Singh-Lewis, an opposition MP, called for an investigation into the fire's cause.

"We need to understand how this most horrific and deadly incident occurred and take all necessary measures to prevent such a tragedy from happening again," she said.

AFP

Greece eyes new vote as PM seeks absolute majority

Athens, Greece - Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Monday he was seeking a new vote as soon as on June 25 in order to obtain a ruling majority, a day after his party won national elections that failed to produce a single-party government.

The conservative New Democracy party of Mitsotakis trounced its rivals in Sunday's vote, with a 20-point lead over its nearest contender - Syriza, led by leftist Alexis Tsipras.

Voters handed the conservatives their best result since 2007, crediting the party with bringing economic stability back to a nation once known as an EU laggard. 'Shock and awe', headlined left-wing daily *Efsyn* on Monday, summing up the feeling shared by both New Democracy and Syriza voters, while pro-government Proto Thema noted that the double-digit margin was the widest seen since 1974.

The 'political earthquake' hailed by Mitsotakis sent the Athens stock market to its highest in almost a decade.

But the win fell five seats short



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis speaks with Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou ahead of their meeting at the Presidential Palace in Athens, on Monday (AFP)

of an outright majority, leaving Mitsotakis with the option of either seeking a coalition or calling a new vote.

The 55-year-old Harvard graduate on Monday declined power sharing, telling President Katerina Sakellariopoulou, who handed him the mandate to form a government, that it was not possible to form a coalition under the current parliamentary line-

up. Greece should head for new elections 'as soon as possible', he said.

Following Mitsotakis' rejection, Greece will continue going through the motions required under the constitution - with the president then handing similar mandates to Syriza and then third-placed socialist party Pasok-Kinal.

The bids are also doomed to

failure, given Sunday's result.

Hours after the vote, Tsipras, too, had set the stage for a new vote, saying the next battle will be 'critical and final'.

A senior judge will eventually be named interim prime minister and call for new elections.

In power over the last four years, former McKinsey consultant Mitsotakis steered the country through the pandemic which

devastated Greece's vital tourism industry.

On his watch, the erstwhile EU economic headache has enjoyed a post-COVID revival, booking growth of 5.9 per cent in 2022.

With unemployment and inflation falling, and growth this year projected at twice that of the European Union average, Greece's outlook was a far cry from the throes of the crippling debt crisis a decade ago.

Mitsotakis' term however was blighted by a wiretapping scandal as well as a train crash that claimed 57 lives in February.

The government initially blamed the accident - Greece's worst-ever rail disaster - on human error, even though the country's notoriously poor rail network has suffered from years of under-investment.

Nevertheless, neither the accident nor the wiretapping scandal appeared to have dented support for his conservatives - who scored a far bigger win than that predicted by opinion polls ahead of the vote.

AFP

Around 15 people killed in Burkina attack: Sources

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - More than a dozen people, thought to be mostly shepherds, have been killed in an attack in eastern Burkina Faso, security and local sources told AFP on Monday.

On Sunday 'several dozen terrorists attacked the outskirts of Kompienga' - the capital of the province of the same name - and killed 'around 15 people', a resident told AFP.

The attack was confirmed by a security source and another resident.

The latest attack caps a bloody week for the impoverished landlocked Sahel state, which is struggling with a militant insurgency that swept in from neighbouring Mali in 2015.

At least twelve civilians were killed in an attack by suspected militants in an area of western Burkina Faso bordering Mali on Thursday, a local official and residents told AFP.

Around 20 people were

killed in the series of raids on villages in the country's troubled north, sources said.

And there were reports on Friday that another 20 people had been killed in separate attacks in eastern Burkina Faso.

Last Monday, armed men raided the village of Kaongo in the southeastern province of Koulpelogo, killing at least 11 people including two women and children.

Two days later the neighbouring village of Bilguim-doure was targeted, 'leaving around 10 dead', a local official said.

The attackers torched homes and stores in the two villages and made off with cattle, the official added.

People living in the district said that local residents were fleeing the area, terrified of further attacks. Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been facing mounting violence from militant organisations.

AFP

Fighting rages in Sudan’s capital as truce deadline nears

Khartoum, Sudan - Gunfire and explosions again rocked Sudan's capital on Monday, hours before a one-week humanitarian ceasefire was due to take effect after a series of previous truce deals were all violated.

The United States and Saudi Arabia on Sunday announced that the ceasefire agreed between the rival camps would take effect at 9:45pm (1945 GMT) Monday to enable humanitarian assistance to civilians.

Desperate residents voiced hopes that the new agreement will stem the brutal warfare that has shaken the capital Khartoum and other parts of the impoverished country.

Fighting erupted on April 15 between the army, led by Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces commanded by Burhan's former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

The two sides on Sunday affirmed that they would respect the ceasefire, which was welcomed by the United Nations, African Union and East African bloc IGAD.

But for the 37th consecutive day, the capital of five million awoke to the sound of air strikes and anti-aircraft fire, said witnesses, as the city endures sweltering heat and only intermittent water and power supplies.



A vehicle of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces drives down al-Sittin (sixty) road in Khartoum, on Monday (AFP)

AFP. "We have seen no sign that the Rapid Support Forces are preparing to withdraw from the streets." Around 1,000 people have been killed and more than a million displaced in the more than five weeks of violence that have plunged the already poverty-stricken country deeper into humanitarian crisis.

Lifeline

Despite the previous breached truces, war-weary civilians clung to hope that the upcoming ceasefire would hold, allowing desperately needed aid to bolster the dwindling supplies of food, medicine and other vital resources.

For residents like Khaled Saleh, who lives in the capital's twin city of Omdurman across the Nile, the latest truce pledges are a lifeline.

"With a ceasefire, running water can be restored and I will finally be able to see a doctor because I am supposed to see one regularly for my diabetes and high blood pressure," he told AFP.

Medics have repeatedly warned that the healthcare system is on the verge of collapse in Khartoum and elsewhere, particularly the western Darfur region that has been wracked by decades of deadly conflict.

The joint US-Saudi statement

sought to assure that this ceasefire would be respected, saying it was 'signed by the parties and will be supported by a US-Saudi and international-supported ceasefire monitoring mechanism'. The UN's envoy to Sudan Volker Perthes was due to brief the Security Council on the situation in the country on Monday evening.

Burhan and Daglo in October 2021 jointly staged a coup that ousted a civilian government, derailed a fragile transition to democracy put in place after the 2019 overthrow of former autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

AFP

Israeli forces kill three Palestinians

The three fighters were killed in a raid on a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank

Jerusalem - Israeli forces killed three Palestinian fighters on Monday in a raid on a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank.

In a statement, the Palestinian health ministry identified the three men killed in Balata camp in Nablus as Muhammad Abu Zaytoun, 32, Fathi Abu Rizk, 30, and Abdullah Abu Hamdan, 24.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the armed wing of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party, said in a statement that the three were among the group's 'fighters'.

The group's emblem was wrapped around the foreheads of the men in a morgue, while their bodies were shrouded in the Palestinian flag.

The Israeli army said it had shot several fighters when a gun battle erupted during a 'counter-terrorism' operation.

During the operation, 'armed suspects fired at the soldiers, who responded with live fire. Hits were identified,' it said.

The army added in a statement that it 'apprehended three wanted individuals suspected of involvement in violent activity', and that weapons and ammunition were seized.



Mourners march with the bodies of Palestinian fighters killed overnight in the Balata camp for Palestinian refugees on the outskirts of Nablus in the occupied West Bank on Monday (AFP)

Palestinian presidency spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh described the killings as a 'veritable massacre' and charged that repeated Israeli raids and attacks by settlers constituted a 'major war crime and a collective punishment'. He said 'silence' from the United States had emboldened Israelis to escalate attacks, calling on Washington to 'immediately intervene to stop the Israeli madness that will drag the region toward explosion'.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War and its forces regularly launch incursions into Palestinian cities, which are nominally under the control of Abbas's Palestinian Authority.

Deadly military operations

have surged in recent months across the Palestinian territory.

Witnesses told AFP that Israeli forces raided several houses in the camp overnight in search of people wanted by the army.

Gunfire and loud explosions rocked the camp, the witnesses said, adding that a house was demolished. Israel's army, meanwhile, said it had 'located in one

of the residences an explosives manufacturing site' and detonated it.

