

Climate change emerging risk to financial stability: CBO

Oman has a substantial amount of vulnerable urban infrastructure located in close proximity to flood-prone areas

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's infrastructure has borne the brunt of tropical storms in the last decade and continues to face severe risks of floods, storm surges and rising sea level. At the heart of the growing environmental problems is climate change, which the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) says presents a significant challenge and risk to the financial system of the sultanate.

'There is growing awareness and concern about the implications of climate change on the financial stability of Oman as it poses two major types of risks. The first is its direct physical impact leading to damage of infrastructure and property, and the second is the transition risks such as changes in climate policy, technology and consumer and



'Besides the climate risks faced by all other countries, phasing out carbon emissions would entail a need for massive changes in the structure of the economy'

market sentiments,' CBO stated in its *Financial Stability Report 2022*.

According to Oman's *Second National Communication 2019 Report* submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the sultanate has a substantial amount of vul-

nerable urban infrastructure located in close proximity to flood-prone areas, or subject to coastal inundation and storm surge associated with sea-level rise.

'With climate change, Oman's low-lying urban areas along the coast will be vulnerable to flooding from the combined impact of

sea-level rise and storm surge associated with extreme weather events.'

Additionally, hydrocarbon-dependent countries like Oman are exposed to a challenge from the drive to reduce carbon footprint, CBO stated.

A large part of Oman's GDP relies on the production and export of hydrocarbons that are a major source of greenhouse gases. 'Therefore, besides the climate risks faced by all other countries, phasing out carbon emissions would entail a need for

massive changes in the structure of the economy.'

Assessment of climate risks remains a challenge because of the difficult-to-predict shocks and significantly long time horizon spanning over decades for modeling and analysis of transition risks. 'Nevertheless, CBO continues to keep a close eye on the climate change risks and strives to expand its capability to formally incorporate these risks in its assessment of financial stability.'

Climate change is a concern that Oman is working on seriously and therefore has committed to a low carbon economy and reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, according to the sultanate's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In the second NDC, which the sultanate submitted in 2021, Oman has committed to slow down GHG emission growth and reduce these by seven per cent in 2030, compared to the Business-As-Usual scenario. Through its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, the sultanate is currently engaged to reduce its absolute GHG emission by two per cent by 2030.

TRA decision to improve quality of telecom services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) will implement a regulation to monitor the quality of telecom services in Oman.

As per a decision issued on Monday, the licensee will submit reports on the set performance indicators of the quality of its telecom services within a period not exceeding 30 days from the end of the monitoring period and publish these reports in the form and within the period specified by TRA.

In a statement, TRA said the licensee must announce the data speed for each fixed broadband service package (wired and wireless) and publish sufficient details about the quality of its telecom services and packages displayed in its web-site.

'The actual speed of fixed wired broadband service provided to the subscriber should not be less than 90 per cent of the maximum data speed indicated by the licensee according to the consumer's subscribed package,' TRA stated.

The actual speed of a fixed wireless broadband service should not be less than 70 per cent of the maximum data speed



Speed of fixed wired broadband should not be less than 90% of advertised speed

of the subscribed package.

In the case of wireless services, the licensee should design communications networks in a way to provide coverage (signal strength) that ensures the best telecom services to subscribers, the decision stated.

'The licensee should also design communication networks taking into account the continuous increase in use of mobile broadband services.'

The authority will review the reports submitted by the licensee and audit records and systems with the assistance of a consultant or an auditor.

► NEWS BRIEF

OMAN TO HOST ARAB SAILING CHAMPIONSHIP 2022

Muscat - Oman, represented by Oman Sail, has been named host of Arab Sailing Championship 2022, which is due to take place from October 11-15, 2022, at Barceló Mussanah Resort.

Returning to the sultanate after being held in Egypt in 2019, sailors from 14 countries across the region will compete over five days. Sailors from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and the UAE are expected to compete.

The championship will include races in Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7, RS:X and iQFOiL windsurfing and RS Venture para sailing.



CPA recovers over RO85,000 for consumers



MSX outperforms GCC stock markets in July



HEAVY RAIN SPELL FILLS SAROOJ DAM IN MADHA

Sarooj Dam in the wilayat of Madha in Musandam governorate has filled up, forming a lake of fresh water, following the recent rains that affected several governorates in Oman. Madha received 320mm of rainfall, the highest in four days from July 25 to July 28 (ONA)

Syria, Oman form business council to boost trade ties

Damascus, Sana - The Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade in Syria has announced the formation of Syrian-Omani Business Council.

Oman and Syria are working to develop bilateral economic relations, and in this regard Mohammad Samer al Khalil, Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade, issued the decision to form the council on Sunday.

The establishment of the council aims to enhance the role



Ziad Sabbagh, Syrian Industry Minister, met an Omani delegation participating in the 4th Cement Conference 2022 in Damascus on Saturday

of the private sector and benefit from its capabilities in developing economic relations between Syria and the sultanate in trade, investment, industry, agriculture and tourism, Syrian Arab News Agency reported.

The decision named Wasim Qattan chairman of the council and Dima Aqqad vice-chairman from the Syrian side.

On Saturday, Ziad Sabbagh, Syrian Industry Minister, met an Omani delegation participating in

the 4th Cement Conference 2022 in Damascus and underlined Syria's willingness to expand cooperation with the sultanate in the industrial sector by entering new investments, especially in cement manufacturing as Syria needs it for its reconstruction phase.

The two sides discussed bolstering industrial and commercial cooperation and export of industrial products produced by small enterprises in Syria to Oman.

Aid groups call on Yemen rivals to extend truce

Dubai - Thirty aid agencies working in war-torn Yemen on Monday called on rival forces to extend a four-month long truce helping millions of struggling civilians, one day before it expires.

Yemen's conflict, pitting the Saudi-backed government against Iran-backed Huthi rebels, has killed hundreds of thousands directly or indirectly and pushed the country to the brink of famine.

A UN-brokered truce that took effect in early April has provided a rare respite from violence for much of the country and alleviated some of the suffering.

"During the past four months, ordinary Yemenis have experienced the longest period of calm in the country in over seven years," the aid groups said in a joint statement.

"Since the truce entered into force on April 2, reports of civilian casualties have dropped significantly."

The aid groups, including Yemeni and international organisations, urged "all parties to the conflict to adhere to and extend the agreement to protect civilians across the country".

International signatories included ACTED, Action Against Hunger, the International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief, Oxfam and Save the Children.

The truce, initially agreed for two months, was extended again on June 2 for the same period.

Under the truce, commercial flights have resumed from the rebel-held capital Sanaa to Jordan and Egypt, while oil tankers have been able to dock in the lifeline port of Hodeida, also in Huthi hands.

AFP

55 SOLAR-POWERED KIOSKS TO BE BUILT IN SOUTH BATINAH



The Governorate of South Batinah has launched a project to develop solar-powered kiosks. A total of 55 kiosks will be built across the governorate and construction has commenced for the project in Rustaq. 'This is part of the efforts exerted by the municipality of South Batinah to develop and improve municipal services in all wilayats of the governorate,' a statement said (Supplied image)

CPA recovers over RO85,000 for consumers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) in Barka, South Batinah, recovered RO85,134 for consumers in the first half of 2022.

According to statistics released by the Barka Consumer Protection Department, this amount was recovered from several sectors, with the labour sector accounting for the maximum (RO25,685).

This was followed by aluminium, blacksmith and carpentry workshops (RO15,624), contracting and building materi-



(Supplied photo)

als sector (RO14,034), automobile distributors (RO11,900), and the electrical and electronic appliances sector (RO10,300). Additionally, CPA recovered

RO2,233 from the furniture and furnishing sector, RO1,910 from wedding halls, RO1,118 from the auto parts sector, RO1,175 from vehicle repair workshops, and RO1,085 from the clothing and textile sector, among others.

CPA stated that the money was recovered within the framework of the authority's keenness to preserve the rights of consumers in the event of a breach of their rights as stipulated in the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations.

CPA called on everyone to cooperate to create a safe market that reassures and satisfies consumers.

Registration for National Scientific Research Award opens

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by the Research Council, announced the opening of registration for the National Scientific Research Award (NRA) for 2022.

The award aims to encourage researchers to conduct high qual-



ity and relevant research in areas of national interest. The last date of registration is September 25.

NRA is awarded in two categories - best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent, and best published research led by a young researcher (non-PhD holder).

The research must be of relevance to Oman and in the field of education and human resources; information and communication technologies; health and social services; cultural, social and basic

sciences; energy and industry; or environmental and biological resources.

The published research must not have won any other award nationally or internationally.

The research must have been published after March 15, 2019, in a refereed journal, indexed in either Scopus, Web of Science or in one of the Arabic periodicals listed in the award's website.

165 environmental violations registered in six months: EA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) issued 165 violation notices against establishments in the first six months of 2022.

In a statement, EA said it carried out 3,284 inspection visits in six months to pollution causing

sites, during which it detected 104 violations of non-compliance with environmental requirements, 36 violations of operating without obtaining an environmental permit, and 31 violations of not presenting environmental permits and licences at work sites.

EA officials conducted 1,000

inspection visits in the Governorate of Dhofar, followed by 950 in North Batinah, and 320 in Muscat, among others.

'The authority is engaged in protecting the environment through continuous monitoring of existing projects and the impact of their activities on the local environment,' it stated.

Board of Directors' Report for the six months ended 30 June 2022

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Bank's first half financial results for 2022.

Performance Summary

Oman's outlook has continued to improve on the back of higher oil prices, rising hydrocarbon production and other reform programs. However, as major economies worldwide battle against the unprecedented rise in inflation global recession is now deemed to be a real possibility, which may impact Oman if the demand for oil drops. Our performance in the first half of 2022 shows a 48.0% increase in net profit to RO14.8 M compared with RO10.0 M for the same period in 2021. This has been driven by an increase in net operating income and lower operating expenses. Net interest income was up 6.0% to RO26.4 M for the period ended 30 June 2022 compared with RO24.9 M for the same period in 2021 mainly due to higher interest income which is positive outcome of rate hike. Net fee income increased by 12.8% to RO5.3 M for the period ended 30 June 2022 compared with RO4.7 M for the same period in 2021 owing to higher fees from cards. Net trading income was marginally down by RO0.2 M and stood at RO3.2 M compared with RO3.4 M for the same period last year. A net release of RO5.9 M has been reported to the Bank's ECL and other credit impairment charges compared with a net release of RO5.7 M for the same period last year. The Bank released RO6.0 M of Wholesale ECL offset by a RO0.1 M charge in Retail ECL. The ECL release was driven by an improvement in the macroeconomic variables. Operating expenses reduced by 13.5% to RO23.1 M compared with RO26.7 M for the same period in 2021 primarily due to lower staff cost and prior year impairment charges that were not repeated in the current period. Loans and advances to customers increased by 4.4% to RO1,391.8 M compared with RO1,333.3 M as at 30 June 2021. Customer deposits marginally increased by 0.8% to RO1,939.0 M compared to the same period last year. Our liquidity remains strong, as evidenced by an Advances to Deposit ratio (ADR) of 71.8% at the end of June 2022. HBON's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) stood at 21.4% as at 30 June 2022 compared with 21.6% as at 30 June 2021.

Delivering the best customer experience

In Wealth and Personal Banking (WPB), we launched a new to bank customer deposit acquisition campaign offering all customers cash back for bringing new deposits to their HSBC accounts. We also launched an exciting campaign offering a chance to win 1 million rewards points for cardholders during 2Q and 3Q based on their usage of their credit cards. This was supported by our Employee Banking Solutions program where we held around 615 in-person and virtual meetings, 20 open days with our top corporate employers and 12 financial well-being sessions. In technology developments, the identification of customers through voice biometrics has been deployed in 2022. This allows the customers to access our banking services through our contact centre by phone using their voice as the unique identifier without needing to spend time inputting a phone banking code or answering questions to identify themselves. In the wholesale Business, in June 2022, HSBC acted as a Dealer Manager on a voluntary cash tender offer by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, to buy back 8 series of its outstanding international US Dollar bonds via a Modified Dutch Auction structure. The transaction marks the first ever tender offer to utilize a Modified Dutch Auction mechanism by a MENA sovereign. We also extended our latest payment solution, Global Disbursements, to Oman Air, which will allow it to execute international payments in various currencies its centralised treasury location in Oman. The Global Disbursement solution will introduce a simplified payment process that streamlines reconciliation and provides greater overall cash management. HSBC Oman is proud to have collected two awards at the 2022 Euromoney Middle East Awards for Excellence. The Bank was named Oman's Best Investment Bank for the fourth consecutive year and also won the Best Bank in the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) category.

HSBC Bank Oman S.A.O.G update disclosure on the possible merger with Sohar International Bank S.A.O.G.
Further to the disclosure made on 19th June 2022 and to subsequent discussions between HSBC Bank Oman SAOG (HSBC Oman) and Sohar International Bank SAOG (Sohar International), the Board of Directors of HSBC Oman agreed to enter into a non-binding memorandum of understanding with Sohar International, dated 25 July 2022, on proceeding to exclusive discussions in relation to the possible merger between the two entities, on the basis of a merger by incorporation whereby HSBC Oman would be dissolved and its shareholders offered a consideration valuing HSBC Oman at 1.0x book value, with such consideration consisting of shares of Sohar International with the option for the shareholders of HSBC Oman to elect to receive the consideration in cash, provided that the maximum cash consideration payable by Sohar International to the shareholders of HSBC Oman that elect to receive cash consideration shall not exceed 70% of the total consideration payable by Sohar International. The shares of Sohar International that would form part of the consideration to the shareholders of HSBC Oman would value Sohar International at 1.0x book value. The respective book value of each bank would be calculated at a later date. The ongoing exclusive discussions, negotiations and the potential merger shall remain subject to due diligence and entry into definitive agreements, in addition to obtaining final approvals from the banks' respective Boards, Regulators and Shareholders. HSBC Oman has been informed by HSBC Group, its major shareholder, of its intention for HSBC Bank Middle East Limited ("HBME") to establish a new wholly owned banking branch in Oman. If the proposed merger discussions were to lead to a binding agreement, HBME would then request regulatory approvals for the setup of this new branch.