Following the raid, Palestinians inspected the rubble of a damaged building and salvaged belongings.

The Hamas fighter group, which rules the blockaded Gaza Strip, described those killed as 'freedom fighters'.

"Hamas reiterates that resisting the (Israeli) occupation is a legitimate right for the Palestinian people in their quest for freedom," the group said in a statement.

Densely-populated Balata is home to some 27,000 people, making it the largest camp in the West Bank.

AFP

Iran: Raisi replaces chief of security

Tehran, Iran - Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi on Monday appointed a Revolutionary Guards general as the new secretary of the country's top security body, replacing longtime chief and leading Gulf mediator Ali Shamkhani.

"Ali Akbar Ahmadian was appointed as the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council by the decree of the president," the official presidential website reported.

Ahmadian, who studied at the National Defence University, was in charge of the strategic centre of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps before his appointment to the new post, according to the website.

He was also a member of the Expediency Council, which serves as an advisory board to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Ahmadian has also previously served as commander of the Revolutionary Guards' naval forces and the head of the Guards' joint staff, the presidential website added. The presidential decree ends the nearly decade-long tenure of Ali Shamkhani, 67, who played a key role in Iran's landmark rapprochement with Sunni powerhouse Saudi Arabia in March.

AFP

Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant reconnected to Ukraine grid

Moscow, Russia - The occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant has been reconnected to Ukraine's electricity grid again after being offline for several hours, officials in Kyiv said on Monday.

Earlier on Monday Ukraine's nuclear agency Energoatom had accused Russia of carrying out attacks that caused a power cut.

It said it was the seventh time the plant entered 'blackout mode' since Moscow's troops took control in March 2022.

"The station is switching to power from the Ukrainian energy system," Ukrenergo, Ukraine's state grid operator, said in a statement later on Monday.

"Despite the enemy's morning attack, Ukraine's energy system is operating in a stable fashion," Ukrenergo said, adding that there was enough electricity to 'cover the needs of consumers'.

Located in the southeastern region of Zaporizhzhia, the six-reactor plant is the largest in Europe. The grid operator said that in the eastern region of Dnipro, high-voltage lines had been damaged as a result of Moscow's latest strikes.

The Dnipro governor said an overnight aerial attack had been reported, with four Russian missiles and 15 drones downed.

The last power cut at Zaporizhzhia had been caused by another wave of Russian missile attacks, Energoatom said.

The UN's nuclear chief Rafael Grossi, who has tried to negotiate to reach a deal on the safety of the plant, said it was the seventh power cut at the nuclear facility during the war.

AFP



Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant

Iraqi, Syrian Kurds divided over Erdogan’s battle

Arbil, Iraq - Turkey's presidential election is being anxiously watched by Kurds in Syria and Iraq as economic interests compete with fears of a regional military escalation against some Kurdish groups.

The long-running and deadly conflict between Ankara and militant groups from the ethnic Kurdish minority has spilled across the borders of both Iraq and Syria. But Turkey is also a major economic partner for northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdish province which has long exported oil through a pipeline that runs through Turkey and has trade ties worth billions.

"Economically, there are mutual benefits," said Iraqi political scientist Mohamed Ezzedine.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, having governed for 20 years, has fostered key strategic links with Iraqi Kurdistan's President Nechirvan Barzani, who has been in his post since 2019 after holding senior government positions for decades.

After the first round of elec-



People gather at a market in Arbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq, on May 16 (AFP)

Since Erdogan became president, we have been satisfied. There is a lot of trade with Turkey, the economic situation has improved

AHMED KROUANJ

tions, Barzani called Erdogan, the Turkish 'reis' (chief), to express 'confidence and optimism' he would defeat challenger Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

But some Kurds in Iraq and across the border in Syria fear an

Erdogan victory will see a military escalation in their home regions.

Fighting between Ankara's army and Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) militants from Turkey has for decades spilled over into Iraqi Kurdistan, a rugged mountain re-

gion where both sides operate military bases - with civilians often caught in the crossfire.

In northeast Syria, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) have established a semi-autonomous administration amid the chaos of the long-running war, and the group is backed by the United States as part of an anti-militant coalition.

Ankara, however, considers them an extension of the PKK, which is labelled a terrorist group by Turkey and its key Western allies, and has waged successive military campaigns against them.

Despite the conflict's impact in Iraqi Kurdistan, the region also benefits from its neighbour, with trade ties worth an estimated US\$12bn in 2022.

Many local businesses would like to keep things the way they are.

"Since Erdogan became president, we have been satisfied," said Ahmed Krouanji, who runs a shop in Arbil's market. "There is a lot of trade with Turkey, the economic situation has improved." Others express views

reflecting solidarity with Kurds across the border.

An Erdogan victory 'is not in the interests of the Kurds of Turkey', said Ali Khodr, a man aged in his thirties.

Turkey's leading pro-Kurdish party, the People's Democratic Party, denounces Ankara's persecution of its Kurdish minority and backs Kilicdaroglu.

But the only consolation for the president's opponents after first-round voting that delivered the incumbent a comfortable lead, was that for the first time, Erdogan has been forced into a runoff.

Over two decades, Arbil's leaders have forged close ties with the Turkish president, who receives Nechirvan Barzani and his cousin, Prime Minister Masrour Barzani, on their regular visits to Ankara.

"The government of Kurdistan has always tried to have good relations with Turkey, which is their gateway to the rest of the world," said Ezzedine. "This affinity was built on economic foundations."

AFP

INDIA

Purpose of Rs 2000 notes in system fulfilled: RBI governor

Mumbai, Maharashtra - Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday reiterated that Rs 2000 notes will continue to be a legal tender, after the Central bank's announcement that the notes will be withdrawn from circulation.

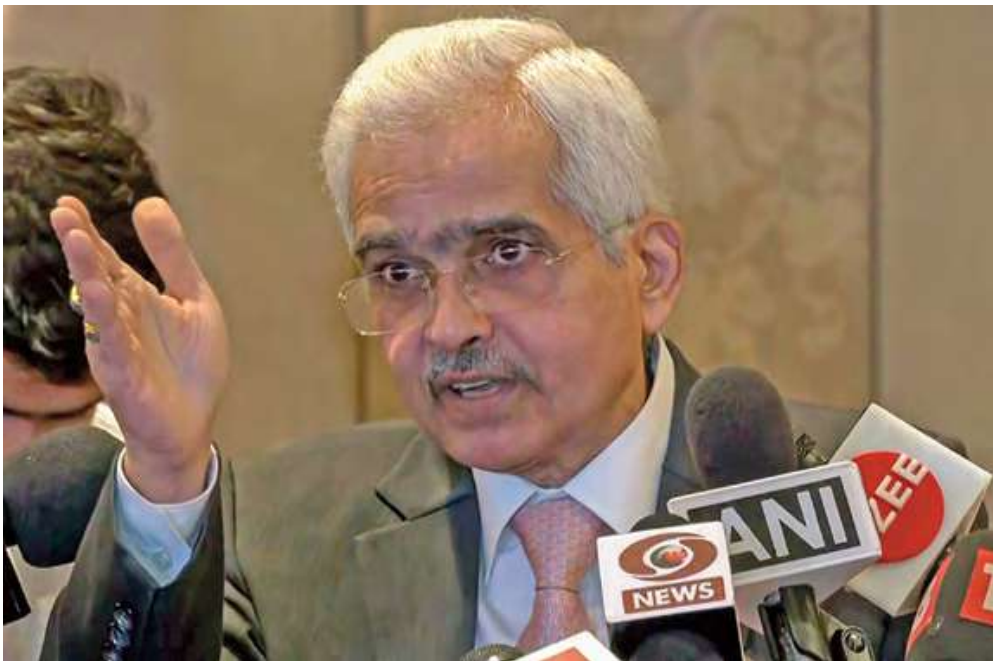
He also said he doesn't expect a rush in the branches and urged people to not rush to banks. The Governor said the Rs 2000 note was primarily issued to replenish money, taken out from the system during the demonetisation of Rs 500 notes and Rs 1,000 notes.

Shaktikanta Das in an interaction with media persons on Monday said that the higher value of currency was manufactured in a brief period of time to increase liquidity in the economy. He also added that Rs 2000 notes circulation came down below 50 per cent since then.

On being asked about the deadline of September 30, the governor said the deadline, given for Rs 2000 notes exchange, was decided so that it would be taken seriously.

"If you leave it open-ended, it becomes a kind of an endless process," Das said during the interaction with the media.

The apex bank's governor



Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das speaks to the media on the withdrawal of Rs 2000 currency notes by RBI, in New Delhi on Monday (ANI)

said that it will revisit the September deadline based on the situation.

On speculations that the decision to withdraw Rs 2000 note may put a strain on the overall money supply, the RBI Governor assured 'we have more than an adequate quantity of notes available, already printed'.

"We have the printed notes already available in the system - not just with the RBI but also at

the currency chests which are operated by the banks. So, there is adequate stock available and there is no reason to worry," Das told the reporters.

"The purpose replenishing the value of money has been fulfilled. Today there are enough notes in circulation of other denominations," he said.

The RBI had decided to withdraw the Rs 2000 denomination notes from circulation, but had stated that it will continue

to remain as legal tender.

RBI had also advised banks to stop issuing Rs 2000 denomination banknotes with immediate effect. RBI, however, said that citizens will continue to be able to deposit Rs 2000 banknotes into their bank accounts and/or exchange them into banknotes of other denominations at any bank branch up to September 30, 2023.

The exchange of Rs 2000 bank notes into notes of other

denominations can be made upto a limit of Rs 20,000 at a time at any bank starting from Tuesday.

"It has also been observed that this denomination is not commonly used for transactions. Further, the stock of banknotes in other denominations continues to be adequate to meet the currency requirement of the public," RBI had said on Friday.

According to the RBI, Rs 2000 denomination banknote was introduced in November 2016, primarily to meet the currency requirement of the economy in an expeditious manner after the withdrawal of the legal tender status of all Rs 500 and Rs 1000 banknotes in circulation at that time.

The objective of introducing Rs 2000 banknotes was met once banknotes in other denominations became available in adequate quantities. Therefore, the printing of Rs 2000 banknotes was stopped subsequently in 2018-19, it said.

About 89 per cent of the Rs 2000 denomination banknotes were issued prior to March 2017 and are at the end of their estimated life span of four-five years.

ANI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with FIPIC ITEC Alumni at Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea on Monday (ANI)

12-step plan to propel partnership with Pacific Island nations launched

Port Moresby, PNG - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday announced a 12-step programme to propel India's partnerships with Pacific Island countries.

"It will fulfil the developmental aspirations of the people of the region and consolidate shared vision of a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said. The prime minister made the announcement while co-chairing the 3rd India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) Summit in Papua New Guinea on Monday.

Taking to Twitter, the MEA spokesperson listed out all the 12 steps announced by Modi. The first of the announcements included opening up a new 100-bed regional super speciality hospital in Fiji and to set up a Regional IT and Cyber Security Training Hub in Papua New Guinea.

"(They include) Sagar Amrut Scholarships -1000 scholarships in the next 5 years, (and) Jaipur Foot Camp in Papua New Guinea in 2023. Thereafter, two camps will be held annually in other Pacific Island Countries," Bagchi said.

The projects will also include FIPIC SME Development Project, Solar project for government buildings, desalination units for drinking water, supply

sea ambulances, dialysis units, 24x7 emergency helpline, Jan Aushadi Kendras and yoga centres, he added.

Modi arrived in Papua New Guinea on Sunday at the Port Moresby airport where Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape touched Modi's feet and sought his blessings. He was also accorded a guard of honour on his arrival.

This is the first-ever visit by

Modi co-chaired the 3rd FIPIC Summit where he stated that India believes in multilateralism

any Indian prime minister to the Indo-Pacific country.

Modi co-chaired the 3rd FIPIC Summit where he stated that India believes in multilateralism and supports 'a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific'. He also met Palau's President Surangel Whipps Jr, Premier of Niue Dalton Emani Makamau Tagelagi, Fiji PM Sitiveni Rabuka, Marshall Islands minister kitlang kabua, Secretary General of the PIF Henry Puna on the sidelines of the summit.

ANI

Delhi HC issues summons to BBC on defamation suit

New Delhi, India - Delhi High Court on Monday issued summons to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) based on a defamation suit moved by a Gujarat based non-government organisation claiming that a two-part documentary by the UK broadcaster cast a slur on the reputation of India and its judiciary as well as that of PM Narendra Modi.

The bench of Justice Sachin Dutta issued the summons to

defendants including BBC and listed for further consideration in September. Senior Advocate Harish Salve appeared for the plaintiff organisation and submitted that the documentary has defamed India and the judiciary also.

Recently Delhi's Rohini court had also issued summons to the BBC, the Wikimedia Foundation and Internet Archive on a plea seeking a direction restraining the defendants from

publishing the BBC documentary based on PM Modi.

The petitioner Binay Kumar Singh had petitioned the Rohini district court to pass an order restraining the defendants including their agents, etc. to cease the publishing of the two-volume documentary series 'India: The Modi Question' or any other defamatory material pertaining to the plaintiff, Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa

Hindu Parishad (VHP) on the platforms of Wikimedia and Internet Archive or any other online or offline platforms.

He had also sought to pass a direction to the defendants ordering them to tender an unconditional apology to the plaintiff and to RSS and VHP for the libellous and defamatory content published in the two-volume documentary series.

The petition said that in the month of January 2023, BBC

aired the two-volume documentary series 'India: The Modi Question'.

It submitted that through the said documentary, BBC claims that there are rising tensions between India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the country's Muslim minority and 'there is an alarming rise of hate crimes and extreme politics in India, particularly targeting the Muslim community'.

ANI



Firefighters douse a fire at the post office building in Manila on Monday (AFP)

Fire destroys historic Philippine post office

Manila, Philippines - A huge fire destroyed a historic post office in the Philippine capital Manila, injuring seven people, officials said on Monday.

More than 80 fire trucks were sent to the decades-old landmark after the blaze broke out late on Sunday, the Bureau of Fire Protection said.

Thick, black smoke billowed hundreds of metres into the sky as flames gutted the neo-classical Manila Central Post Office that overlooks the Pasig River.

It took firefighters more than seven hours to get the inferno under control.

"The whole building has burned down from the basement all the way to the fifth floor," Postmaster General Luis Carlos told DZBB radio.

The cause of the blaze was being investigated, he said.

Fire brigades from across the capital deployed personnel to fight the blaze. The damage bill is estimated at 300mn pesos (US\$5.4mn), according to the fire bureau.

Six out of the seven people injured were firefighters.

Originally built in 1926, the post office was once considered the 'grandest building' in Manila, according to its website.

It was destroyed in World War II as US forces recaptured the capital from Japanese occupation forces, and rebuilt in 1946.

The Philippine National Museum declared the building an 'important cultural property' in 2018.

Letters, parcels and the postal agency's entire stamp collection were in the building and are likely destroyed, Carlos said.

AFP

Papua New Guinea, US sign defence pact

Port Moresby, PNG - Papua New Guinea signed a defence pact with the United States on Monday, giving US forces access to its airfields and ports as Washington vies with China's expanding footprint in the Pacific region.

Washington has growing concerns about China's rise in the Pacific, where it is trying to woo nations with an array of diplomatic and financial incentives in return for strategic support.

Defence Minister Win Bakri Daki inked the deal with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken before the start of a US meeting with the leaders of 14 South Pacific island states in the capital Port Moresby.

"A defence cooperation agreement is done," Prime Minister James Marape said at the signing ceremony, adding the Pacific island was 'elevating' its relationship with the United States.

Blinken said under the 'fully transparent' deal each of the two nations would be able to board the other's vessels, share technical expertise and 'better patrol' the seas together. "We are working together to shape the future. We are very much looking forward to taking our partnership to the next level," he said.

Intensifying rivalry

In a sign of the intensifying rivalry



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Papua New Guinea's Defence Minister Win Bakri Daki shake hands after signing a security agreement as Papua New Guinea's PM James Marape looks on (AFP)

We are working together to shape the future. We are very much looking forward to taking our partnership to the next level

ANTONY BLINKEN

over the South Pacific, Blinken was not alone in representing major powers aiming to counter Beijing's growing economic, po-

litical and military presence.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi flew into town just hours before him on the eve of his own meeting, asserting his nation's role as a regional power.

By signing the security deal with PNG, Blinken will also expand the US military's capacity to deploy in the region.