Conclusion
Finally, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all our stakeholders and to the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority for their continuous support. On behalf of the Board of Directors I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his wise leadership, and we affirm our full support to the Omani government at all times.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles
Chairman

Interim condensed statement of comprehensive income for the three month and the six month period ended 30 June 2022 (unaudited)

	Three month period ended 30 June 2022	Three month period ended 30 June 2021	Six month period ended 30 June 2022	Six month period ended 30 June 2021
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Interest income	17,810	16,441	33,892	32,605
Interest expense	(3,802)	(3,819)	(7,528)	(7,704)
Net interest income	14,008	12,622	26,364	24,901
Fee income	3,808	3,166	7,007	6,449
Fee expense	(912)	(882)	(1,755)	(1,700)
Net fee income	2,896	2,284	5,252	4,749
Net trading income	1,590	1,650	3,201	3,361
Other operating income – net	(6)	17	222	137
Net operating income before loan impairment charges and other credit risk provisions	18,488	16,573	35,039	33,148
Change in expected credit losses and other credit impairment charges - net	3,859	3,532	5,892	5,687
Net operating income	22,347	20,105	40,931	38,835
Employee compensation and benefits	(5,242)	(5,636)	(10,596)	(11,661)
General and administrative expenses	(5,376)	(7,025)	(11,617)	(13,774)
Depreciation and impairment of property, equipment and right-of-use assets	(434)	(466)	(896)	(1,293)
Amortisation of intangible assets	(18)	-	(18)	-
Total operating expenses	(11,070)	(13,127)	(23,127)	(26,728)
Profit before tax	11,277	6,978	17,804	12,107
Tax expense	(1,852)	(1,207)	(2,984)	(2,072)
Profit for the period	9,425	5,771	14,820	10,035
Other comprehensive income / (loss)				
Items that will be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss when specific conditions are met				
Debt instruments at fair value though other comprehensive income				
- Fair value (loss) / gain	(326)	200	(130)	(600)
- Expected credit losses recognised in income statement	(407)	(19)	(384)	(116)
- Tax (expense) / release	49	(30)	20	90
Other comprehensive (loss) / income for the period - net of tax	(684)	151	(494)	(626)
Total comprehensive income for the period	8,741	5,922	14,326	9,409
Earnings per share – basic and diluted				
- for the period (RO)	0.005	0.003	0.007	0.005
- annualised (RO)	0.019	0.012	0.015	0.010

Interim condensed statement of financial position as at 30 June 2022 (unaudited)

	At 30 June 2022	At 30 June 2021	Audited At 31 December 2021
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Assets			
Cash and balances with central banks	138,401	283,175	282,721
Due from banks	268,829	234,948	213,700
Loans and advances to customers - net	1,391,846	1,333,345	1,347,188
Financial investments	528,072	449,102	448,962
Other assets	56,539	39,281	34,078
Intangible assets	1,332	-	-
Property and equipment	20,047	19,622	20,342
Right-of-use assets	2,660	-	-
Deferred tax assets	2,614	4,452	2,256
Total assets	2,410,340	2,363,925	2,349,247
Liabilities and equity			
Liabilities			
Due to banks	54,120	47,598	48,444
Deposits from customers	1,939,012	1,922,941	1,901,094
Current tax liabilities	5,124	5,709	5,339
Other liabilities	60,536	48,055	46,492
Lease liabilities	2,537	2,727	2,391
Total liabilities	2,061,329	2,027,030	2,003,760
Equity			
Share capital	200,031	200,031	200,031
Legal reserve	47,777	45,944	47,777
FVOCI reserve	886	1,063	1,380
Retained earnings	100,317	89,857	96,299
Total equity	349,011	336,895	345,487
Total liabilities and equity	2,410,340	2,363,925	2,349,247



Korean consortium awarded first smart farm project in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A Korean smart farm consortium, comprising POMIT Company and Nongshim Company, has been awarded a pilot project becoming the first partner of Oman government's smart farm initiative.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) and Omani Indian Fertiliser Company signed an agreement to finance the smart vegetable farms project in February.

Last week, H E Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Undersecretary for Agriculture in MAFWR, and POMIT signed an agreement on the container-type vertical farm pilot project.

The project includes two 40ft containers, designed and manufactured in Korea, to be installed



(Supplied photo)

in Oman, besides supporting operations, training and transfer of know-how in the first three months. Following this period, the consortium will provide remote support for one year.

"POMIT is an ICT company that specialises in the Middle

East market. This project will be the first government smart farm project in the Middle East. It will help support Oman's food sustainability efforts," said Sanghoon Yang, director of POMIT.

"It is a meaningful start for the Korean consortium to be a part of

POMIT specialises in the Middle East market. This project will be the first government smart farm project in the Middle East. It will help support Oman's food sustainability efforts

SANGHOON YANG

Oman government's smart farm initiative and be a catalyst in the food security efforts of the country," said Sejin Kim, Commercial Attaché of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea and Director General of Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency.

MHUP to charge RO100 for registration of property in Sorouh projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) will charge RO100 for transfer and registration of each real estate unit located within integrated residential neighbourhood projects (Sorouh).

A ministerial decision (No 156/2022) was issued to this effect on Monday, amending some fees and service charges collected by the ministry.



(Supplied photo)

The first article of the decision stipulated that a new clause (No

16) is added to Annex No 6 regarding fees for registration and documentation of property and request for proof of ownership of real estate located within integrated residential neighbourhood projects.

The Sorouh initiative was launched in 2019, providing citizens comfortable and affordable housing. The project aims to provide alternatives in order to reduce the demand for land by citizens.

Sorouh projects feature modern

living standards and services, green spaces, large public parks, sports grounds, mosques, health-care facilities and commercial centres.

The ministry is currently expanding Sorouh projects by offering three new sites with more than 4,000 housing units.

"Work is on to offer ten more sites in several governorates in 2022," H E Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shuali, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, stated in an address to Majlis A'Shura in June.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

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Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/026	2022/MM/QS-16 (RE-CALL-02)	RFP for Renewal of AMC for Muscat Municipality IT Infrastructure (RE-TENDER-02) (E- Tender)	Rail 25	09/08/2022	16/08/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/009	2022/MM/QS-22 (Re-Call-01)	Preparation Works at Umq Rubakh – Wisal - at Qurriyat (RE-TENDER-01) (E- Tender)	Rail 25	22/08/2022	11/09/2022	Forth
PRE/22/070	2022/MM/QS-38	REP FOR MUSCAT CONTACT CENTER SOLUTION	Rail 25	22/08/2022	11/09/2022	Specialist

Tender Conditions :-

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.

- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).



Oman United Insurance Co. S.A.O.G

PO BOX 1522, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman- Tel: 24477372, Fax: 24477323, E-mail: info@omanutd.com - C.R. No: 1/237250/0

COMPANY REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman United Insurance Company SAO G, I have the pleasure to present to you the Un-Audited Financial Statements of the company for the 6 months' period ended on 30 June 2022.

Operation Performance Highlights:

Particulars	30 Jun 2022	30 Jun 2021	Change %
Gross Written Premium	18,490,272	18,597,509	(0.58)
Gross Underwriting Results	2,039,756	3,371,042	(39.50)
Realized Investment and other income	1,697,134	1,759,890	(4)
Net Profit for the year (after income tax)	891,151	2,422,998	(63)

Gross Written Premium and Underwriting Results:

The gross premium income of all insurance branches amounted to OMR 18.49 million compared to OMR 18.60 million in the same corresponding period of the year 2021 depicting a decrease of (0.58%). This decrease is attributable to the overall prevailing economic conditions accompanied with the severe pricing competition and high motor loss ratio. As a result of our focus on the quality of business rather than the volume of business, and the selective underwriting policy adopted by the management thereof, the gross underwriting profit of all lines of business amounted to OMR 2.04 million compared to Underwriting profits of OMR 3.37 million in the corresponding period of last year depicting a decrease of (39.49%).

Investment and other income Results:

Considering the current & expected oil price movements coupled with improved economic activities within the local economy, we will be cautiously optimistic about the local equity market,

thereby investing in the local equity shares in a phased manner in line with the Investment of the assets of Insurance and Takaful Insurance companies Regulation. By this approach, we will be diluting the investments from fixed income securities to the equity investments in a gradual manner.

Therefore, the company achieved a total investment income of OMR 1.70 million, compared to OMR 1.76k in the corresponding period last year depicting an increase of (4%) The net investment income after deducting unrealized investment losses amounted to OMR 1.52 million compared to OMR 2.01 for the same period last year i.e. an increase of (25%)

Net profit:

The company's net profit after tax amounted to OMR 891K against a net profit after tax of OMR 2.42 million in the corresponding period of last year, depicting an increase of (63%), this is mainly due to higher motor claims ratio coupled with marginally lower investment income has contributed to the lower net profit. Management would take the best efforts to overcome this lower net profit. Accordingly the earnings per share amounted to .009 Bzs against .024 Bzs in the corresponding period of last year. It is worth noting that the net asset value per share amounted to 282 Bzs compared to 293 Bzs in the same period of last year with a growth rate of 2.5%, this is despite the continuous distribution of dividends to the shareholders.

Business risks:

Honorable shareholders: As you know, insurance business is exposed to natural and other risks that are governed by fate and destiny, (Such as the pandemic of Coronavirus, Covid19) and on the other hand, the performance of the investment portfolio is very much influenced by the prevailing economic and political conditions.

However, the management has been exerting its utmost efforts by adopting a conservative risk management mechanism that mitigates the effects of the risks related to the activity.

Acknowledgement:

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the shareholders, our loyal customers, reinsurers and employees. Our sincere thanks and appreciation also extended to Capital Market Authority for their tremendous support in regulating and developing the local insurance sector and for their assistance, which has led to the smooth functioning of operations

Finally, our sincere thanks and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq. We all pray to Almighty Allah to shower His Majesty with blessings, keep him in good health and give him long life. Our sincere thanks and appreciation extended to His Majesty's rational government and we wish to the Omani people always Progress and prosperity.

Thank You and Kindest Regards

Salim Bin Nassir Al Busaidi
Chairman

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

	6 months ended 30 June 2022 RO	6 months ended 30 June 2021 RO
Income		
Gross written premiums	18,490,272	18,597,508
Net underwriting result	2,039,756	3,371,042
Investment income – net	1,303,604	1,772,622
Other operating income	216,187	242,139
Total net income	3,559,547	5,385,803
General and administration expenses	(2,520,824)	(2,572,488)
Profit before taxation	1,038,723	2,813,315
Taxation	(147,572)	(390,317)
Profit for the period	891,151	2,422,998
Other comprehensive income		
Items that will be reclassified to statement of profit or loss:		
Net change in fair value of available-for-sale investments	13,761	(55,871)
Total comprehensive income for the period	904,912	2,367,127
Earnings per share	0.009	0.024

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2022			
	Unaudited 30 June 2022 RO	Audited 31 December 2021 RO	
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property and equipment	1,405,805	1,51247	171 477
Investment property	2,048,740	2,109,629	2,076,932
Available-for-sale investments	734,161	834,073	734,800
Deposits	27,950,000	42,600,000	35,150,00
Reinsurance contracts	4,699,243	5,896,172	5,684,000
	36,837,949	52,967,045	45,139,641
Current assets			
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	5,520,712	4,603,054	3,640,082
Insurance and other receivables	11,849,427	11,556,395	9,076,932
Deposits	20,984,426	11,841,497	21,438,822
Reinsurance contracts	29,642,936	25,404,575	28,715,326
Bank balances and cash	3,296,992	622,674	773,410
	71,294,493	54,028,195	63,644,572
Total assets	108,132,442	106,995,240	108,784,213
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
EQUITY			
Share capital	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
Share premium	871,519	871,519	871,519
Retained earnings	3,750,156	4,822,193	6,359,005
Legal reserve	3,333,334	3,333,334	3,333,334
General reserve	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
Fair value reserve	179,688	199,369	165,927
Contingency reserve	10,000,000	10,000,000	10,000,000
Total equity	28,234,697	29,326,415	30,829,785
LIABILITIES			
Non-current liabilities			
Insurance contracts	5,404,243	6,996,172	6,594,000
Employees' end of service benefits	791,097	881,137	764,632
Deferred tax liability	101,794	122,910	128,692
Lease liability	266,873	248,571	276,610
	6,564,007	8,248,790	7,763,934
Current liabilities			
Insurance contracts	53,330,922	50,749,910	52,583,108
Bank overdraft	893,298	598,828	-
Trade and other payables	18,845,987	17,575,740	16,808,302
Lease liability	34,569	57,300	46,077
Taxation	228,962	438,257	753,007
	73,333,738	69,420,035	70,190,494
Total liabilities	79,897,745	77,668,825	77,954,428
Total equity and liabilities	108,132,442	106,995,240	108,784,213
Net assets per share	0.282	0.293	0.308
NOTE:			
The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them in either Arabic or English within 7 days of receipt			

MARKET WATCH

MSX30 4,590.19
Sensx 58,115.50

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian	205.55
Pakistan	624.42
Bangladesh	246.46
Philippines	144.17
Sri Lanka	931.41

*Rates as on AUGUST 01
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Egypt currency near record low

The Egyptian pound plunged on Monday to a near all-time low of more than 19 to the dollar, in the world's number one wheat importer where prices have soared.

Egypt's currency has not fallen so sharply since December 2016 when it hit 19.3 to the US greenback after a drastic devaluation.

The central bank on Monday was buying one dollar for 19.01 pounds, compared with a rate of 15.6 in March. That amounts to a drop of about 22 per cent, according to an AFP report.

In late March, inflation-hit Egypt also devalued its currency, which lost around 18 per cent of its value overnight. Foreign currency reserves fell more than US\$7bn in April and May to stand at US\$33.4bn at the end of June, as a result of moves "to calm the markets" as well as "external debt repayments", the central bank said at the time.

The Arab world's largest country, where almost one-third of the population lives below the official poverty line, is grappling with inflation of around 15%.

MSX outperforms GCC stock markets in July

Muscat Stock Exchange recorded 9.9 per cent gains in July, helped by higher oil prices, economic recovery and strong earnings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange outperformed all its GCC counterparts in July as the benchmark MSX30 Index recorded a 9.9 per cent gain during the month, its biggest monthly rise since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Most GCC markets rebounded in July on strong quarterly earnings, higher oil prices and global economic recovery. The Muscat Stock Exchange recovered after its lacklustre performance and volatile trading during the previous months.

The MSCI GCC Index reported the biggest gain in six months at 6.1 per cent in July 2022, broadly in line with global equity markets, according to a Kamco Investment report released on Monday.

Performance within the GCC was also positive across the board with Oman seeing the biggest monthly gain of 9.9 per



cent closely followed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia with gains of 9.7 per cent and 5.9 per cent, respectively. Abu Dhabi and Dubai markets lagged with smaller gains of 3.1 per cent and 3.6 per cent, respectively, Kuwait-based Kamco Investment said.

The MSX30 Index continued its gaining streak for the second consecutive month during July, recording the largest growth among the GCC indices, to close the month at 4,532.1 points.

Sectoral performance

In terms of sectoral performance at the MSX, both services and financial indices increased during July by 5.8 per cent and 10.0 per

cent, respectively. The industrial index showed the only decline falling 0.9 per cent to close the month.

In terms of company performance, Oman Chlorine Company topped the monthly gainers list in July recording 31.4 per cent increase in share prices. Galfar Engineering and Contracting Company was next with a gain of 28.4 per cent followed by HSBC Bank Oman and Dhofar Generating Company with 23.2 per cent and 21.0 per cent increases in their respective share prices during the month.

Galfar recently won a RO73mn contract to construct a dual carriageway project in

Duqm. The contract has a duration of 36 months and was awarded by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

On the other hand, Al Jazeera Steel Products Company posted the largest share price slide for July witnessing 14.4 per cent share fall followed Dhofar International Development Holding and Oman Refreshment Company for the second and third spot on the decliners table recording 11.5 per cent and 10 per cent share fall, respectively, during the month.

Monthly trading activity on Oman's stock exchange remained mixed during July, similar to the previous month. Total volume of shares traded during July dropped 13.4 per cent to reach 219.9mn shares as compared to 254mn shares during June.

Galfar topped the monthly volume traded chart registering 36.4mn of shares traded, followed by Bank Muscat and Bank Nizwa with 27.9mn and 22.5mn in trades during the month.

Monthly market turnover at the MSX, on the other hand, witnessed an increase of 4.0 per cent to reach RO53mn in July. Bank Muscat topped the value traded chart witnessing RO15.3mn of its shares changing hands during July followed by Omantel and Galfar with RO6.5mn and RO4.2mn in trades, respectively.