Beijing has snapped up mines and ports across the Pacific and last year inked a secretive security pact with the Solomon Islands that allows China to deploy troops to the country.

Chinese foreign ministry

spokeswoman Mao Ning on Monday said Beijing would not object to 'normal exchanges' between nations but must be on guard for the use of cooperation 'as a pretext for engaging in geopolitical games' in the Pacific.

'Illegal activities'

The United States fears that a Chinese military foothold in the South Pacific could outflank its facilities on Guam, and make the defence of Taiwan more complicated in the event of a Chinese invasion.

The State Department said the

pact with PNG would 'increase stability and security in the region'.

"Port Moresby is no longer the sleepy diplomatic outpost it once was," said Gordon Peake, a senior adviser for the Pacific Islands at the United States Institute of Peace. "While China might not be mentioned anywhere in the document, it's an important subtext in this story of deepening US-PNG relations."

Marape last week said the deal would offer Washington movement in the country's waters in return for access to US satellite surveillance to battle 'illegal activities on the high sea'.

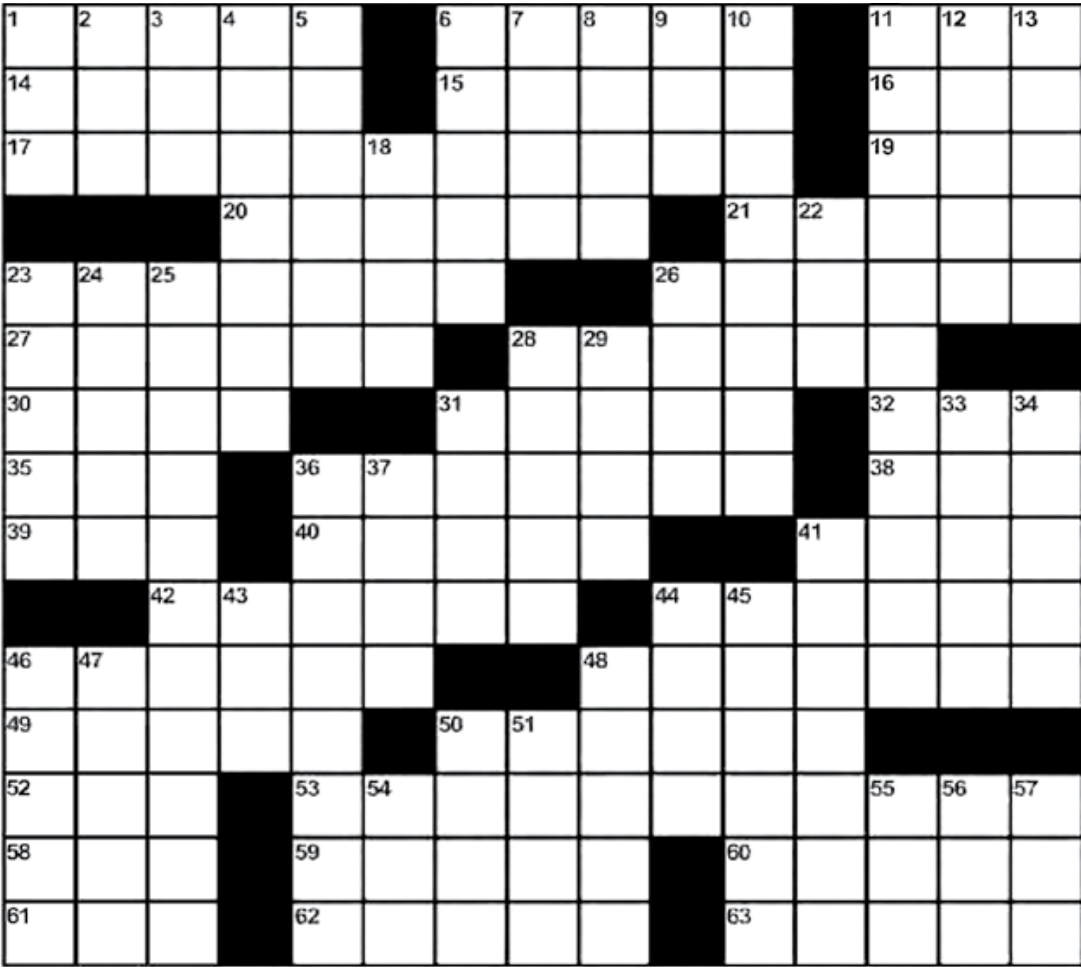
The deal would not prevent him from signing similar agreements with other nations, including China, he said.

The agreement has also prompted student protests at several universities, PNG's biggest newspaper the Post Courier reported, over fears it gives US forces too much autonomy at some of the country's key entry points.

In Port Moresby, scores of students gathered at the University of Papua New Guinea into the evening with some setting tyres on fire. A private security guard at the university said stones were being thrown at passing vehicles.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Notable historic period
 - 6) Legions
 - 11) Degree in math
 - 14) Hawaiian island
 - 15) Burqa wearer's deity, often
 - 16) "And what have we here?"
 - 17) Brain part
 - 19) Big_ Conference
 - 20) Where a frog may be found?
 - 21) Terrible twos, e.g.
 - 23) Bands around the bi-ceps
 - 26) Oar steadiers
 - 27) Bright and pleasant
 - 28) Let out, as fishing line
 - 30) Charged particles
 - 31) Disparaging look
 - 32) Rubble- making stuff
 - 35) Banned bug-killer
 - 36) Not going anywhere
 - 38) _ polloi
 - 39) Swell place?
 - 40) Artist's stand
 - 41) Drudge
 - 42) Swarming insect
 - 44) Ludlum's "The_
- DOWN**
- 1) Character in a Christmas special, often
 - 2) An eagle is two under this
 - 3) Lennon's wife
 - 4) Saddle parts
 - 5) Come-_ look
 - 6) Signs of divinity
 - 7) _ podrida
 - 8) Vegas machine
 - 9) Bar bill
 - 10) One leading the flock
 - 11) Nuts
 - 12) "We hold_ truths ..."
 - 13) Fine-tunes
 - 18) Affectedly creative
 - 22) Clod chopper
 - 23) Litmus reddeners
 - 24) _ Island (state)
 - 25) Senior moment, e.g.
 - 26) Cheshire cat's hangout
 - 28) Available for occupa-tion
 - 29) "Ain't Misbehavin'" star Carter
 - 31) Back talk
 - 33) High times?
 - 34) Points at the dinner table
 - 36) Battering down to some amazing places. Today, the tables are turned and you need someone else to trust you, and they might need some convincing. Instead of telling them you're trustworthy, show them. Remember what it took to make you believe in somebody and give that to them.
 - 37) Drawn tight
 - 41) Large suitcase, perhaps
 - 43) _Wan Kenobi
 - 44) Canaanite deity
 - 45) End of a threat
 - 46) Behind
 - 47) Andean animal
 - 48) Construction site sight
 - 50) Vacation destination
 - 51) Attempt
 - 54) Postal creed word

55) "... _ he drove out of sight"

56) "Platoon" war, briefly

57) "... will be done"

NOTE PAD

R	A	D	A	R	A	C	U	T	E	M	A	P
A	B	O	D	E	L	O	S	E	R	I	L	L
W	A	R	M	W	E	A	T	H	E	R	L	E
E	R	R	E	T	A	D	R	Y				
D	O	N	N	I	N	G	R	E	T	O	R	T
O	W	E	T	E	A	S	R	I	V	E		
G	N	U	E	S	T	O	P	C	U	B	I	C
M	U	T	T	O	O	L	S					
A	P	R	I	L	S	T	E	A	M	K	I	N
A	T	O	P	H	A	L	O					
O	B	L	I	G	E	D						
F	E	Z	I	L	O							
F	R	O	C	O	O	L	M	I	L	L	I	O
E	E	N	A	T	R	I	A					
R	A	E	L	A	S	E	R	S	T	A	L	E

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A new relationship prospect could pop up today, and the question is will you be ready? The timing might not be ideal, but when opportunity knocks, you have to answer whether you're ready or not! This new relationship might be romantic, but it could also be a business networking connection. So be ready for just about anything and keep your schedule loose. You might have to hit the road soon, so get ready to go!

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It's up to you. You can choose to either sow the seeds of discord or the beginnings of a fruitful and peaceful time for you and your loved ones. Remember, forgiving someone doesn't mean that you condone what they did. It just means that you refuse to let it have any power over you or what you do. Inform your actions with the knowledge and wisdom of your heart instead of letting your ego run the show.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Trusting other people is the right thing to do. Not only has it enabled you to get closer to people you care about, it has also helped you expand your horizons. By putting your trust in a leader, you have followed them to some amazing places. Today, the tables are turned and you need someone else to trust you, and they might need some convincing. Instead of telling them you're trustworthy, show them. Remember what it took to make you believe in somebody and give that to them.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your family or social group has a lot to teach you right now, so spend more time with them! Even if you're itching to have some alone time, this isn't the best moment for that. You should be around as many of your favorite people as possible. Their energy will not only invigorate you, it could also inspire you. Don't go solo to parties. Grab a date, any date, and hit the scene as a team. You're already a great partner, but it's always good to get in some more practice.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You usually find helpful information when you look into the details of a project, but today it's not so simple. In fact, you're likely to only get more confused the deeper you dig. The best thing to do in that situation is to stop what you're doing immediately. Walk away for a while and let your brain be occupied by other ideas. When you come back later in the day, those details will suddenly help you understand. You'll immediately know what to do.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your level of creativity is higher than most people's, and this enables you see things in a fresh way. Today, your creativity is more potent than ever, so use it to open doors. Toss out any guilt you might feel for being able to come up with better ideas than anyone else. Be proud of your ability to contribute fresh, innovative, and sometimes downright odd ideas to the discussion. Sure, you might get a few funny looks, but more likely you'll get a lot of people muttering that they wish they'd thought of it.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You're learning more about how to use your charm to get ahead in your career and further your prospects, and it's already starting to pay off. Overall, this could be a very educational day for you. The events can teach you many valuable lessons about how to win people over to your cause without sending them off on a guilt trip. Your smile can take you far right now, so don't be shy about cracking a joke or making a silly comment to someone.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It's important for you to appreciate the smaller things in life today. The ideas you want to develop right now won't go anywhere until you fully understand all the details that are involved with them. There's magic in those details, so why not slow down and take them all in? You'll enjoy pouring over the minutiae much more than you think you will. Plus, there is a great deal of pride to be found in noticing something that no one else notices.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your ambitions have taken you far in your life, but in going so far have you left someone behind? Reach out to the areas of your life you've been neglecting and realign your goals. Focus on people and building relationships, not your resume. Take a day or two off from heavy-duty thinking and put your family and friends first. Today, send out some messages to the people who would love to hear what's up in your life. Catch up with what's going on with them.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today, you have to stay absolutely focused! Put away all the shiny objects and turn your undivided attention to what needs to get done. Be prepared for your mind to wander as the day progresses. Someone new on the scene has a fun story to tell, and you want to hear it! A little social break from the action is fine and healthy, but just make sure that by the time your head hits the pillow tonight you've made enough progress to make yourself proud.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Disturbing dreams don't have to ruin your waking hours! Just because you had some night visions that were somewhat confusing or frightening doesn't mean that they portend anything bad coming into your life. Sometimes a dream is just a dream. Your subconscious mind is just playing around with different ideas and images. There's no hidden puzzle for you to solve, so don't waste time today trying to figure them out. You'll have different dreams tonight.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

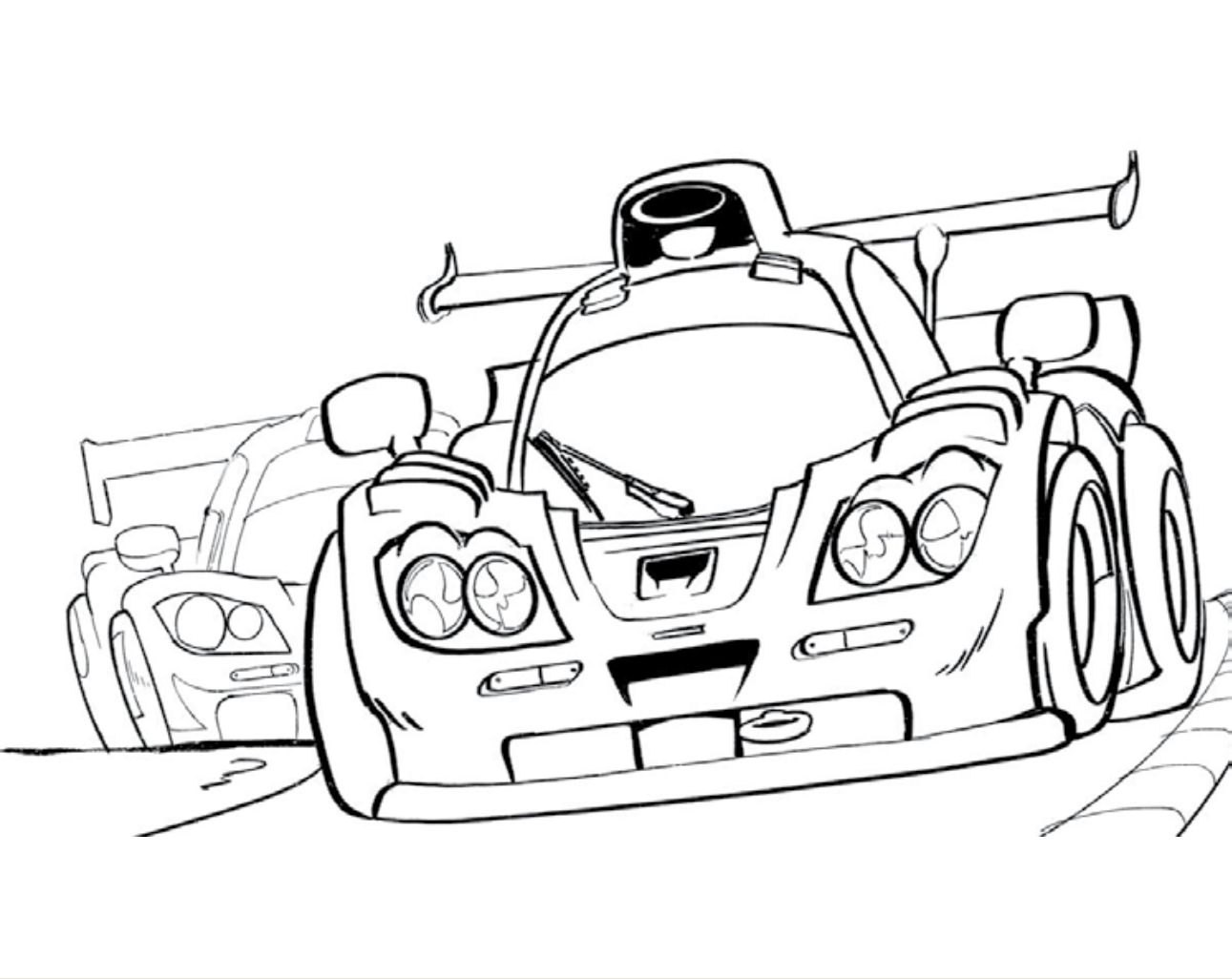
A person from your past could come back into your life today, and their transformation might be remarkable, but not necessarily in a good way. Give them the benefit of the doubt and don't jump to conclusions about what has caused the changes you're seeing. You have changed probably more than you realize, so accept the fact that people don't stay the same. Give them a chance to reintroduce themselves to you. Keep an open mind.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which of these games has 9 squares on a standard board?
- A. Noughts and Crosses
 - B. Chess
 - C. Snakes and Ladders
 - D. Scrabble
02. Which of these gospels is last in the Christian New Testament?
- A. John
 - B. Matthew
 - C. Mark
 - D. Luke
03. Which 20th century American composer wrote the American Festival overture in 1939, and Symphony No. 3 considered the most important new work of 1942, and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1943?
- A. Robert Schumann
 - B. William Schuman
 - C. Clara Wieck Schumann
 - D. Walter Schumann

Answers: 1. A 2. A 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	U	C	S
N	O	G	D
O	E	S	G
O	U	I	I

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior gestures to the crowd during their Spanish league match against Valencia at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on Sunday (AFP)

'Vinicius is victim'

Ancelotti blasts Spanish league's 'problem' with racism

Barcelona, Spain - Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said Spanish football had a racism problem and needed to be prepared to halt matches, after Vinicius Junior was again the target of abuse during a 1-0 defeat at Valencia in La Liga on Sunday.