OPAZ extends fee reduction for SMEs



Muscat - The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has approved a decision to extend the 50 per cent reduction of fees for the services provided in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) to SMEs.

The fees reduction period for SMEs will continue until March 20, 2027, according to the decision published in the Official Gazette on Monday.

The decision explained that the 50 per cent reduction of fees for the services provided by OPAZ targets SMEs operating in the special economic zones and free zones, provided that they are wholly-owned by Omanis and registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

Dr Said bin Khalifa al Tuirshi, in-charge of managing the business development sector at OPAZ, said that this decision comes within the framework of the authority's effort to create a stimulating investment environment for entrepreneurs.

It will meet the needs of residents, workers and visitors to the special economic zone for various services

DR SAID AL TUISHI

"The decision will benefit businesspersons and owners of commercial buildings located within SEZAD as this package of facilities will boost the business and demand for these buildings. Further, it will meet the needs of residents, workers and visitors to the special economic zone for various services," he said.

Tuirshi said that OPAZ last month issued a decision reducing the registration fees for registration services in the commercial registry and licenses to practice some economic activities, including over 130 activities in SEZAD.

Kuwait's Haitham al Ghais takes office as new OPEC chief

Vienna, Austria - Haitham al Ghais of Kuwait on Monday took office as secretary general of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) at the organization's secretariat in Vienna, Austria.

Ghais was appointed by acclamation for a three-year term at the special meeting of the OPEC Conference held on January 3, 2022. He succeeds the late secretary general of OPEC, Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo.

In a press statement released by OPEC, Ghais said, "It is a great honour for me to be at the helm of an organization that has been instrumental in supporting a stable and sustainable supply of oil to the world for more than 61 years."

"Throughout its history, OPEC has been at the forefront of promoting dialogue, cooperation and partnerships to achieve



Haitham al Ghais

its mission. Today, I look forward to working with all our member countries and our many partners around the world to ensure a sustainable and inclusive energy future which leaves no one be-

hind," the secretary general added.

Ghais - a respected oil technocrat and well-known OPEC figure - brings a great wealth of experience from both his diplo-

matic background, as well as his extensive experience in the energy and oil sectors in both OPEC founder member Kuwait and internationally. His career in the global oil industry spans 30 years. He advised six Kuwaiti oil ministers on the global oil market and its developments over the past years.

Ghais is also a veteran of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC). He served at KPC's offices in Kuwait, Beijing and London. Before taking the position of OPEC secretary general, he was the deputy managing director for international marketing at KPC.

Ghais was a leading member of Kuwait's delegation to the meetings of OPEC and the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) between OPEC member countries and non-OPEC oil-producing countries.

Shell's profit rockets on high oil prices

London, UK - British energy giant Shell said that its net profit soared more than five-fold to US\$18bn in the second quarter, fuelled by resurgent oil and gas prices, and rewarded shareholders with another bumper buy-back.

The surge in profits in the three months to June was partially attributable to a reversal of US\$4.3bn in impairments after the company raised its forecasts for the gas and oil market.

"We delivered strong financial results," said chief executive Ben van Beurden alongside the results statement.

The London-listed energy major announced a US\$6bn share buyback programme, hav-



ing already returned US\$8.5bn to shareholders.

Van Beurden warned also that "with volatile energy markets, economic turbulence and the ongoing need for action to tackle climate change, 2022 continues to present challenges to con-

sumers, to government, and to companies".

Shell had rebounded into a US\$3.4bn profit in second quarter of 2021 from a US\$18.1bn loss in the same period of 2020 when it took a massive impairment charge on the Covid-ravaged oil

market.

However, oil and gas prices have soared this year owing to the Ukraine war and after countries lifted pandemic lockdowns.

Gas prices, which sky-rocketed in March after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, are soaring once more this week after Moscow curbed crucial deliveries to Europe in recent days.

The world's energy majors are reaping the benefits of this year's surge in global oil and gas prices as a result of the war in Ukraine.

France's TotalEnergies said Thursday that net profit more than doubled in the second quarter to 5.7bn euros (US\$5.8bn) from a year earlier.

AFP

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MUSCAT DAILY

OPEC+ walks 'fine line' between US and Russia

London, UK - The OPEC+ group of oil exporters are set to hammer out a new strategy at their meeting Wednesday, with all eyes on how they will react to soaring crude prices.

The 13 core members of OPEC, led by Saudi Arabia, and the 10 further states in OPEC+ – chief among them Russia – find themselves at a crossroads.

After the drastic output cuts they agreed to in spring 2020 in reaction to the plunge in demand caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the member states of the alliance are once again producing at pre-virus levels – at least on paper.

In normal times they would perhaps have stopped at that but faced with runaway prices and pressure from Washington, this scenario is viewed as unlikely.

US President Joe Biden travelled to Saudi Arabia in mid-July despite his promise to make the country a "pariah" in the wake of the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Part of the reason for the controversial trip was to convince Riyadh to continue loosening the production taps to stabilise the market and curb rampant inflation.

Wednesday's meeting will reveal whether his efforts were successful.

"The US administration appears to be anticipating some good news but it's hard to know whether that's based on assurances during Biden's trip or not," Craig Erlam, analyst at Oanda,



told AFP.

"It wouldn't be a surprise to see the Saudis announce something that Biden could tout as a win to voters at home," according to Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management.

Sceptical market

Oil prices tumbled Monday as weak Chinese economic data raised concerns about demand from the world's top crude importer. WTI, the main US contract, fell by five per cent to US\$93.69 per barrel while the international benchmark, Brent, slipped by almost four per cent to just under US\$100.

According to the London-based research institute Energy

Aspects, OPEC+ could adjust its current agreement in order to keep raising crude production volumes.

However, analysts warn against expecting any drastic increases.

OPEC+ has to take into account the fact that the interests of Russia – a key player in the alliance – are diametrically opposed to those of Washington.

"Saudi Arabia has to walk a fine line," says Tamas Varga, analyst at PVM Energy.

The task will be to allow the United States to save face while also placating Moscow in order to ensure the stability of the alliance.

Any decision on Wednesday

will have to be unanimous, which may lead to a longer meeting than normal.

The videoconference meeting is due to start at around 1300 GMT on Wednesday (or 3 pm at the cartel's Vienna headquarters).

"Any new OPEC+ deal aimed at further ramping up supplies is likely to be met with market scepticism, considering the supply constraints already evident within the alliance," says Han Tan at Exinity.

The alliance already regularly fails to fill the production quotas already allotted and has struggled to get back to pre-pandemic volumes.

AFP

HSBC pre-tax profit falls, dismisses calls for split

Hong Kong, China - HSBC bank on Monday said pre-tax profit fell in the first half, and appeared to rebuff calls to spin off its Asian activities on the eve of a key shareholder meeting.

Pre-tax earnings sank 15 per cent to US\$9.2bn after it took a US\$1.1bn hit on possible credit losses "to reflect heightened economic uncertainty and inflation", HSBC said.

The result "reflected a more normalised level of expected credit losses compared with the Covid-19 releases made last year, as well as the macroeconomic impact of the Russia-Ukraine war", added chief executive Noel Quinn.

However, net profit rose 14 per cent to US\$8.3bn in the reporting period partly on a large one-off tax credit.

The annual revenue outlook was positive, Quinn noted, with net interest income expected to reach at least US\$31bn this year and US\$37bn next year as interest rates rise.

The group was confident of achieving its best returns in a decade in 2023. "We also intend to revert to quarterly dividends in 2023," he added.

London-headquartered HSBC was among a number of major banks to cancel dividends early in the pandemic after a de facto order from the Bank of England – a move that upset some Hong Kong investors.

Monday's results come one day before HSBC executives' first face-to-face meeting with shareholders from the Asian financial hub in three years.

Executives are expected to



field questions about a restructuring bid from its biggest shareholder Ping An Insurance Group.

The lender is under pressure from Ping An, which has a 9.2-per cent stake, to spin off its Asian operations, in a bid to unlock shareholder value amid tensions between China and the West.

The bank has previously hinted it wants to keep its current structure while continuing a pivot to Asia. Quinn, speaking later on Monday, suggested such an "alternative structure" would have a "negative" impact on HSBC.

"It has been our judgment that alternative structural options will not deliver increased value for shareholders," Quinn told analysts on a conference call.

"Rather, they would have a material negative impact on value." HSBC had "considered many of these options over recent years", and recently updated its analysis with

third-party financial and legal advice, he added.

Hong Kong politician Christine Fong said on Sunday that HSBC separating its Asian business and bringing back its primary listing to the city is the "best way to protect (the interests of) minority shareholders".

Fong, who reportedly represents 500 small investors in HSBC stock, also voiced support for Ping An getting seats on HSBC's board, citing the cancelled dividends in 2020 as a reason.

Last year, HSBC vowed to accelerate a multi-year pivot to Asia and the Middle East, with ambitions to lead Asia's wealth management market.

The bank said it would invest US\$6bn in Hong Kong, China and Singapore and hire more than 5,000 wealth advisers – while slashing 35,000 jobs and cutting its retail operations in the United States and France.

AFP

Pfizer profits jump on strong sales of COVID-19 products

New York, US - Pfizer reported a jump in second-quarter profits behind a near doubling of revenues driven by sales of its COVID-19 vaccine and therapeutic drug Paxlovid.

The drugmaker raised some of its overall financial benchmarks, but maintained 2022 sales targets for its two Covid-19 products: US\$32bn from the vaccine co-developed with German company BioNTech; and US\$22bn from Paxlovid.

The total is equal to just over half of forecasted 2022 total revenues.

In the quarter ending June 30, profits were US\$9.9bn, up 78 per cent from the year-ago period following a 47 per cent jump in revenues to US\$27.7bn.

US officials last month approved emergency authorization to Pfizer and Moderna for COVID-19 vaccines in under-five-year-olds, the final age group awaiting immunization in

most countries.

Pfizer is currently working on a COVID-19 Omicron vaccine booster candidate for the fall, assuming regulatory approval is granted, company officials said.

Pfizer and German BioNTech have also submitted data for an Omicron vaccine to the European Medicines Agency.

"Pfizer is well positioned to satisfy its current contractual obligations and potential demand within its production capacity through the end of the year," said chief executive Albert Bourla in a statement.

Sales for both its Covid-19 products rose during the quarter.

Revenues for the vaccine came in at US\$8.8bn, up 13 per cent from the year-ago period, while sales of Paxlovid were US\$8.1bn – a big jump over the prior quarter following a five-fold growth in US utilization.

AFP

Tech titans stumble after pandemic boom

San Francisco, US - Amazon and Apple were a relative bright spot in a week of otherwise lackluster earnings results for an industry reckoning with the end of heady pandemic-era growth.

A crowded period of quarterly financial releases from the world's biggest tech firms has been marred by misses and uncertainty – making it clear that the boom triggered by Covid-19 restrictions on getting about has tipped toward downturn.

As people are freed from pandemic lifestyles that had them relying on the internet for shopping, playing, working and learning, inflation is pushing up prices and Covid-19 is causing temporary shutdowns of factories in China relied on by tech firms.

Recession fears, a strong dollar, shrinking advertising budgets and inflation – headwinds are coming from every direction at the moment.

"When you think about the number of challenges in the quarter, we feel really good about the growth that we put up," Apple chief executive Tim



Cook said on an earnings call last week.

For Apple, product sales tallied US\$63.4bn in a drop from the same period a year earlier, but the dip was more than made up for by services revenue that climbed to US\$19.6bn, earnings figures showed.

Demand for iPads and Mac computers exceeded supply in the recently-ended quarter, the main cause being pandemic restrictions that caused "plant closures and plants running at less than full utilization," Cook noted.

Apple was also hobbled by an ongoing shortage of computer chips, Cook said.

Meanwhile, US chip giant Intel reported disappointing earnings battered by its own missteps as well as economic conditions – a post-Covid drop in demand and "supply dislocations in China and other parts of the supply chain," executives said on an earnings call.

Amazon beat sales estimates to reach US\$121bn in the quarter, and revenue climbed at its cloud-computing platform Amazon

Web Services.

The retailer has made progress reducing ranks of employees that had been beefed up to handle online shopping that surged during the pandemic, executives said.

"Amazon managed pretty well through the second quarter despite tough macro conditions and added costs weighing on its bottom line," said analyst Andrew Lipsman.

Apple, Microsoft and Facebook-owner Meta have talked of the strong dollar eating into earnings, since when America's currency gains too much value, it can make products more expensive overseas or eat away at a beneficial exchange rate.

Meta pointed to the greenback's role in the firm's first year-on-year revenue decline since going public in 2012.

Not much good news

In addition to the generally bumpy economic times, firms such as Netflix and Meta are fighting fierce competition from rivals – and both reported losing some ground.

Meta lost about two million monthly users between quarters, and Netflix shed nearly a million paying customers.

Yet Netflix stock is up about a per cent in the past five days, with investors potentially hopeful after the firm projected a coming rebound in subscribers.

Markets seemed similarly assuaged despite Google parent Alphabet missing on revenue and profit.

The Silicon Valley giant's bad news was not unexpected, as the flow of online ad dollars that fuels the company's fortunes has slowed as inflation, war and other troubles vex the overall economy.

"Still, with its tremendous market share in search advertising, Google is relatively well positioned to weather the rough waters that lie ahead," said analyst Evelyn Mitchell.

As advertisers have tightened their belts, and Apple's privacy changes have bitten into firms' sales of costly but highly targeted ads, the damage was uneven.

AFP

Germany's economic model shaken by energy crisis

Berlin, Germany - Stagnant German growth in the second quarter has led analysts across the board to predict a recession as the outlook becomes clouded by the threat of a halt to Russian gas supplies.

But it is not only growth that is sputtering at zero percent between April and June – Germany's entire economic model is being called into question by experts.

"The war in Ukraine puts an end to the German economic business model as we knew it –

a model which was mainly based on cheap energy imports and industrial exports into a increasingly globalised world," said Carsten Brzeski, economist at ING bank, in response to the second-quarter growth data.

Less expensive to produce and transport, with prices pinned down in long-term contracts, Russian gas has for decades contributed to Germany's economic prosperity.

Industry consumes 30 per cent of the gas burnt in Germany. Before the war, more than

half of the total supplies came from Russia, a figure which had fallen to 35 per cent by the beginning of June.

To wean itself completely off Russian gas, Germany is looking further afield for new supplies, including shipments of liquefied natural gas from the United States and Qatar, as well as moving more quickly to renewable electricity generation.

"As an exporting nation, Germany has benefitted disproportionately from free trade. But it is exactly that which is now in danger," said the Sueddeutsche daily earlier this month.

The coronavirus pandemic and the Ukraine war have shown the weaknesses of open economies, as supply chains have been upended and key components have become scarce.

Germany has been among the most exposed to the logistical problems of the past two years.

Germany's dependence on China is also worrying politicians in Berlin. The strong two-way ties between Germany and

China were "not healthy", liberal Finance Minister Christian Lindner said in April.

Beijing is Germany's number-one trade partner, with trade between the two nations expanding again by 15.1 per cent in 2021.

"It's potentially a new risk," economist Claudia Kemfert told AFP. While the risk was less acute than dependence on Russia, more needed to be done to "focus on the domestic economy and build resilience", she said.

After years of anaemic

growth, inflation is back with a vengeance in the European Union. In Germany, the memory of 1920s-style hyperinflation weighs heavy on the public debate.