"The Spanish league has a problem, and Vinicius is not the problem. Vinicius is the victim. There's a very serious problem," Ancelotti said, adding that Vinicius was "sad, not angry" after the incidents at Mestalla.

Midway through the second half play was delayed for several minutes after Vinicius appeared to be racially abused by a Valencia supporter.

The Brazilian forward stood in front of the fans behind the goal



What has happened? Reports, and nothing at all has come from it. The solution is to stop the game. I am very sad, I've never had to take off a player because of insults

CARLO ANCELOTTI

and pointed to one, with teammate Eder Militao by his side.

Vinicius was later sent off in added time at the end of the game for hitting Hugo Duro during a brawl, with Valencia triumphing through Diego Lopez's

first-half goal.

"The fact I thought about taking him off because of the racist atmosphere does not seem good to me," Ancelotti told reporters.

"What has happened today has happened before, but not like

that, it's unacceptable."

Vinicius has been racially abused at several stadiums this season in Spain and an effigy of him was hung from a bridge in the Spanish capital by Atletico Madrid fans.

La Liga have filed legal complaints to Spanish authorities on multiple occasions this season, with the league pledging on Sunday to do so again after investigating. However Ancelotti said it was not helping.

"What has happened? Reports, and nothing at all has come from it. The solution is to stop the game," continued the coach.

"I am very sad, this has never happened to me - I've never had to take off a player because of insults.

"He's a kid, he likes playing football, but in these conditions it's very complicated."

Vinicius took to Instagram after the defeat.

"The prize for the racists today is that they have sent me off. It's not football, it's La Liga," wrote the 22-year-old.

The attacker said Spain was viewed as "a country of racists" in his homeland Brazil.

La Liga said in a statement that they were investigating the incident and would take legal action if a hate crime had been committed. The Spanish top flight said they have been "proactive" in previous cases of racism against Vinicius, filing nine complaints with relevant authorities and prosecutors.

After Vinicius' stand off with Valencia supporters, referee Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea spoke to stadium officials, who made an announcement calling for racist insults to stop before play resumed around 10 minutes later.

In his post-match report, the referee wrote that a fan shouted "monkey, monkey" at the player.

LA LIGA WAS CRISTIANO AND MESSI, NOW IT 'BELONGS TO RACISTS', SAYS VINICIUS

Valencia, Spain - Vinicius Junior said La Liga "belongs to racists" after suffering vile abuse on Sunday during Real Madrid's 1-0 defeat at Valencia.

The 22-year-old Brazilian winger faced off with home supporters and pointed directly to one after racist insults during the second half.

Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois said he heard monkey chants near the start of the game, while Los Blancos coach Carlo Ancelotti said there was "a racist atmosphere" at Mestalla.

"It was not the first time, not the second and not the third. Racism is normal in La Liga. The competition thinks it's normal, the (Spanish) Federation also thinks it's normal and opponents encourage it," Vinicius wrote on Instagram on Sunday.

"The league that once belonged to Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Cristiano (Ronaldo) and (Leo) Messi, now belongs to racists.

"A beautiful nation, which welcomed me and which I love, but one which has agreed to export the image of a racist country to the world.

"I'm sorry for the Spaniards who don't agree, but today, in Brazil, Spain

is known as a country of racists. Unfortunately, for everything that happens every week, I have no way of defending it. I agree."

The Spanish top flight said they have been "proactive in the face of all racist incidents" involving Vinicius who was sent off in Sunday's game.

La Liga said they were investigating what happened at Mestalla and will take the appropriate legal action if a hate crime is detected.

"La Liga has filed complaints (to relevant authorities) on nine occasions in the last two seasons," said the top

It was not the first time, not the second and not the third. Racism is normal in La Liga

VINICIUS JUNIOR

flight in a statement.

"La Liga has been fighting against this kind of behaviour for years and promoting the positive values of sport, not only on the pitch but also off it."

The Brazilian football federation (CBF) president Ednaldo Rodrigues also criticised the incident.

"How long are we going to experience, in the middle of the 21st century, episodes like the one we just witnessed, once again, in La Liga?" he wrote in a statement released by the CBF on Instagram.

"How long will humanity remain just a spectator and an accomplice in cruel acts of racism?"

Rodrigues offered the Madrid forward a message of support.

"There is no joy where there is racism," he added.

AFP



Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring against Auxerre on Sunday (AFP)

Mbappe goals see PSG all but secure Ligue 1 title

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain all but secured the Ligue 1 title on Sunday as a Kylian Mbappe brace gave them a 2-1 win away to Auxerre that left the Qatar-owned club six points clear at the top of the table with two games remaining.

PSG had hoped to officially confirm a second straight championship triumph, and a ninth in the last 11 seasons, but they needed closest rivals Lens to slip up earlier in the day.

Lens won 3-1 at Lorient, and so PSG still require one point from their final two matches to secure a French record 11th title overall.

However, a goal difference advantage of 16 over Lens means they are almost certain to win the title even if they end the season level on points with their closest rivals.

PSG, whose final two matches are away at Strasbourg and at home to Clermont, will move ahead of Saint-Etienne's previous record of 10 titles which they equalled last year.

Mbappe's goals both came in the first eight minutes in Burgundy as he moved on to 28 for the season, two ahead of Lyon's Alexandre Lacazette on top of the Ligue 1 scorers' chart.

He struck in the sixth minute,

collecting a Fabian Ruiz pass and turning home defender Gauthier Hein inside out before shooting high into the net.

It was 2-0 two minutes later, as Hugo Ekitike left a Lionel Messi pass for Mbappe to rifle in a shot from the edge of the area. Auxerre saw Rayan Raveloson hit the bar late in the first half and Lassine Sinayoko pulled one back six minutes after the break.

"My players have their hands on the trophy. Now we need to finish on a high in the next two matches and lift the trophy at home on the last day," PSG coach Christophe Galtier told

broadcaster Amazon Prime.

Galtier and PSG have come in for criticism during a challenging second half of the season, in which they have lost six times in Ligue 1 and were knocked out of the Champions League by Bayern Munich in the last 16.

"When we look back and analyse the season, we had a very difficult period after the World Cup with injuries to key players," Galtier added.

"Our squad was severely weakened in big games and that led to us playing badly, but believe me, it is still a performance to win the league."

Lazio beat Udinese to leapfrog Inter Milan in Serie top-four race

Rome, Italy - Lazio climbed to third in Serie A as they won 1-0 at Udinese on Sunday after Inter Milan, with eyes on two cup finals, fielded a weakened side, suffered a first-half red card and lost 3-1 at champions Napoli.

Lazio's veteran striker Ciro Immobile won a 61st-minute penalty for the only goal as Lazio jumped to 68 points two points ahead of Inter and one behind second-placed Juventus, who

play Monday. After that, all the contenders have two matches left.

Inter hold the last Champions League spot with a two-point edge over AC Milan.

Napoli continued their Serie A title party with late goals against a short-handed Inter Milan.

With two finals looming - against Fiorentina in the Italian Cup on Wednesday and Manchester City in the Champions

League on June 10 - Inter coach Simone Inzaghi made eight changes from the team that beat AC Milan in the second leg of their European semi-final last Tuesday.

Inter's task became even tougher when veteran centre back Roberto Gagliardini picked up a second yellow card in the 41st minute.

Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa put Napoli ahead after 67

minutes, spinning and volleying a shot into the corner of the net.

Inzaghi threw on some regular starters and one of them, Denzel Dumfries, set up Romelu Lukaku for a close-range equaliser after 82 minutes.

Napoli skipper Giovanni Di Lorenzo curled a 20-metre shot into the top corner to restore the lead three minutes later.

As Inter pressed desperately, Gianluca Gaetano finished off a

Napoli counter-attack with his first league goal for the club deep into added time.

Inter's European chances could be enhanced on Monday when second-placed Juventus face a second Italian Football Federation ruling on illicit transfer activity.

An original 15-point deduction was later revoked by the country's highest sports court.

AFP



Lazio's Ciro Immobile celebrates after scoring against Udinese

ON CUSP OF TITLE

Haller toasts Dortmund’s ‘beautiful’ title chance after cancer battle

Berlin, Germany - Borussia Dortmund striker Sebastien Haller said his side were achieving “something beautiful” after a 3-0 victory at Augsburg on Sunday sent them within one win of the Bundesliga title.

“It’s just unbelievable. If someone told me I would be in this situation six months ago, I wouldn’t have believed them,” an emotional Haller told DAZN.

Haller was diagnosed with testicular cancer shortly after signing with Dortmund and underwent four rounds of chemotherapy and two operations, missing six months before returning in January.

Dortmund sat in sixth place in January, but have lost just one of their 18 matches in the league since Haller returned.

Dortmund are now two points clear with one match remaining, a rare occurrence after a decade of Bayern Munich dominance.

The final round of games kick off at the same time next Saturday. To lift the Bundesliga shield for the first time since 2011-12, Dortmund will need a victory at home against Mainz only if Bayern win at Cologne.

If Bayern draw or lose, Dortmund will be champions even if they lose.

German tabloid *Bild* rejoiced after the win, running the headline “Haller-luja, Dortmund close in on the title”.

Even though Dortmund dominated, and Augsburg were reduced to 10 men late in the first half, the game was scoreless until the 58th minute, when Haller pounced on an error by a defender to score the opener.

He added another from a rebound with the clock winding down, sending the visiting fans

chance to achieve something big.”

Dortmund, who came into the game knowing victory would put them in control of the title race, but made the trip without injured midfielder Jude Bellingham, were winless on the road since February.

Dortmund, who had scored 11 goals in their past two games, controlled the first half but could not find a breakthrough, Haller forcing a fingertip save from Tomas Koubek.

It’s just unbelievable. If someone told me I would be in this situation six months ago, I wouldn’t have believed them. We’ve got a huge chance to achieve something big

SEBASTIEN HALLER



Borussia Dortmund’s Sebastien Haller celebrates after scoring against Augsburg in their Bundesliga match on Sunday (AFP)

the visitors, snapping up a loose ball before spinning and threading the ball into the far corner.

With just over five minutes remaining, Haller pounced on a rebound from a Marco Reus shot to put Dortmund 2-0 up, sending the visiting fans into a chant of “German champions, only Dortmund”.

With the clock winding down, Dortmund captain Mats Humels was helped off the field after taking a boot to the face.

The centre-back’s replacement, Nico Schlotterbeck, put the ball through for Brandt to score a third.

Stuttgart stay alive

Earlier, a goal and two assists from substitute Chris Fuehrich gave Stuttgart a massive boost in their relegation fight, with a 4-1 win away at Mainz.

Brought on with 30 minutes remaining and the scores locked 1-1, Fuehrich laid on a goal for Serhou Guirassy just two minutes later, before adding one of his own. The winger set up another goal in injury time for Tanguy Coulibaly to take his side from the relegation places to the safety of 15th.

In Sunday’s late game, Bayer Leverkusen gave away a two-goal lead with two defensive errors to draw 2-2 against Borussia Moenchengladbach at home.

Europa League semi-finalists Leverkusen were cruising after first-half goals to Amine Adli and Kerem Demirbay, but gave the ball away in front of goal twice to let Gladbach score twice.

Leverkusen were reduced to ten men late in injury time when Piero Hincapie saw straight red for a horrible challenge on Gladbach’s Julian Weigl.

AFP

Champions Manchester City feel ‘unstoppable’ says Grealish

Manchester, United Kingdom - Jack Grealish claimed Manchester City feel “unstoppable” as the Premier League champions set their sights on an historic treble.

City celebrated their fifth title in six seasons by beating Chelsea 1-0 at a jubilant Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola’s side were crowned champions on Saturday when second placed Arsenal lost 1-0 at Nottingham Forest.

After trailing Arsenal for much of the season, City blew the Gunners away with 12 successive league wins to make it three consecutive titles.

Asked if City have felt invincible during their blistering run, Grealish said: “We have. It’s mad because I spoke to some of the lads not long ago and I said, ‘Imagine if someone would have said to you to win the league you’ve got to go and win 12



Jack Grealish

games in a row’.

“I’m not saying I didn’t think we could do it but it was going to be difficult. We’ve got so much talent in this squad and I think at the moment we feel unstoppable. And it doesn’t stop here, we’ve still got some massive games coming up.”

City are enjoying a period of Premier League dominance not seen since Manchester United won five titles in six seasons between 1996 and 2001.

Their dynastic credentials are already well established, but emulating United’s 1999 treble triumph would lift City into even more rarified air as one of English football’s greatest ever sides.

City face Manchester United in the FA Cup final at Wembley on June 3, then take on Inter Milan in the Champions League final in Istanbul seven days later.

AFP

‘I never thought I could win clay title,’ says Medvedev

Rome, Italy - Daniil Medvedev said Sunday that ending his long-standing clay court title jinx was almost equal to capturing the 2021 US Open.

The Russian added a first clay trophy to his 19-title collection with a 7-5, 7-5 win over Holger Rune in the Italian Open final in Rome.

It was his his fifth title of the season and sixth career Masters trophy from six different venues.

“In a way, it’s the number one career honour,” said the 27-year-old.

“I would never (have) thought I would be able to make this. But I have to be honest -- a Grand Slam is always bigger.”

He added: “This one is special because I didn’t think it was going happen, I still kind of don’t believe - not that I won it, but I played so well this week.”

Medvedev, who had been 0-3 in his three previous trips to the



Russia’s Daniil Medvedev celebrates after beating Denmark’s Holger Rune in the Rome Open final on Sunday (AFP)

Italian capital, had knocked out 2017 champion Alexander Zverev and 2022 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas on his way to Sunday’s final.

“I didn’t think I could win a Masters 1000 on clay in my career because usually I hated it, I hated playing on it.”

AFP

Koepka boosts LIV Golf and makes case for US Ryder Cup spot



Brooks Koepka celebrates with the Wanamaker Trophy after winning the PGA Championship on Sunday (AFP)

Rochester, United States - Brooks Koepka gave the Saudi-backed LIV Golf circuit a landmark triumph and sparked some questions for the US Ryder Cup team by winning the PGA Championship on Sunday.

Koepka’s fifth major title made him the first player to win a major since joining the break-away circuit and boosted him to second in the US Ryder Cup qualifying points table.

“I definitely think it helps LIV,” Koepka said.

Koepka was among the array of stars who jumped from the PGA Tour to LIV, which lured talent with the promise of record

I’m just trying to prove it to myself, not trying to prove it to anybody else, that I can still do it. I like the way things are starting to come together

BROOKS KOEPPKA

\$25 million purses for 54-hole events, despite concern over Saudi Arabia’s human rights record.

The PGA banned LIV players from its events, with a legal fight between them due in court next May. Until then, the rival circuit’s top talent only meets in majors.

When asked if he takes pride

in representing LIV, Koepka said, “Yeah, I think so. To win a major is always a big deal no matter where you’re playing. All it does I guess, validates it for myself... I’m back.”

LIV events don’t get world ranking points, causing concern that major qualifying will be difficult soon. Koepka’s win helps

make the case their players deserve consideration.

LIV’s Bryson DeChambeau shared fourth and reigning British Open champion Cam Smith shared ninth at Oak Hill. And Koepka shared second last month at the Masters with LIV’s Phil Mickelson.

“Congrats @BKoepka your comeback has been impressive. I am so proud of you,” LIV Golf League commissioner Greg Norman tweeted.

“As for the @livgolf_league players they belong and the Majors and golf knows.”

US Ryder Cup captain Zach Johnson said he hasn’t spoken to anyone about having LIV players on the squad, overseen by the PGA of America, which allowed LIV qualifiers into the PGA Championship.

“I think it’s too premature, frankly irresponsible, to even have any sort of opinion about that,” Johnson said.

Forget Johnson’s six captain’s picks. Right now Koepka has a spot on qualifying points, mostly gained from PGA Tour events.

“I’m just trying to prove it to myself, not trying to prove it to anybody else, that I can still do it,” Koepka said. “I like the way things are starting to come together.”

Joint action

ARTHRITIS AWARENESS MONTH



keep the joints flexible, strengthens the muscles around the joints, and improves overall joint function," Dr Ranjan says, adding, "Low-impact exercises like walking, swimming, and cycling can be gentle on the joints while providing numerous benefits."