Beyond this psychological block, the obsession with price stability ensures a "competitive industry and a nation of savers", according to a recent report by French think-tank OFCE.

Rising prices have led to increasing labour unrest in Germany. July saw the longest industrial action at German

ports in 40 years and a day of strikes by ground staff at Lufthansa.

Ahead of negotiations that are set to kick off in September, the powerful IG Metall union is asking for an eight-percent pay rise for 3.8mn workers across various industrial sectors, the biggest wage demand since 2008.

Overshadowed by the war in Ukraine, the lack of skilled workers is a major headache for German industry.

AFP

Alizz Islamic Bank adopts innovative initiatives to support the community

The staff of Alizz Islamic Bank have begun pursuing various voluntary efforts aiming at extending personal initiatives and giving back to the communities around them.

Within this framework, the Sharia'a Audit and Compliance Department (SACD) launched a voluntary initiative for cleaning mosques in Wakan tourist village which is located 2,000m above sea level in South Batinah governorate, with the participation of all staff of the department, the bank said in a statement.

The bank has recently approved a prudent strategy that is applicable to its staff in all departments and branches across the sultanate whereby each department and branch is required to propose a voluntary project that reflects the bank's commitment to its CSR initiatives through its staff, and this initiative was rolled out under the direct supervision of the CEO.

Likewise, the bank is encouraging competitiveness among the staff in giving back to the community by awarding the most innovative and beneficial initiatives.



Commenting on the cleaning campaign, Issa Salem al Riyami, Head of the SACD said, "These

voluntary initiatives reflect each individuals' commitment to the communities, as giving back to



the community, regardless of the form or type of voluntary initiatives, has a significant impact not

only on the individual but on society as well. "This spirit shouldn't be lim-

ited to the employee's role within the organisation, but rather should go beyond that," he further said, adding that the "bank's aim behind launching such initiatives was that each department implements its own initiatives, and this vision was already deliberated and approved after taking all perspectives into consideration and aligning them with the desired objectives".

Riyami continued asserting that "the bank invests in social responsibility in line with its mission to achieve exceptional and sustainable results for our shareholders".

Since its inception, he said the bank launched several projects with the aim of providing a better life for the people we serve across the sultanate, in addition to fulfilling the bank's commitment to the prosperity of the society.

"To that end, the bank offered the necessary support to charity organisations and proactive national organisations that aim to build strong and flexible communities. It has also contributed directly to the growth of non-profit social organisations," he added.

Oman holds seminar on drafting 'Development Budget 2023'

Oman's Ministry of Economy on Monday organised a seminar on drafting 'Development Budget 2023' and its e-system.

The seminar included a demonstration on the main guidelines that government units, ministries, authorities and public establishments must follow when submitting their development budgets for 2023.

The seminar's opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Dr Nasser Rashid al Ma'awali, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Economy.

The seminar was held within the context of Royal Decree No. 36/2022 on the System of the Governorates.

The Royal decree gives governorates financial and administrative autonomy in a bid to enhance decentralization and boost the attractiveness and competitiveness of those governorates.

It also aims to activate the role of governors' offices, which includes drafting development budgets of the respective governorates.

Nestlé makes 'Bidfood Oman' exclusive distributor for S.Pellegrino, Acqua Panna

Bidfood Middle East, a leading multi-channel foodservice provider of international Food and Beverage brands and part of the Bidcorp Group, has secured a sole distributorship agreement to supply Nestlé's S.Pellegrino and Acqua Panna water products to the foodservice channel in Oman.

This new distribution agreement builds upon a long-standing partnership between Nestlé Waters and Bidfood Middle East - which dates to 2004. The agreement will enable both companies to further grow their distribution and partnership with the premium operators in the foodservice sector.

Commenting on the success, Hisham al Jamil, Bidfood Middle East CEO said, "We are proud of the long-term relationship we have developed with Nestlé Waters, and extremely delighted to further expand our services for Nestlé's S.Pellegrino and Acqua



Panna products to Oman, following the success in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia".

Both brands, he said, have earned a strong reputation worldwide as fine dining waters and are widely appreciated by the leading figures of the culinary scene in the region.

"Equipped with a vast sales force and a solid distribution net-

work, Bidfood Oman will offer S.Pellegrino and Acqua Panna unparalleled market penetration and further increase its presence in the region," he added.

Andrea Jacomelli, Area Manager MEA said, "Sanpellegrino Group over the past decades has experienced an incredible success in the Middle East, delighting its consumers with Acqua Panna, S.Pellegrino waters and

the Italian sparkling drinks.

"A decisive contributor to this accomplishment has been the long-term partnership between Sanpellegrino and Bidfood Middle East. Expanding the geographical scope to Oman will enable Bidfood Oman to leverage its expertise and help us bring our amazing brands to the Sultanate of Oman with its Hospitality sector in focus," Jacomelli added.

S.Pellegrino, Acqua Panna and Sanpellegrino Sparkling Fruit Beverages are international trademarks of Sanpellegrino S.p.A. which is based in Milan, Italy.

Distributed in over 130 countries through branches and distributors in all five continents, these products represent quality excellence by virtue of their origins and perfectly interpret Italian style worldwide as a synthesis of pleasure, health, and well-being.

Ooredoo digital partner in Dhofar's tourism promotion

Committed to the sustainable development of all regions in Oman and continuing its support for local charity associations, Ooredoo recently participated as digital partner in the Nojume Camp, to promote Dhofar as a prime tourist destination across the region and to support the Omani Bahja Orphan Society.

"More than 23 bloggers from across Oman and the GCC were invited to spend part of the khareef season in Salalah and experience its tourist attractions, hospitality events, natural beauty and amazing weather and at the same time to encourage people to support the Omani Bahja Orphan Society," Ooredoo said.

Ooredoo, as digital sponsor, provided special welcome gifts, a visitor's pack containing a pre-paid mobile SIM and data, as well as providing coverage of the event with 5G Internet.

With the Khareef season back in full swing this year, content



creators are the perfect partners to highlight all of the amazing experiences that Dhofar offers to visitors.

Powered by Ooredoo's services, Nojume Camp brought the fun and shared their experiences of the season, which creators could share with their audiences on social media.

Ooredoo is also celebrating

the khareef season with a series of freebies and special offers for visitors including giving all customers 1GB of free data valid for 24 hours automatically when entering the Dhofar region.

Whether for a quick solo adventure, a romantic getaway, or a family break, Ooredoo's great value plans are the perfect accompaniment.

ISG Class XII students become Oman toppers in all streams

Students of Indian School Al Ghubra showcased a record breaking performance in this year's CBSE Class XII examination by bagging the top positions in all the three streams among the Indian Schools in Oman.

Pranshu Dasgupta with a phenomenal score of 99.4 per cent secured the first position in Oman in the Science stream, while Sujanyaa Sriram with a high score of 97.8 per cent came first in Oman in the Commerce stream. Shraavani Sastry with a commendable score of 98 per cent topped the list of the successful students from Humanities in Oman, ISG said in a statement.

Besides the first rank in the three streams, the second position in Oman in the Humanities stream was occupied by Caroline Judi Benhur with 97.6 per cent marks.

Ishan Jabir and Keshav Balwant Deoskar with a score of 98.2 per cent jointly ranked third in Oman in the Science stream. Ananya Panwar with 97.2 per

THE TOPPERS

Pranshu Dasgupta

Science stream

The first rank was secured by **Pranshu Dasgupta** with an all-time high score of **99.4%**. The second position was shared by **Ishan Jabir** and **Keshav Balwant Deoskar** with a score of **98.2%** **Atharva Umesh Bhide** with **98%** was ranked third in the school

Ishan Jabir

Commerce stream

Sujanyaa Sriram secured the first position with an excellent score of **97.8%**. **Ananya Panwar** made it to the second position at the school level with **97.2%** **Aruthra Baskaran** was placed in the third position with a score of **96.4%**.

Sujanyaa Sriram

Humanities stream

Shraavani Sastry stood first with an outstanding score of **98%**. **Caroline Judi Benhur** with **97.6%** secured the second position **Saloni Bantu** with **96.8%** bagged the third at the school level.

Shraavani Sastry

cent of marks came third in Oman in the Commerce stream. The percentage of students who scored an overall aggregate of 90 per cent and above are 46

per cent in the Science stream, 31 per cent in the Commerce stream and 46 per cent in the Humanities stream. The percentage of students

who scored distinction are 87 per cent in the Science stream, 89 per cent in the Commerce stream and 64 per cent in the Humanities stream.

All the 168 students who appeared for the examination passed in all the subjects without any compartment. A perfect score of 100 was

scored by an impressive number of students in various subjects and they are: Aswathi Manukumar, Atharva Umesh Bhide, Herschelle Mathew Thomas, Ibrahim Mohammad and Pranshu Dasgupta in Mathematics; Pranshu Dasgupta in Physics; Ayesha Tarafdar, Eyakkeya Vithyashree S and Keshav Balwant Deoskar in Chemistry; Aditya Pandey, Aswathi Manukumar, Atharva Umesh Bhide, Keshav Balwant Deoskar, Pranshu Dasgupta and Sankalp Sinha in Computer Science and Rahul Deepak Varvani in Engineering Graphics.

Ishan Jabir with a score of 99 per cent secured the highest marks in Biology, while the subject toppers in English are Atharva Umesh Bhide, Farah Gayasuddin, Pooja Thalopathy and Pranshu Dasgupta (98%). Ananya Sahdev is the top scorer in Physical Education (88%).

In the Commerce stream the students who scored centum are: Rebecca Angela Pinto and

Saujanya Anand Khapali (Business Studies); Hridya Suresh (Psychology) and Sujanyaa Sriram (Entrepreneurship).

Ananya Panwar scored 99% in Accountancy and became the subject topper. She along with Aruthra Baskaran, and Sujanyaa Sriram scored highest in Economics; while Aruthra Baskaran scored highest in Informatics Practices and Nikhil Sreejith in Marketing.

In the Humanities stream Shraavani Sastry achieved the perfect score of 100 in Sociology. Kshama Sushilkumar Mumbai is the subject topper in Economics (99%) and Sneha Megan Pais scored highest in Painting (95%).

Principal Papri Ghosh and the members of the school management committee applauded the commendable performance of the students and wished them the very best in their future endeavours.

They also thanked the teachers who have guided these students to scale great heights.

Sohar International receives ‘Best Tourism Promotion Campaign’ award at Arab Forum

Sohar International has been conferred the title of the ‘Best Campaign to Promote Tourism’ at the Second Arab Forum for Tourism and Heritage held in Salalah recently.

In honour of its unflinching efforts, the bank said the award was given for its initiative in 2021 and 2022 titled ‘In Oman We Win’ and ‘Take It From Us’ respectively.

Organised by the Arab Centre for Tourism Media, the Second Arab Forum for Tourism and Heritage was held on July 24 and 25 at the Rotana Hotel, Salalah.

It was inaugurated by H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and saw in attendance several key representatives from the public and private sectors, the bank said in a statement.

Representing the bank, Khalil Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Sohar International attended the event and received the award.

The forum seeks to enhance the partnership between media institutions and the government and private sector establishments in the culture, heritage, and tourism sector in an endeavour to catalyse the marketing and promotional efforts in the field, the statement added.

As an agile, dynamic, and progressive bank that is well-aligned with the sultanate’s goal of economic diversification, Sohar International has been leading innovative campaigns geared at promoting the tourism sector in the country, the bank stated.

Commenting on the award, Hedaifi said, “Sohar International believes in taking a more holistic approach to its CSR campaigns and strategically integrates key focus areas of national interest and the country’s long-term goals into its initiatives.”

Through the ‘In Oman We Win’ and ‘Take it from Us’ initiatives,



he said the bank adopted a unique approach to highlighting the natural beauty, abundant resources, and rich cultural heritage of the sultanate while simultaneously promoting SMEs catering to this segment and hence creating a rewarding experience for all stakeholders.

“We are indeed honoured to have received this award which will act as further inspiration for us to continue to conceptualise innovative campaigns and add value to the tourism sector,” he further added, saying that “with Oman’s tourism sector showing immense potential, Sohar International will remain committed to supporting the country’s vision to position the Sultanate as a key tourism destination.

“This will also act as a key driver of socio-economic growth, job creation, and the development of industries.”

Passionate about creating a unique experience, Sohar International’s ‘In Oman We Win’ was a popular Prize Scheme in 2021 that took viewers on a tour through various touristic, cultural, and historic locations from Musandam to Dhofar.

The bank’s ongoing ‘Take It From Us’ campaign primarily focuses on spreading financial knowledge amongst the community. Through well-conceived initiatives like these, Sohar International has reaffirmed its position as a premium bank that is invested in the socio-economic progress of the country.

Recently, Sohar International was ranked by the highly coveted Best Banks Survey as the ‘Fastest Growing Bank’ in the Large Banks Category and ‘Excellence in Digital Transformation’ at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards. In addition, Global Business Review Magazine Awards 2022 honoured Sohar International with the title of ‘Best Corporate Banking - Oman 2022’.

Huawei unveils ‘flagship products’ at Dubai event

Huawei held a Flagship Products Summer Launch Event in Dubai that saw the introduction of incredible cutting edge devices including the ideal flagship foldable phone Huawei Mate Xs 2, a flagship laptop Huawei MateBook X Pro, a flagship tablet Huawei MatePad Pro, Huawei FreeBuds Pro 2 as well as Huawei MateBook D16. Each one of these devices comes loaded with some innovative features that are set to take the user experience to next level, the group said.

Mate Xs 2, Huawei’s brand-new flagship foldable smartphone, features an ultra-flat surface which is minimalist and natural, the phone uses the Falcon Wing Design, it said. The True-Chroma Camera System of Huawei Mate Xs 2 includes a 50MP True-Chroma Camera for capturing true-to-life colours.

Huawei Mate Xs 2 is available in Oman with pre-orders at a price of RO789.9 on Huawei’s online platforms as well as from



the certified retailers.

Another product that Huawei is promoting is MateBook X Pro, terming it to be ‘the Ultimate Elegant High-Performance Flagship Laptop’. The MateBook X Pro is available in Oman with pre-orders at a price of RO729.9 on Huawei’s online platforms as well as from the certified retailers.

Other ‘flagship products’ are MatePad Pro, FreeBuds Pro 2, all-new Huawei Metaline Antenna and MateBook D laptops.

Bank Muscat wins ‘Best Trade Finance Bank in Oman’ award from Global Trade Review

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has won the Best Trade Finance Bank in Oman Award from *Global Trade Review* (GTR) magazine for the fourth consecutive year.

With its strong global network of over 500 correspondent banks, Bank Muscat offers a number of customised solutions to meet the challenging demands of exporters, importers and local traders in the sultanate and this year’s GTR award recognises the excellent services provided by the bank through its Global Trade Services division.

Speaking on the occasion, Fatma Khalifa al Maskiry, Senior Assistant General Manager - Global Trade Services, Bank Muscat, said: “As one of the leading Trade Finance providers in the region, Bank Muscat has been facilitating trade and economic development both in the Sultanate and the region. I would like to take this opportunity to thank *Global Trade Review* for



Fatma Khalifa al Maskiry

recognising the bank’s efforts in supporting the corporate sector in Oman and in the region through a number of highly-customised solutions.”

The Global Trade Services team at Bank Muscat blends traditional financial solutions with tailor-made packages for operations, ensuring prompt payments, managing liquidity and minimising exchange rate risk.

Bank Muscat offers a number



of customised solutions to meet the challenging demands of exporters, importers and local traders in the sultanate.

The bank issues Letters of Credit, all types of Guarantees, Standby LCs, handles documents under collection, offers document checking services under export Letters of Credit, and confirms Letters of Credit.

It also provides various trade financing solutions including re-

ceivables finance, trust receipt financing and facilitates secured trade payments and receipts between buyers and sellers. In line with global trends and its customer-centric vision, the bank is also currently digitalising a number of its services to enhance customer convenience and accessibility.

As a prolific innovator in the financial sector, the bank regularly wins a number of interna-

tional and local awards and accolades.

Recently, Bank Muscat was ranked by Forbes Middle East as one of the Top 100 Listed Companies in the Middle East for the second consecutive year.

Earlier in 2021, the bank was rated as one of the Top 50 Banks in the region by Forbes Middle East and also as the Best Trade Finance Provider in Oman by Global Finance.

Barceló Hotel Group announces exclusive staycation at Mussanah, 4 others in GCC

Barceló Hotel Group, the leading Spanish hotel chain, is inviting people to experience ‘a fantastic staycation experience’, which the group is offering at its five operating properties across the GCC, including the one in Mussanah in Oman.

Residents are welcomed to a getaway unlike any other and can avail of up to a ten per cent discount when booking their staycation through the Barceló Hotel Group website, valid until August 31, the group said in a statement.

International and local travellers can enjoy the perfect summer vacation at Oman’s favourite beach resort, Barceló Mussanah Resort. Regarded as Mussanah’s flagship beach property, Barceló Mussanah Resort has launched a variety of exciting and tantalising summer activities, catering to the needs of every type of traveller.

‘Adventure and thrill seekers are promised an exhilarating experience as they glide the scenic Mussanah Marina on the 175-metre long zip-line or beat the heat with a range of water-sports



activities, including snorkelling among the beautiful coral reef, sailing across the marina, making waves across the beach on jet skies or rejuvenating at Zayna Spa and Fitness Centre’, the statement added.

In collaboration with Oman Sail, Barceló Mussanah Resort has launched daily sailing cruises from 4.30pm to 7.00pm for guests and day-visitors to witness the majestic whale sharks as they glide the crystal blue waters of Unesco-protected Al Di-

maniyat Island.

Guests can explore the beautiful Mussanah Marina with daily sunset cruises, offering scenic views of the Sultanate’s vibrant marine life, it added.

The little ones are treated to a range of fun and informative activities throughout the day, as the Kids’ Club provides a wonderful space for children to engage in games and watch movies. Beat the heat on the private beach or take a refreshing dip in the swimming pool. Foodies can satisfy

their seafood cravings at Azure Restaurant or treat themselves to the flavours of the world at Mydan Restaurant.

Barceló Hotel Group offers guests personalised and exclusive experiences through its loyalty programme, myBarceló. Guests can avail of various enticing membership discounts and offers across Barceló properties in the region and globally.

Promising tantalising and exciting summer experiences at its five properties across the GCC, the group said, guests can also enjoy a gastronomic journey of the flavours of Spain.

Barceló Hotel Group is offering Staycation packages with special benefits to enjoy a well-deserved summer break at Dukes The Palm, a Royal Hideaway Hotel, Barceló Residences Dubai Marina, Occidental Al Jaddaf, Occidental Sharjah Grand in the UAE, besides the Mussanah Resort. An extra ten per cent discount is available on bookings made through the group’s value-for-money loyalty programme - myBarceló.

Gamers8 Fortnite competition concludes in Riyadh with epic finale

Gamers8, the biggest esports and gaming event worldwide that saw world’s best Fortnite teams and players coming to Saudi Arabia over the weekend, came to an end with an epic finale in Riyadh on Sunday night.

With a staggering US\$2m prize pool up for grabs in the eagerly anticipated four-day Fortnite tournament at a purpose-built arena at Boulevard Riyadh City, Malibuca from Nigma Galaxy and EpikWhale from TSM claimed the Standard version crown.

Scoring 359 points during Sunday’s final earned them the US\$250,000 top prize in that format, with Malibuca also taking home an extra US\$100,000 for being the MVP of the weekend. The victors of the Zero Build tournament - who also collected a cool US\$250,000 in winnings - were Anas from Guild Esports and Pinq from Tundra Esports. They scored 320 points during their event.

“I am delighted with the win, Malibuca said. “I think I will be three times more confident in my



tournaments online from now on because it was really nervous to play this tournament and a huge boost to win. I don’t know what I’m going to do with the money yet - I don’t have a lot of money and I’m saving, so winning it is very nice. I may look to buy a house.”

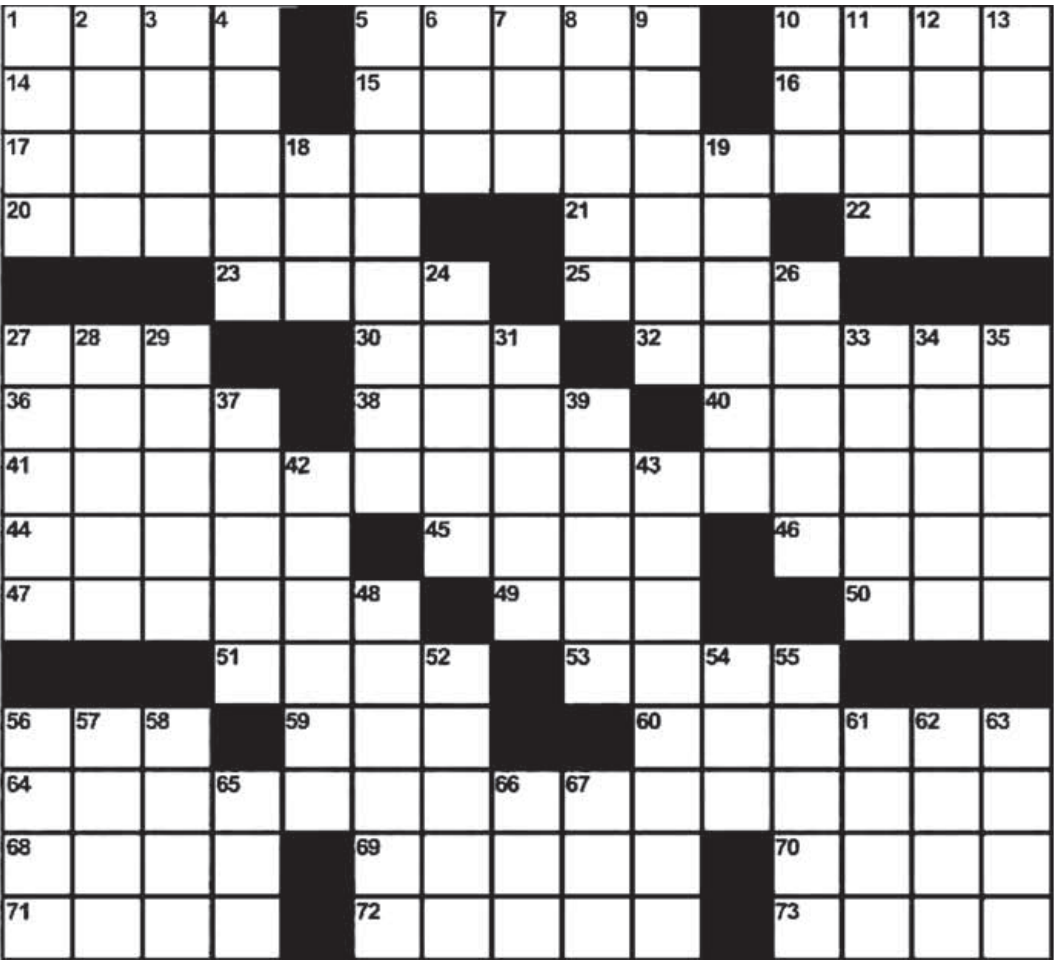
EpikWhale said, “The win adds a lot of confidence to my game, especially playing at a LAN event with the best players from every region - Brazil, Asia,

Middle East, Europe and North America.”

“Winning at that just makes going back to playing only against Western players that much easier. The money’s really cool, but I am also just glad that I can do what I love and succeed in it.

“I want to thank the Saudi Esports Federation for hosting us - I never before thought I’d be in Saudi Arabia playing and my time here has been really memorable,” EpikWhale added.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Insect's sense organ
- 5) Log-transport channel
- 10) Safe robber, slangily
- 14) China is there
- 15) Caulking stuff
- 16) Exam sans pencils
- 17) Choose a career, e.g.
- 20) Despotic one
- 21) "Rings on _ fingers ..."
- 22) Yonder lass
- 23) "Dragnet" star Jack
- 25) Himalayan legend
- 27) Prints, pastels, paintings, etc.
- 30) Eyebrow shape
- 32) Take from a sum
- 36) Female hogs
- 38) Town near Santa Fe
- 40) Category of creative work
- 41) Befit
- 44) Don't differ
- 45) "Buona _" (Italian greeting)
- 46) Voicemail signal
- 47) Confused fights
- 49) Wiggly swimmer
- 50) Accountant's word
- 51) Way more than a

few

- 53) Distinctive flair
- 56) Microbrewery pint, sometimes
- 59) One may be thrown in anger
- 60) Magazine supervisor
- 64) What many have near Christmas
- 68) Paquin of films
- 69) Indigenous New Zealander
- 70) Opera solo
- 71) Rise up, as a horse
- 72) Acquired some more
- 73) Capone adversary

DOWN

- 1) Not present or future
- 2) Like used briquettes
- 3) Pinocchio, infamously
- 4) Southern fruit tree
- 5) Relief for sore tootsies
- 6) Computer linkage abbreviation
- 7) Oahu instrument, briefly
- 8) Like cooked oatmeal
- 9) Hosted or roasted
- 10) Not me or them
- 11) Boots an easy

- grounder
- 12) Deep cut
- 13) Club that may perform
- 18) Selma-to-Talladega direction
- 19) Nicaraguan statesman
- 24) Hillsides, to a Scotsman
- 26) That is, in Latin
- 27) Indian border state
- 28) Cheek application
- 29) Spin around
- 31) Outback call
- 33) SAG is one
- 34) Witch like old woman
- 35) Article of faith
- 37) Kind of wool or drum
- 39) Landslide debris
- 42) Start a round of golf
- 43) Something checked before answering
- 48) Symbol of disgrace
- 52) Ending for "farm" or "home"
- 54) Commotion
- 55) Adar follower
- 56) From_ (at a distance)
- 57) Checkout annoyance
- 58) Where Vulcan forged
- 61) Buggy item?

- 62) Elevator pioneer
- 63) Showy Scandinavian rugs
- 65) Galley implement
- 66) Bidding action
- 67) "Look_ ye leap

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Sometimes an interruption can be a very good thing. It forces you to pause and take a step off the road you've been traveling on. Yes, it certainly can be annoying to have to stop what you're doing, but you can easily turn a break in the action into a positive experience. Today, use any downtime you have to double-check the work you've done so far, and don't be afraid to admit that it might be time for you to change course or direction.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're a very generous person, to a fault sometimes. There are some new people in your life right now who could be angling to take advantage of the fact that you tend to think of the needs of others before you consider your own needs. Today, you should protect yourself. Switch around your priority list to focus more on giving yourself what you need (and keeping what you have). Conservation is a big long word for hanging on to what you've worked so hard for.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your ideas are definitely the best ones being offered up today, so how come no one is listening to you? This is no time to throw a hissy fit out of frustration, because that will do little to help people take you seriously. Instead, resign yourself to the fact that you can lead a horse to water but can't make it drink. In groupthink situations, sometimes the answer isn't the right answer. It's merely the one that everyone agrees on.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There is nothing standing in your way today! The road is wide open and slanted slightly downhill just enough to let you coast along nicely. Let your ambition take a back seat for today while you just ride out the day and see what it brings you. Go through this day as if you're pedaling leisurely through a blooming garden. Take your time and you'll find a few breathtakingly beautiful surprises, some comforting sights, and some very intriguing new



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Are you intimidated by anyone right now? If so, you need to spend time with them today. Don't veer into stalker territory, but you should try your best to spend as much time as you can with someone who makes you feel self-conscious or nervous. The more you can see them for who they really are, the less uncomfortable they'll make you feel in the future. If no one intimidates you, then keep an eye out for a shy person who's doing their best to get to know you. Be friendly!



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Cold logic is for math problems and science fair projects, not for introducing new people into your life! The next time you're thrust into a large social group with little warning, don't put up your guard. Stop trying to size up people before you open up. Walk into the room with your mind and heart wide open. It's time to let your warmth and compassion do the talking. They create and inspire much more interesting conversations than critical thinking ever could.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Believe it or not, everyone has a wellspring of creativity inside them, especially you! Creativity is your spirit's way of communicating and revealing itself to the outside world, and it's a wonderful way to release powerful, positive energy into the Universe. Today, utilize your creativity to make a statement about who you are. Act in an unusual way that gets you noticed and offers you an opportunity to let others to learn something about you. Wrap your message in an unexpected



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

When you stray outside of your usual circle of friends, there's a reason. Usually it's because you've developed an interest they don't share, no matter how hard you've tried to lure them into it. Whether it's billiards, scuba diving, or line dancing, if you're game to try it and they're not, don't be shy. Get out there and charm a new group. In just a few weeks, you'll get them all together anyway and make them all feel they're at a great big family reunion.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

This may sound counterintuitive, but the stars say you should seek out conflict today. You're not one for confrontation, but it's a necessary evil in life and something you'd be better off getting more comfortable with. The future holds some battles for you, and getting practice with the easy skirmishes will help you down the road. You'll always be able to see the problems at hand, but you should develop some more skills in doing something about them.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you want to get some new energy in your life right now, you need to mix it up with some new people. Makes sense, right? Strike up a conversation with a stranger in line, compliment a rookie coworker on a new outfit, or ask someone to lunch who you've never really talked to before. Expanding your experiences starts with expanding the people you talk to. You'll be surprised by how much of a difference one little conversation can have on your outlook.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your determination is formidable. In fact, there aren't too many other signs that could even come close, much less match it. That's an asset in any professional, but it isn't always the best tactic when it comes to making friends. At the moment, you're especially determined to achieve a particular goal. Just watch out for the distinct possibility that stepping on someone else's toes won't even occur to you, much less stop you.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

All of us worry from time to time, especially when tiny issues suddenly seem to multiply. At the moment, you might be worrying a bit more than you really should, but you won't be willing to let it go until you've spoken to someone about it. Whether the issue is health or work related doesn't matter. Face it, get it over with, and get it done. It's time for a new start, but you won't be able to pull that off until you're sure.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In the 2020 Summer Olympics what country took all three podium spots for the women's 100 m?

- A. Great Britain
- B. Kenya
- C. Ethiopia
- D. Jamaica

02. Which field does a body represented by the acronym ICC work in?

- A. Criminal justice
- B. Cricket
- C. Commerce
- D. Any of these

03. What name is given to the group of elements that includes fluorine, chlorine, bromine and iodine?

- A. Halleberries
- B. Hallucinogens
- C. Halloweens
- D. Halogens

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

R	L	L	S
A	I	U	I
I	M	G	M
A	T	Y	M

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

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

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

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

Pelosi in Asia; silent on Taiwan visit

With no word if US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will visit the island, she stopped first in Singapore

Singapore - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Monday kicked off an Asia tour that has been shrouded in secrecy following an escalation in tensions with China over Taiwan.