Hospital awareness campaigns

Dr Biswajit stated, "KIMS Oman Hospital runs a campaign to raise awareness about arthritis in the month of May. The campaign is aimed to raise awareness about arthritis and help people understand the condition so that they can get the help they need. The hospital believes that everyone deserves to live a healthy and active life, regardless of their health condition."

Dr Ranjan disclosed that they also share patient stories and testimonials through social media to create an impactful awareness. "People will be able to connect better and understand the impact of arthritis by learning about others. And Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals have one-on-one counselling sessions with the patients who are at risk. We have also introduced discounted screening packages to encourage people for preventive health screening," he added.

Dr Akshay also stated that Apollo Hospitals organise campaigns and screening for arthritis during the winter months when arthritis is much more prevalent.

(Contributed by Deeba Parween)

ARTHRITIS CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE AT ANY AGE. IT IS A PREVALENT HEALTH CONCERN WORLDWIDE, INCLUDING IN OMAN. AND THE MONTH OF MAY IS OBSERVED AS ARTHRITIS AWARENESS MONTH TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT THIS CONDITION

If you find it difficult to hold onto your morning coffee mug for long or find it extremely painful when getting up from a chair, or notice a redness/swelling in any of your joints that lasts more than a day, you could be suffering from arthritis, a degenerative condition that affects millions worldwide every year.

In Oman, various organisations, healthcare professionals, and advocacy groups come together to spread awareness through informative campaigns, events, and fundraisers. These initiatives aim to promote early diagnosis, provide resources and

support, advocate for research, and improve access to quality care.

Dr Biswajit Dutta Baruah, consultant orthopaedic surgeon at KIMS Oman hospital, said that the most common type of arthritis in Oman is osteoarthritis, which is often associated with aging and 'wear and tear' of the joints. Rheumatoid arthritis is the second most common, followed by gouty and psoriatic arthritis, with differential symptoms, he said.

Dr Biswajit believes that arthritis can have a significant impact on a person's quality of life. "It can make it difficult to perform daily activities, such as

walking, climbing stairs, and getting dressed. Arthritis can also lead to depression, anxiety, and social isolation."

Dr Akshay, specialist orthopaedic surgeon at Apollo Hospital, explained, "Osteoarthritis can affect any joint in the body, although it most commonly affects joints in the spine, hands, hips and knees. Most people consider osteoarthritis to be inevitable during one's lifetime, but proper clinical management and treatment can help stall, if not reverse, the impact of this deteriorating condition."

"The most common symptoms of arthritis are grating or cracking sensation on move-

ment, exaggerated pain in winter season, overall loss in flexibility, not able to sit cross legs, difficulty in forward bending and generalised swelling," he added.

Treatment options

Dr Ranjan Babu, specialist orthopaedician at Badr Al Samaa Hospital, said that there is no cure for arthritis but there are treatments to manage the condition. "Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and physical therapy can help to improve joint function, reduce pain, and increase strength and flexibility. Sometimes corticosteroid injections directly into the affected joint can provide short-

term pain relief and reduce inflammation."

Dietary changes

Dr Biswajit suggests to avoid processed food, red meat, caffeine, sugar, and alcohol as it can worsen arthritis symptoms. "Diet plays an important role in alleviating symptoms but there is no 'one-size-fits-all' diet for arthritis. Some of the best foods for arthritis are whole grains, lean proteins, fruits and vegetables. Also, Omega-3 fatty acids which are healthy fats found in fish have anti-inflammatory properties."

Dr Ranjan adds, "Dietary changes may not cure arthritis or replace medical treatments but

they can help managing inflammation, reducing pain, and improving overall joint health."

Self care is the best care

According to Dr Baruah, self care is an important part of managing arthritis. Adopt a healthy lifestyle and listen to your body, he says. But,

Dr Ranjan believes that prevention is better than cure.

"Arthritis can be avoided by maintaining a healthy weight. Excess weight puts additional stress on the joints, particularly the weight-bearing joints like the hips, knees, and ankles. Also, regular physical activity helps

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Manpo Kei

A general consensus amongst fitness enthusiasts is that an individual needs to walk around 10,000 steps a day to stay healthy. And people across the globe have accordingly been adjusting their fitness trackers to reach this number. But, don't fret, if you fall behind. It's okay to reach halfway

Do you walk 10,000 steps a day and feel elated about staying on the path to good health? Do you struggle to reach this number and feel guilty about side-stepping your fitness goals?

One might wonder from where has the figure of '10,000 steps' originated. And, is there any truth behind it or is it just another fitness myth? Research shows that you'd be doing fine, even if you do not attain the 'magic figure'.

Scientific studies based on fitness have also been conducted to check the validity of the claim that walking 10,000 steps will ensure good health. According to a recent article in News Medical Life Sciences (www.newsmedical.net), studies were conducted to find out how this belief come into being and whether reaching that figure was actually important.

It was found, when Japan was preparing to host the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, there was an increased focus on fitness in the general Japanese population. An awareness had begun to spread about the fact that regular exercise was a good way to fight against lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity and strokes. And, the simplest exercise was walking - anyone could do it, no special equipment nor training was needed for it.

The modern pedometer was introduced to the Japanese marketplace at

roughly the same time. It was a simple gadget that could be worn around the waist and would calculate the number of steps walked. This gave an individual a good idea of the distance they managed to cover.

This was fortuitous for the health conscious public who wanted to stay fit and use walking or jogging as their primary exercise tool. Needless to say the gadget sold quickly as people began keeping track of just how many steps they were walking each day.

'Manpo kei', which literally means 10,000 steps in the Japanese language, became the rallying slogan for these dedicated walkers. Many Japanese walking

clubs swung into existence and Manpo kei was the minimum that they were expected to walk. Gradually the concept of walking 10,000 steps moved from the Japanese public to health conscious walkers around the world. Today most fitness experts will use Manpo kei as the basic fitness goal for a regular exercise regimen.

The Department of Movement and Sports Science of the Ghent University in Belgium had conducted a study on the validity of increased physical activity helping with improving overall health for an individual. The study was conducted in coordination with the School of Human Movement Studies, at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia to de-

termine if 10,000 steps per day truly helped the health of the participant.

Participants underwent a 10,000 steps per day fitness plan, their progress was tracked by the researchers with pedometers, physical activity questionnaires, an activity log, and a questionnaire related to the awareness of the project. They included those at risk of chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis.

Nearly half the participants managed to complete the challenge successfully. And felt they were in better health and there was an overall sense of wellbeing. However when a follow up study was performed four years later, it was found that

the positive intervention effect was not sustained. Most participants reported a sharp drop in physical activity with each subsequent year and the lack of socio-ecological interventions. While the study proved that walking 10,000 steps was beneficial, the fact remains that exercise only helps if it is a regular habit.

A study in JAMA Neurology also found that walking about 10,000 steps a day was linked to less cardiovascular disease (heart disease, stroke and heart failure), 13 types of cancer, and dementia. Taking 10,000 steps is about the same as walking four or five miles, depending on your stride. However, new research says 10,000 steps is not necessarily a magic figure for health benefits.

For example, 9,800 steps lowers the risk of dementia by 50 per cent, the research suggests, but taking just 3,800 a day lowers it by 25 per cent.

Hence, the 10,000 steps or Manpo-kei is not a hard and set requirement. A person who regularly walks 6,000 steps a day will also stay healthy. It is important to set a target for fitness which meets the needs of the individual. One that the individual will commit to and stay motivated to complete.

So, if you can walk just 4,000 steps a day, don't feel guilty or depressed about taking up inadequate fitness activity. As long as you do it every day and sustain your interest in doing so, you will definitely accrue health benefits.

BENEFITS OF WALKING

Walking regularly can help reduce your risk of:

- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Depression

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR STEPS EVERYDAY

- Take the dog for a walk. If you don't have a dog, volunteer to walk the neighbour's dog.
- Try music. A bouncy tune can make activity more enjoyable and help motivate you to walk faster.
- Include the family. Instead of an afternoon movie, go for a walk or hike together.
- Instead of sending a work email, walk to your colleague's desk.
- Walk while waiting for a bus or a cab or even for a flight.
- Choose parking spots farther away from the entrance. If you take a bus, get off early and walk the rest of the way.
- Take the stairs. Even going down the stairs helps burn calories.