With no word if Pelosi will visit the island, she stopped first in Singapore, where Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong urged her at a meeting to strive for 'stable' ties with Beijing. Her itinerary also includes Malaysia, South Korea and Japan, but a possible Taiwan visit has dominated attention in the run-up.

Reports about a plan to visit the island have enraged Beijing and caused unease in the White House with President Joe Biden trying to lower the temperature.

Beijing considers self-ruled Taiwan its territory - to be seized one day, by force if necessary - and said it would regard a Pelosi visit as a major provocation.

Pelosi's office confirmed her Asia trip in a statement on Sunday once her plane was in the air, following days of US media speculation and the speaker refusing to confirm her itinerary.

"The trip will focus on mutual



Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (right) shaking hands with US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi at the Istana Presidential Palace in Singapore during a visit to the Asia-Pacific region, on Monday (AFP)

security, economic partnership and democratic governance in the Indo-Pacific region," it said, referring to the Asia-Pacific.

The statement did not mention Taiwan. But visits by US officials there are usually kept secret until delegations land.

And as speculation mounted, both CNN and Taiwan's TVBS cited unnamed sources on Monday to report that Pelosi does indeed plan to include the island on her Asia tour.

'Powder keg'

The *Global Times*, China's state-run tabloid, suggested that Pelosi might use 'emergency excuses like an aircraft fault or refuelling' to land at a Taiwanese airport. "If she dares to stop in Taiwan, it will be the moment to ignite the powder keg of the situation in the Taiwan Straits," Hu Xijin, a former *Global Times* editor and now commentator, tweeted.

Beijing's foreign ministry on

Monday, warned a visit would 'seriously threaten the peace and stability' of the Taiwan Strait if it goes ahead.

"If House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visits Taiwan, China will take resolute and strong countermeasures to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity," spokesman Zhao Lijian said. "As to what measures, if she dares to go, then let's wait and see."

Taiwan's 23mn people have

long lived with the possibility of an invasion but the threat has intensified under Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The United States maintains a policy of 'strategic ambiguity' over whether it would militarily intervene were China to invade.

While it diplomatically recognises Beijing over Taipei, it also backs Taiwan's democratic government and opposes any forced change to the island's status. American officials often

make discreet visits to Taiwan to show support but a Pelosi trip would be higher-profile than any in recent history.

Taiwan's government has remained silent on the prospect of a Pelosi visit and there has been minimal local press coverage.

"I really hate what the Chinese are doing," Hsu Ching-feng, a fruit vendor in Taipei, told AFP.

"But there's nothing us common folks can do about it but ignore them. I will just ignore them."

'Wrong target'

As House speaker, Pelosi is third in line to the US presidency and one of the country's most powerful politicians.

The last House speaker to visit was Newt Gingrich in 1997.

Biden and Xi had a tense phone call last week clouded by disagreements over Taiwan.

Xi issued an oblique warning to the United States not to 'play with fire' over the island.

Speculation about Pelosi's Taiwan plans has coincided with an uptick in military activity across the region.

US officials have sought to downplay the significance of a Pelosi visit, urging calm from Chinese leaders.

Kharis Templeman, a Taiwan expert at the Hoover Institution, said Beijing 'misread US politics and screwed their signalling up' with its intense reaction. "They picked the wrong target. Biden doesn't control the Speaker or any other member of Congress," he tweeted on Sunday.

AFP



Nichelle Nichols (AFP)

'Star Trek' fame Nichelle Nichols dies at 89

Washington, US - Nichelle Nichols, a groundbreaking Black actress who played communications officer Nyota Uhura with cool authority on the popular 1960s series *Star Trek*, has died at 89.

Her son, Kyle Johnson, announced the death on the official uhura.com website, saying, "Last night, my mother, Nichelle Nichols, succumbed to natural causes and passed away. Her light, however, like the ancient galaxies now being seen for the first time, will remain."

A family spokesman said Nichols died in Silver City, New Mexico, where she had been living with her son.

US President Joe Biden said Nichols 'redefined what is possible for Black Americans and women'.

AFP

US envoy hopeful on Lebanon-Israel talks

Beirut, Lebanon - A US envoy on Monday expressed optimism that Lebanon and Israel could move towards a maritime border deal to settle competing claims over offshore gas fields.

The dispute escalated in early June after Israel moved a production vessel near the Karish offshore field, which is partly claimed by neighbour Lebanon.

This prompted Beirut to call for the resumption of US-mediated negotiations on the demarcation dispute. "I remain optimistic that we can make continuous progress as we have over the last several weeks and I look forward to coming back to the region and being able to make the final arrangements," Amos Hochstein told reporters after meeting Lebanon's top leaders.

Hochstein, on his second visit in less than two months, is carry-

ing an Israeli proposal in response to a demarcation offer made by Lebanon.

On Monday, he met with President Michel Aoun, Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri at the presidential palace.

Lebanon is looking to clinch 'a deal that preserves its rights and its wealth and that could provide, as soon as negotiations are over, an opportunity to revitalise the economy', Aoun said before Monday's meeting.

Lebanon and Israel have no diplomatic relations and are separated by a UN-patrolled border. They had resumed maritime border negotiations in 2020 but the process was stalled by Beirut's claim that the map used by the United Nations in the talks needed modifying.

Lebanon initially demanded



US Senior Advisor for Energy Security Amos Hochstein (AFP)

860sqkm in the disputed maritime area but then asked for an additional 1,430sqkm, including part of the Karish field.

Israel claims that the field lies in its waters and is not part of the disputed area subject to ongoing negotiations.

A Lebanese official in mid-June said Beirut had made a new offer to Hochstein, holding back on demands for territory where Israel planned to imminently extract gas.

Beirut was pushing for the country's maritime border to exclude Karish and include the whole of a nearby field instead, the official told AFP at the time.

An Israeli official on Sunday said Israel's offer, which related to the original disputed zones, was a 'compromise to both sides' and would allow Lebanon to develop 'the Sidon reservoir', known as the Qana field, while safeguarding Israel's interest.

On July 2, Israel said it had downed three drones launched by Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah that were headed towards the Karish gas field.

The Iran-backed Shiite Mus-

lim movement on Sunday released a short video it said showed surveillance of several Israeli-chartered energy infrastructure ships, including the production vessel sent to Karish which is operated by London-listed firm Energen.

Hezbollah's chief Hassan Nasrallah had threatened attacks if Israel proceeds with gas exploration in the disputed area.

On Sunday, he said he was trying to 'strengthen' Lebanon's negotiating power and said that his party will determine its next step based on the outcomes of Monday's talks. 'We're paying no attention to Nasrallah's threats and they're not a factor in the negotiations,' Ram Ben Barak, head of the Israeli foreign and defence committee told public broadcaster Kan radio on Monday.

AFP



Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani (AFP)

Iran 'optimistic' after EU proposal for nuke deal

Tehran, Iran - Iran said on Monday it remains 'optimistic' about a possible revival of the 2015 nuclear deal after the European Union tabled a proposal aiming for a compromise in the talks stalled since March.

"We remain optimistic that the negotiation process will lead us to a logical and reasonable outcome," foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said at his weekly news conference.

The comment comes after EU foreign policy chief and coordinator of the nuclear talks between Iran and world powers, Josep Borrell, last Tuesday submitted a new draft text and urged the different sides of the negotiations to accept it or 'risk a dangerous nuclear crisis'.

Negotiations in Vienna began in April 2021 to restore the deal, but have stalled since March amid differences between Tehran and Washington on several issues.

any breakthrough.

Borrell said the draft text includes 'hard-won compromises by all sides' and 'addresses, in precise detail, the sanctions lifting as well as the nuclear steps needed to restore' the 2015 pact. "The Iranian side has carefully reviewed the text and presented its views," Kanani said. "It is possible that in the near future we can reach a conclusion regarding the timetable for the negotiations."

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NASSER KANANI

"We will probably see a new round of negotiations," Kanani added, but noted that 'it depends entirely on the willingness of the other side, especially the American side'.

The 2015 agreement gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its atomic programme to guarantee that it could not develop a nuclear weapon - something it has always denied seeking.

AFP

Palestinian family encircled by Israeli settlement

Beit Ijza, Palestinian Territories - An eight-metre high metal fence surrounds the Gharib family home in the occupied West Bank. To reach it they must pass through a gate remotely controlled by Israeli security forces.

Since Israel seized the territory in the Six-Day War of 1967, a Jewish settlement has sprung up on surrounding land claimed by the family leaving them isolated in their single-storey house on the edge of the Palestinian village of Beit Ijza. "I don't know when this will end," sighed Sa'adat Gharib. 'No one knows the pain my children are suffering.'

For years the family home stood amid swathes of farmland, but now it lies behind a yellow gate, controlled by Israeli soldiers, who also patrol a narrow bridge overlooking the eight-metre fence. "During



Palestinian Sa'adat Sabri Gharib (right) walks with family members between Israeli army barriers, toward their house which is an enclave at the heart of the Jewish settlement of Givon Hahadasha (AFP)

these years we've had a tough life," said Gharib, 40, who works for the Palestinian Authority in nearby Ramallah.

When he was a child, the Jewish settlement of Givon Hahadasha was built partially on land he says belonged to his

family. Decades on, the high fence separates the Gharib house from the Israelis' red-roofed homes and gardens. A

communal space for the settlers, with a children's slide, has been placed a few metres away.

Settlements are deemed illegal by most of the international community, a judgement Israel rejects. The Gharib family has fought numerous legal battles in Israeli courts, in 2012 winning the right to a small strip of the land they claim. "The settlers built a parking lot and a park, and we've needed the security forces to implement (the decision) and retrieve it for 10 years," said Gharib.

The yellow gate leading to the house was installed back in 2008, Gharib said, and at one point the family had to hold up their IDs to security cameras to cross the threshold. "(We) appealed to the high court... and the court permitted us to have the gate open all the time."

AFP

Myanmar junta extends state of emergency

Yangon, Myanmar - Myanmar's military government has extended a state of emergency by six months, state media said on Monday, with the junta chief saying elections could only take place when the conflict-racked country was 'stable and peaceful'.
Min Aung Hlaing, who led last year's coup, requested the military government to 'allow him to serve for an additional 6 months', according to a report in the *Global New Light of Myanmar*. Members of the junta's National Defence and Security Council 'unanimously supported the proposal', it said.

The junta declared a state of emergency after ousting Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February last year and plunged the country into turmoil.

It has previously said elections would be held and the state of emergency lifted by August 2023 - extending the initial one-year timeline it announced days after the coup.

The army has justified its power grab by alleging massive fraud during the 2020 elections in which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) trounced a military-backed party.

Last year, it cancelled the results of the polls, saying it had uncovered more than 11mn instances of voter fraud.

International observers said the voting was largely free and fair.

Suu Kyi has been detained since the coup and faces an eclectic raft of charges that could



Protesters shout slogans and hold photos of Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration outside the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok last week (AFP)

Min Aung Hlaing, who led last year's coup, requested the military government to allow him to serve for an additional 6 months. Junta's National Defence and Security Council supported the proposal

see her jailed for more than 150 years.

In a speech broadcast on Monday, Min Aung Hlaing did not mention a date for fresh polls but said they could only be held when the country was 'peaceful

and stable'.

He also said 'reform' to the country's electoral system was needed, including combining the first-past-the-post system - under which Suu Kyi's NLD has won sweeping majorities - with

proportional representation.

The influence of 'powerful parties' had previously stifled other political voices in the country, he said.

The junta chief also invited the leaders of a number of the country's established ethnic rebel groups for a second round of face-to-face meetings.

Myanmar has about 20 ethnic rebel armies - many of which control swathes of remote border territory, and have fought each other and the military for

decades.

Some have condemned the coup and offered shelter and weapons training to the 'People's Defence Forces' (PDFs) that have sprung up since the putsch, and which analysts say have surprised the military with their effectiveness.

Several ethnic rebel groups attended a first round of 'peace talks' with the junta in May, although groups fighting alongside anti-junta rebels stayed away.

AFP

ASEAN foreign ministers to push for tougher action

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Malaysia is set to lead a push for tougher action on Myanmar when a regional bloc of foreign ministers meet this week, as anger mounts at the junta for stonewalling crisis resolution efforts.

The 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - which has spearheaded so far fruitless diplomatic efforts to restore peace - last week condemned the junta's execution of four prisoners.

Myanmar has been in chaos since a putsch in February last year and the death toll from the military's brutal crackdown on dissent has passed 2,100, according to a local monitoring group.

Ministers meeting in Phnom Penh from Wednesday are expected to lament

the lack of progress on ASEAN's 'five-point consensus' plan, agreed to in April last year, which called for an immediate end to violence and dialogue between the junta and coup opponents.

As well as voicing 'deep concern' about recent developments and calling for restraint, the ministers will also demand 'concrete actions to effectively and fully imple-

ment the Five-Point Consensus', according to a draft communique obtained by AFP.

After more than a year of no progress on the plan, Malaysia will present a framework for its implementation, even as critics deride the ASEAN as a toothless talking shop.

"The key element of the framework is there must be an end-game. You have to have an end-game. What is the end-game of the five-point consensus?" Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah told AFP.

Within the bloc, frustrations are growing after the Myanmar junta went ahead with its first executions in decades despite personal pleas from Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Among the four executed were Phyo Zeya Thaw, a rapper-turned-lawmaker from ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party and veteran political activist Kyaw Min Yu - better known as 'Jimmy'.

"It shows the junta is making a mockery of the (consensus plan)," Saifuddin wrote in a weekend newspaper article.

AFP

Year's largest fire whipped by winds destroys California homes

Yreka, US - The largest fire in California this year is forcing thousands of people to evacuate as it destroys homes and rips through the state's dry terrain, whipped up on Sunday by strong winds and lightning storms.

The McKinney Fire was completely uncontained as it burned in Klamath National Forest in Northern California, CalFire said, spreading over more than 51,000 acres near the city of Yreka.

It is the largest wildfire so far this year in California, which has already battled several blazes this summer.

California Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency on Saturday, saying the fire had 'destroyed homes' and 'threatened critical infrastructure' after breaking out on Friday.

The fire was 'intensified and spread by dry fuels, extreme drought conditions, high temperatures, winds and lightning



Property in the community of Klamath River lies in ruins in the Klamath National Forest northwest of Yreka, California, on Sunday (AFP)

storms,' Newsom said in a statement.

More than 2,000 residents were under evacuation orders and some 200 under evacuation warnings, according to the California Office of Emergency Services, mostly in Siskiyou County.

"Surrounding areas should be ready to leave if needed. Please don't hesitate to evacu-

ate," the Siskiyou County Sheriff tweeted.

Highway 96 and McKinney Creed Road southwest of the Klamath River were closed to the public, CalFire said.

Yreka resident Larry Castle told the Sacramento Bee newspaper that he and his wife had packed up a few possessions and their three dogs to leave the area for the night, as other fires

in recent years had taught them the situation could turn 'very, very serious'.

Nearly 650 people were working to douse the blaze as of Sunday, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group said.

Firefighting forces were sent from nearby Oregon to help containment efforts, the Oregon State Fire Marshal said, as the Klamath National Forest also deals with the Kelsey Creek Fire. CalFire said the cause of the fire was still 'under investigation'. The US Forest Service said 'a heavy smoke inversion' had helped to limit the growth of the fire on Sunday, but also meant that firefighters' aircraft were also 'mostly grounded'.

Fire crews were working above Fort Jones and west of Yreka 'to cut off the fire's progress', the USFS said.

The record-breaking blaze was sparked just days after the year's previous largest fire raged in central California.

AFP

Australia's aboriginal MP brands Elizabeth II a 'colonising' queen

Sydney, Australia - Aboriginal Senator Lidia Thorpe branded Britain's Elizabeth II a 'colonising' queen on Monday, as the recently elected lawmaker reluctantly swore allegiance while taking the oath of office.

In a flash of protest, Greens senator Thorpe raised her right fist in a Black Power salute as she begrudgingly swore to serve the 96-year-old monarch, who is still Australia's head of state.

"I sovereign, Lidia Thorpe, do solemnly and sincerely swear that I will be faithful and I bear true allegiance to the colonising Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II," she said before being rebuked by a Senate official. "Senator Thorpe, Senator Thorpe, you are required to recite the oath as printed on the card," said the chamber's president Sue Lines.

After reciting the pledge as required, Thorpe declared on Twitter: "Sovereignty never ceded."

Australia was a British colony for more than 100 years, a period during which thousands of Aboriginal Australians were killed



The members of Parliament attend a traditional smoking ceremony to mark the opening of the 47th Federal Parliament in Canberra last week (AFP)

and communities were displaced wholesale. The country gained de facto independence in 1901, but has never become a fully-fledged republic.

In 1999, Australians narrowly voted against removing the queen, amid a row over whether her replacement would be chosen by members of parliament, not the public. Polls show most Australians are in favour of being a republic, but there is little

agreement on how a head of state should be chosen.

The issue was rekindled at the last election, when noted republican Anthony Albanese was elected prime minister. He quickly appointed the country's first 'minister of the republic'.

"I do support a republic," Albanese told CNN on Sunday, but added that another referendum would have to wait.

AFP

Senegal ruling coalition claims poll victory as opposition cries foul

Dakar, Senegal - President Macky Sall's ruling coalition claimed victory in Senegal's legislative elections but the opposition rejected the assertion as a 'prefabricated majority'.

'We won 30 departments' out of the 46 in the west African country and overseas constituencies, Aminata Toure, head of the presidential coalition, told reporters late on Sunday. "This undoubtedly gives us a majority in the National Assembly."

'We have given a majority in the National Assembly to our coalition president' Sall, she added, without giving the number of seats won by her camp or whether it was an absolute or relative majority.

Toure however acknowl-

edged her coalition had been defeated in the capital Dakar in Sunday's vote.

The opposition was swift in rejecting Toure's claims.

Barthelemy Dias, a leader of the main opposition coalition headed by former presidential candidate Ousmane Sonko, spoke of 'vulgar lies' and a 'pre-fabricated majority' on private radio RFM.

"Cohabitation is inevitable. You lost this election at the national level. We will not accept it. This abuse will not pass," said Dias, who is also the mayor of Dakar.

The opposition had hoped the elections would impose a cohabitation, or divided government, on Sall and curb any am-



People wait in line outside their voting station in the popular neighbourhood of Ngor in Dakar on Sunday (AFP)

bitions he may have for a third term.

Sunday's polls were an important test for Sall after local elections in March saw the opposition win in major cities, including Dakar, Ziguinchor in the south and Thies in the west.

The single round of voting will decide the 165 seats of the single-chamber parliament - currently controlled by the president's supporters - for the next five years.

Sall has promised to appoint a prime minister - a position he abolished and then restored in December 2021 - from the winning camp.

Some seven million Senegalese were eligible to vote in the election, which passed

without any major incidents.

Turnout at several polling stations appeared relatively low, according to AFP correspondents and observers, and the interior ministry said participation had reached 22 per cent by 1 pm.

Provisional overall results are expected no later than Friday.

"I hope... there are no disputes," said Lamine Sylva, a 60-year-old artist who voted at a school in Mbao, near Dakar.

"It's like football - there is a winner and a loser."

Yahya Sall, a retired soldier, said he hoped the new parliament 'will have a strong opposition presence... to advance democracy'.

AFP

Tensions soar as Iraq gears up for counter-demonstrations

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraqi security forces were on high alert in Baghdad on Monday as tensions soared after rivals of Shiite Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr, whose supporters are occupying the parliament, called for counter-demonstrations.

A political standoff 10 months after Iraq's went to the polls pits Sadr - a populist with a devoted following of millions among the country's majority Shiite population - against the powerful pro-Iran Coordination Framework, another Shiite alliance. Sadr's supporters have been occupying parliament in the normally high-security Green Zone - also home to government buildings and embassies - since Saturday.

They started their protest in response to the rival alliance's prime ministerial nomination.

Large numbers of security forces set up roadblocks and checkpoints, ahead of calls by supporters of the Coordination Framework slated to start around 5pm local time (1400 GMT). The protests are 'not directed against any particular group', the supporters said on social media.

The protest is expected to take place on a road leading to the Green Zone, not far from where thousands of Sadr supporters were still bedded down at the parliament, waving flags and pictures of Sadr.



Supporters of Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr, protesting against a rival political bloc's nomination for PM, perform a prayer at Iraq's parliament in the capital Baghdad's high-security Green Zone, on Monday (AFP)

A Sadr loyalist has also called on supporters of the cleric to protest across Iraq's provinces, in demonstrations to take place at the same time.

The Coordination Framework includes lawmakers from the party of Sadr's longtime foe, ex-prime minister Nuri al-Maliki.

It also represents the powerful pro-Iran former paramilitary alliance Hashed al-Shaabi, now integrated into the regular forces. Hadi al-Ameri, who heads a faction of the Hashed al-Shaabi, repeated a call on Monday for 'constructive dialogue enabling solutions to be found to points of contention'.

He warned against 'an atmosphere of media escalation,

sparked by statements and counter-statements calling for mass mobilisations that could get out of control and lead to violence'. In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, government formation has involved complex negotiations since a 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, but in this case 10 month of political deadlock have left the country without a government.

Sadr's massive mobilisation of supporters in recent weeks has underscored the political clout of the firebrand preacher, who once led a militia against American and Iraqi government forces.

AFP

India reports Asia's first possible monkeypox death in Kerala state

New Delhi, India - Indian authorities reported on Monday Asia's first possible monkeypox fatality after the death of a man who recently returned from United Arab Emirates testing positive.

Kerala state's health ministry officials said tests on the 22-year-old 'showed that the man had monkeypox'.

Three monkeypox-related fatalities have so far been reported outside Africa in an outbreak that the World Health Organization has declared a global health emergency.

The Indian man died in Kerala on July 30 around a week after returning from the UAE and being taken to hospital.

It was unclear however whether monkeypox was the cause of death.

"The youth had no symptoms of monkeypox. He had been admitted to a hospital with symptoms of encephalitis and fatigue," the *Indian Express* daily quoted Kerala's health minister Veena George as saying on Sunday.

Twenty people identified as high risk of infection were being kept under observation, she added, including family members, friends who played football with the man and medical staff.

18,000 cases

According to the WHO, more than 18,000 monkeypox cases



A technician gestures inside a molecular laboratory facility set up to test for the monkeypox disease in Chennai, India, last week (AFP)

have been detected throughout the world outside Africa since the beginning of May, most of them in Europe.

Spain last week recorded two monkeypox-related deaths and Brazil one.

It is however unclear if monkeypox actually caused the three fatalities, with Spanish authorities

as of Sunday still carrying out autopsies and Brazilian authorities saying its deceased patient had other 'serious conditions'.

The WHO's European office said on Saturday that more monkeypox-related deaths can be expected. "With the continued spread of monkeypox in Europe, we will expect to see more

deaths," Catherine Smallwood, Senior Emergency Officer at WHO Europe, said in a statement. The goal needs to be 'interrupting transmission quickly in Europe and stopping this outbreak', she said.

Nobody's fault

India has reported at least four

cases, with the first recorded on July 15 in another man who returned to Kerala from the UAE.

Kerala's health ministry said in its statement on Monday that a high-level team from the state medical board would probe the death.

Primary tests from the National Institute of Virology in the

city of Pune showed that the man had the variant from West Africa and that more genetic tests would be conducted.

"The disease is nobody's fault. Those who have symptoms should inform the health department so that the spread can be contained," the ministry said, adding that there was 'no need to panic'.

It added that the man's family only informed doctors on July 30 result of tests conducted in Dubai on July 19, by which time he was in a critical condition.

It added that there were 165 passengers on the same flight from UAE but that 'nobody is a close contact'.

Rash

Monkeypox, so called because it was first discovered in a monkey, is related to the deadly smallpox virus, which was eradicated in 1980, but is far less severe.

Early signs of the disease include a high fever, swollen lymph glands and a chickenpox-like rash.

In May 2022, a flurry of cases was detected in countries outside Africa in people with no travel links to the region.

The WHO last month declared the outbreak to be a global health emergency - the highest alarm it can sound.

AFP

At least 6 dead in Libya fuel truck blast

Sabha, Libya - At least six people were killed and dozens injured on Monday when a fuel truck exploded in southwestern Libya, medics said.

The precise causes of the blast were not clear.

It happened when a crowd flocked around the tanker as it headed to resupply a petrol station in the Bent Bayyah district. A stampede occurred, followed by a massive explosion that set several cars on fire, according to images posted online.

An official at the main hospital in Sabha, southern Libya's main city, told AFP six people had died.

The hospital's management said on Facebook that 'more than 50 wounded were admitted to Sabha hospital', without indicating the number of deaths.

Many of the wounded were in a critical state, said a security source in Sabha, hundreds of kilometres south of the capital Tripoli.

Interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah tweeted that his government was 'closely following' the incident.

"We have ordered a crisis cell to urgently transfer the wounded to major hospitals," he said. Libya has Africa's largest proven oil reserves, but chronic corruption and theft for smuggling to neighbouring countries means that the pumps often run dry.

AFP

Biden calls on Russia, China to enter nuke arms control talks

Washington, US - President Joe Biden called on Monday on Russia and China to enter nuclear arms control talks, saying that Moscow in particular has a duty to show responsibility after its invasion of Ukraine.

In a statement, the US leader reiterated that his administration is ready to 'expeditiously negotiate' a replacement to New START, the treaty capping intercontinental nuclear forces in the United States and Russia.

"Russia should demonstrate that it is ready to resume work on nuclear arms control," Biden said. "But negotiation requires a willing partner operating in good faith. And Russia's brutal and unprovoked aggression in Ukraine has shattered peace in Europe and constitutes an attack on fundamental tenets of international order."

Turning to China, which has been bolstering its much smaller nuclear arsenal, Biden said the communist state has a

duty as a permanent member of the UN Security Council 'to engage in talks that will reduce the risk of miscalculation and address destabilizing military dynamics'. "There is no benefit to any of our nations, or for the world, to resist substantive engagement on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation."

Biden said nuclear superpowers Russia and the United States in particular have a responsibility to set the tone, ensuring the viability of the landmark nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT, which seeks to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology worldwide.

"The health of the NPT has always rested on meaningful, reciprocal arms limits between the US and Russia. Even at the height of the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union were able to work together to uphold our shared responsibility to ensure strategic stability," Biden said.

AFP

Truss wins UK cabinet backing as voting begins

London, UK - British Conservative frontrunner Liz Truss won another heavyweight endorsement on Monday as party members began a month of voting to decide the next occupant of 10 Downing Street.

Truss's lagging rival Rishi Sunak vied to make up lost ground with a plan for future tax cuts - and potentially to host a future women's football World Cup in Britain after England's 'Lionesses' won the European championship.

Truss attended Sunday's final against Germany, and the first victory by any England football team in a major tournament since 1966 wiped the prime ministerial race off newspaper front pages.

The Tory contenders were going head-to-head later on Monday in a members' hustings, in the southwestern city of Exeter - the second of 12 such events before the winner is announced on September 5.

Sunak, a polished debater, needs to recapture momentum after Truss steamed into a strong

Liz understands that the status quo isn't an option in times of crisis. We need a 'booster' attitude to the economy, not a 'doomster' one, in order to address cost-of-living woes

NADHIM ZAHAWI

polling lead on a platform of immediate tax cuts to address Britain's worst cost-of-living crisis in generations.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Nadhim Zahawi joined other luminaries of Boris Johnson's cabinet in backing the foreign secretary against Sunak, his predecessor in the Treasury.

"Liz understands that the status quo isn't an option in times of crisis," Zahawi wrote in *The Telegraph*, attacking Sunak's plan to prioritise fighting inflation now,



Liz Truss, one of the two contenders to become UK's next PM (AFP)

before cutting taxes later.

"We need a 'booster' attitude to the economy, not a 'doomster' one, in order to address cost-of-living woes and the challenges on the world stage," the new chancellor said.

Sunak's resignation from the scandal-tainted Johnson's cabinet helped spark a ministerial exodus that forced the prime minister out last month.

As they began receiving postal and online ballot forms, a large minority of the roughly

200,000 Tory members is said by pollsters to nurse a grievance against Sunak - one shared by Johnson.

The prime minister is not formally taking sides, but has told aides that he intends to give his successor some words of advice, 'whoever she may be', *The Sunday Times* reported.

Improving food security

Despite her endorsements from the likes of Zahawi, Defence Sec-

retary Ben Wallace, former Northern Ireland secretary Brandon Lewis and Tory centrist Tom Tugendhat, Truss has warned against complacency.

Heading into the Exeter hustings, the foreign secretary has markedly improved her sometimes robotic public delivery - seen most notoriously in a 2014 speech when she was environment secretary. Returning to her former field, the Remainer-turned-Brexit zealot promised to 'unleash' farmers from European Union regulations to improve the UK's food security.

Truss also vowed to tackle labour shortages in agriculture, partly caused by post-Brexit restrictions on immigration which have forced UK farmers to leave fruit rotting in fields and to slaughter healthy pigs.

Both the contenders have stressed the need for unity once the election is out of the way, aware that the opposition Labour party is riding high in the polls amid the economic crisis and political tumult of Johnson.

AFP

LOW-COST FASHION



and spurious

ULTRA-FAST FASHION CHARMS THE YOUNGER GENERATION DESPITE ITS CARBON FOOTPRINT ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND EXPLOITATION OF CHEAP LABOUR



Workers make clothes at a garment factory that supplies SHEIN, a cross-border fast fashion e-commerce company in Guangzhou, China

Many of these cheap clothes end up on huge dump sites, burnt on open fires, along riverbeds, and washed out into the sea, with severe consequences for people and the planet

GREENPEACE

The so-called 'ultra-fast fashion' has won legions of young fans who are able to snap up relatively cheap clothes online, but campaigners say the trend masks darker environmental problems.

Britain's Boohoo, China's SHEIN and Hong Kong's Emmi are the main players in a sector that produces items and collections at breakneck speed and rock-bottom prices.

Their internet-based business model provides fierce competition to better-known 'fast fashion' chains with physical stores, like Sweden's H&M and Spain's Zara. According to Bloomberg, SHEIN generated US\$16bn in global sales last year.

However, environmental pressure groups slam the 'throwaway clothing' phenomenon as grossly wasteful - it takes 2,700 litres of water to make one T-shirt that is swiftly binned.

"Many of these cheap clothes end up on huge dump sites, burnt on open fires, along riverbeds, and washed out into the sea, with severe consequences for people and the planet," Greenpeace says.

Nevertheless, with inflation across the globe

soaring to the highest level in decades, there is huge demand for low-price garments. And after the coronavirus pandemic, high-street shops with big overhead costs are struggling to compete.

Quantity not quality

With T-shirts costing just the equivalent of US\$4.80 and bikinis and dresses selling for just under US\$10, for high-school students, such as 18-year-old Lola from the French city of Nancy, ultra-fast fashion shopping appears to offer unbeatable bargains.

Turning a blind eye to the environmental cost, she says brands such as SHEIN allow her to follow the latest trends without spending an astronomical amount.

Lola says she normally places two or three orders per month on SHEIN with an average combined value of 70 euros (US\$71) for about 10 items.

Ultra-fast fashion's young target demographic are looking for 'quantity rather than quality', says economics professor Valerie Guillard at Paris-Dauphine University.

Much of the success of SHEIN, which was founded in late 2008, is attributable to its massive presence on social media networks, such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.

In so-called 'haul' videos, customers unwrap SHEIN packages, try on clothes and review them online. On TikTok alone, there are 34.4 billion mentions of the hashtag #SHEIN and six billion for #SHEINhaul.

The brands also extend their reach via low-cost partnerships with so-called social-media influencers to build trust and increase sales.

Irish influencer Marleen Gallagher, 45, who works with SHEIN and other firms, praised them for offering broader-size ranges.

"They are unrivalled when it comes to choices for plus-size women," she told AFP.

Carbon footprint

Not only does the industry have a reputation for devouring valuable resources and damaging the environment, ultra-fast fashion companies have also been plagued by scandals over allegedly poor working conditions in their factories.

Swiss-based NGO Public Eye discovered in November 2022 that employees in some SHEIN factories worked up to 75 hours per week, in contravention of China's labour laws.

Britain's Boohoo similarly faced criticism following media reports that its suppliers were underpaying workers in Pakistan. The industry's carbon footprint is equally disastrous.

The French Agency for Ecological Transition estimates that fast fashion accounts for two per cent of global greenhouse emissions per year - as much as air transport and maritime traffic combined.

It comes as no surprise, then, that climate campaigner Greta Thunberg is damning.

"The fashion industry is a huge contributor to the climate and ecological emergency, not to mention its impact on the countless workers and communities who are being exploited around the world in order for some to enjoy fast fashion that many treat as disposables," Thunberg wrote last year. The authorities are also beginning to scrutinise the brands' practices.

The British Competition and Markets Authority has opened a 'greenwashing' probe against Boohoo, Asos and George at Asda over concerns that some of the environmental claims about their products are misleading.

Charlotte, 14, says she has decided to stop ordering from SHEIN and Emmi.

"I was happy to have new clothes, but then I felt guilty," she said. "Now, I look for them on Vinted, (an online marketplace for buying and selling new and secondhand items)," the teenager said.

AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Logistics/Marketing
27 year old female Sri Lankan with an MSc and BSc in Logistics and Supply Chain and 4 plus years of experience seeking a job in Oman.
Email ID: chamindrin@gmail.com
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LUXURY WATCHES TRENDS

‘PLAYFULNESS’ IN REAL TIME

AFTER TWO YEARS OF PANDEMIC-RELATED DISRUPTION, THE LUXURY WATCH WORLD MET IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, TO SHOWCASE THE LATEST HOROLOGICAL TRENDS AT THE ANNUAL ‘WATCHES & WONDERS 2022’ TRADE SHOW, HELD EARLIER THIS YEAR

With almost every heavy weight brand and CEO in attendance, the six-day Watches and Wonders 2022 event (held between March 31 and April 5) offered a chance to keep a tab on the pulse of Swiss watchmaking. It is an industry that generated over US\$24bn in exports in 2021 - not only matching pre-pandemic levels but up 2.7% on 2019, according to the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry.

A recent article in *CNN Style* stated that, like many luxury goods sectors, watchmaking was affected by COVID-19 in numerous ways, from boutique closures to stalled production in the Jura Mountains, where most of the country's watch factories have been located since the 19th century. But just as they did in the 1980s - when faced with near-decimation at the hands of new, cheaper quartz technology from Asia - luxury watches have proven their enduring, emotional appeal by bouncing back in short order.

The rebound may be down to wealthy buyers seeking tangible investments amid economic uncertainty or even finding themselves with more

disposable cash after months without vacations and entertainment. And having been staged virtually for the last two years, Watches & Wonders was out to capitalise on resurgent demand with an IRL fair that welcomed over 22,000 visitors.

Throughout every vaulted hall of Watches & Wonders, which wrapped up last week, delegates delighted at vitrines showcasing a veritable rainbow of coloured timepieces, innovations in ceramic and titanium, jazzy interchangeable straps, lots of travel functions and occasion-only stunners (we're going out again, after all).

"It always looks a bit like the whole watch industry had a discussion in advance to agree on the major trends," said watch manufacturer IWC's CEO, Christoph Grainger-Herr, as he toured the historic brand's shipping-container pavilion. "Last year there was a huge presence of green. Post-pandemic, we've seen quite an outburst of colour in every single direction, and there's a playfulness that's come back."

"It's fantastic to be back," enthused Karl-Friedrich Scheufele, co-CEO of Chopard, from the threshold of his own gleaming, wood-paneled pavilion, "because there's nothing like showing watches (and) jewellery pieces in real time, to real people... And that is irreplaceable."

Here are some of the most eye-catching watches that were on display:



Patek Philippe Calatrava Reference 5226G

With Patek Philippe obsessives, abandoning hope of acquiring a recently discontinued Nautilus Reference 5711, there's another option. Cool and youthful, but just classic enough, Patek Philippe's Calatrava Reference 5226G sports a refined case with a hobnail pattern guilloché around the entire circumference of the caseband. The charcoal-gray dial, which fades to black at the rim, has a grainy texture deliberately reminiscent of antique camera cases.



Rolex Oyster Perpetual GMT-Master II

Switzerland's biggest brand surprised all by not only giving its GMT-Master II travel watch a new green-and-black ceramic bezel, but by repositioning its crown for left-handers. For such an established watch design - the first to combine a 24-hour 'home time' hand with a rotating bezel - the new configuration takes a mental adjustment as well as temporal one. But the result is as handsome as it is great value.



Parmigiani Tonda PF Rattrapante GMT

Since Parmigiani Fleurier hit a bullseye with last year's dramatically nipped and tucked Tonda PF range, the buzz around the Swiss watchmaker has been at fever pitch. This beautiful new takes on the GMT traveler will further bolster the brand's reputation. Push the button at 8 o'clock to skip your 'local' hours hand forward or backwards as you venture through time zones, while a second gold-crafted hour hand keeps you rooted to home.



Cartier Masse Mysterieuse

This watch has been eight years in the making, which might seem odd given how little adorns the dial. It is, however, the latest in Cartier's long line of 'mystery' clocks dating back to 1912, when the French brand debuted a clock face that seemed to float in mid-air. Here, six layers of sapphire glass support the hands and central winding rotor, which also houses the highly shock-resistant movement that winds as you move your arm.



Jaeger-LeCoultre Rendez-Vous Dazzling Star

Jaeger-LeCoultre's MO is all about precision, so there were plenty of raised eyebrows at the brand's Watches & Wonder presentation as it described its latest mechanical innovation as reflecting the unpredictable, romantic nature of shooting stars. Using the kinetic power supplied by the wearer's daily wrist movement, a star arcs across the dial's aventurine sky at arbitrary moments in the day. Jaeger-LeCoultre is keeping the mechanics behind the feat a secret.



Australia's Emma McKeon proudly displays her 11th gold, won in the women's 50m freestyle swimming, at the Commonwealth Games on Sunday (AFP)

MCKEON'S 11

Australia's Emma McKeon becomes most successful Commonwealth Games athlete with 11th gold medal

Birmingham, United Kingdom - Swimming superstars Emma McKeon and Chad le Clos made Commonwealth Games history on Sunday as Adam Peaty suffered a shock defeat.

McKeon now has 11 gold medals at the Games over her career - more than any other athlete after her victory in the women's 50m freestyle.

Silver for defending champion Le Clos in the men's 200m butterfly gives him an 18th Commonwealth medal, putting him level with shooters Michael Gault and Phil Adams.

McKeon's crowning Commonwealth moment was extra special as her family were there to witness it - they were absent at last year's Tokyo Olympics, where she won seven medals, including four gold.

The 28-year-old has now moved ahead of now retired compatriots Ian Thorpe, Susie O'Neill and Leisel Jones on the all-time list.

"They're the ones that inspired me when I was young," she said. "I remember watching them on TV and that lit the fire in me to be where I am now. I've got them to thank."

Le Clos finished second behind Lewis Clareburt of New Zealand in his evening race.

Sunday's final was 10 years to the day since he beat American great Michael Phelps at London 2012 in the same event to become Olympic champion.

The South African said he would have gone to extreme lengths to have won in Birmingham.

"I would've cut my finger off to win tonight," he said.

"It meant everything to me and my family - everyone's in the stands, my friends flew out for this race.

"I will be on the top of the podium in 2022, so whether it's this week or world short-course (championships), that is a promise."

Peaty shock

Peaty, who missed the world championships in Budapest in June after breaking his foot, had been unbeaten in the 100m breaststroke in a long-course global championships since 2014.

England team-mate James Wilby took gold in a time of 59.25sec, with Zac Stubblety-Cook second and his fellow Australian Sam Williamson third - pushing Peaty into fourth spot.

"When it comes down to the race sometimes it doesn't go to plan," Peaty told the BBC. "I was

hurting from the 50m but you know that's a lack of training, lack of racing."

He added: "I can't overthink it. I'm a fighter and sometimes you have got to have these moments to keep fighting."

Australia's 4x200m relay women's team sent excitement levels soaring after Peaty's defeat by setting a new world record - the first of the Games - in a time of 7min 39.29sec.

The team of Madison Wilson, Kiah Melverton, Mollie O'Callaghan and Arianne Titmus powered home to beat China's previous mark of 7:40.33, set at last year's Tokyo Olympics.

Australia also had a good day at the track cycling but their haul of three golds was overshadowed by a horrific crash.

England's Olympic omnium champion Matt Walls was catapulted over the barriers and into the crowd in the men's 15km scratch qualifiers.

Walls and two other riders - Isle of Man's Matt Bostock and Derek Gee of Canada - were taken to hospital but Walls was discharged later on Sunday.

"I've somehow come away with no serious injuries just a few stitches and pretty banged up," he tweeted.

"I really hope everyone else involved is OK including the spectators that may have been injured."

A CT scan also gave Bostock the all-clear.

The rugby sevens came to a conclusion in Coventry with South Africa inflicting more Commonwealth Games woe on Olympic champions Fiji.

The South Africans won 31-7 - Muller du Plessis scoring two tries - to regain the title they won in 2014, but for the Fijians it was their fourth silver medal.

The distraught players sank to their knees at the final whistle.

New Zealand men took the bronze, beating bitter rivals Australia 26-12.

There was further disappointment for Fiji in the women's final as they lost 22-12 to Australia.

There was a second gold for England's Alex Yee as the hosts won the triathlon mixed relay title.

AFP

Ex-Ryder Cup captain Stenson wins in LIV debut



Henrik Stenson made his LIV Golf debut a memorable one (AFP)

New York, United States - Henrik Stenson, stripped of the European Ryder Cup captaincy after joining the breakaway LIV Golf circuit, shook off the controversy to win the LIV Golf Invitational Bedminster on Sunday.

"I guess we can agree I played like a captain," said the 46-year-old Swede in a dig at Ryder Cup Europe after he carded a two-under par 69 at Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, New Jersey.

His 11-under total gave him a two-shot victory over Matthew Wolff and Dustin Johnson in the 54-hole, shotgun start event.

Stenson was sacked as Europe's Ryder Cup captain last week after signing with the Saudi-backed LIV circuit, which has drawn criticism from human rights activists concerned about Saudi Arabia's record.

The circuit has additionally provoked the wrath of the established DP World Tour and US PGA Tours as it lures players with massive purses and reportedly in some cases with signing bonuses worth tens of millions.

It's been a busy 10 days and I'm proud I managed to focus as well as I did

HENRIK STENSON

"It's been a busy 10 days and I'm extremely proud that I managed to focus as well as I did," said Stenson, who raked in the \$4 million individual winner's prize from the \$20 million purse as well as a share of the \$1.5 million awarded for his Majesticks team's runner-up finish in the team event. Former world number one Johnson, who birdied the last to claim his share of second with a three-under 68 for nine-under, captained the winning 4 Aces team. Wolff carded a seven-under 64.

Earlier on Friday, the circuit confirmed that it had signed up two-time Masters champion Bubba Watson.

AFP

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Finau marches to US PGA victory in Detroit

Los Angeles, United States - Tony Finau fired six birdies in a five-under par 67 on Sunday to capture his second US PGA Tour title in as many weeks with a convincing five shot win in the Rocket Mortgage Classic.

Finau, fresh off his come-from-behind victory in the 3M Open, started the day tied for the lead with Taylor Pendrith and relentlessly pulled away as the Canadian struggled to build momentum.

Finau's 26-under par total of 262 was the lowest score in tournament history.

The world number 16 was 24-under after birdies at the fourth, seventh and 10th - where he rolled in a 21-foot putt - before his lone bogey of the week with a three-putt at the 11th.

Finau promptly responded by draining a 30-foot birdie putt at the 12th, then added birdies at 14 and 17 to close out the win.

"Anytime you win, you breed confidence," said Finau, who is projected to rise to seventh in the world rankings. "I was just happy to carry that confidence from last week right into this week.

"I've been working extremely hard on my game all year and I think I'm just kind of bearing the fruit of the labor I've had throughout this season and it's coming together for me late in the season."

Pendrith, meanwhile, had three birdies and three bogeys in his even par 72 to share second on 21-under 267 with reigning FedEx Cup champion Patrick Cantlay and Cameron Young.

"It was tough," Pendrith said. "I couldn't really get anything going and didn't get off to the best start like I did the last three days, but kind of hung in there.

"I left a lot of putts short and obviously those have no chance of going in..."

AFP

Tony Finau poses with the trophy after winning the Rocket Mortgage Classic (AFP)

Sinner stuns Alcaraz again to take Umag title

Umag, Croatia - Jannik Sinner defeated Spanish teenager Carlos Alcaraz for the second time in four weeks on Sunday to take the Spaniard's Umag clay-court title.

World number 10 Sinner came from a first set deficit to beat the fifth-ranked Alcaraz 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 6-1 in the final.

Sinner, who now has six career titles but a first on clay, had also defeated the 19-year-old in the fourth round at Wimbledon earlier this month.

"I am obviously very happy," said Sinner who saved all nine moments, but we worked every time to play better, to be a better player, to be a better person.

"So, I'm very happy to be finally lifting a trophy this year, but I know that I still have a lot of things to improve. It's all about the process."

Alcaraz had been seeking his fifth title of 2022 but instead was defeated in a final for the second successive week after losing to another Italian, Lorenzo Musetti in Hamburg.

Despite those back-to-back setbacks, Alcaraz will rise to a career high of four in the world rankings on Monday, replacing Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas.

De Minaur champion

Australia's Alex de Minaur rolled to a 6-3, 6-3 victory over American Jenson Brooksby on Sunday to add a second ATP Atlanta title to the one he captured back in 2019.

The 23-year-old Aussie claimed his sixth career title - and his first since a victory in Eastbourne in June of last year.

"I'd like to thank the crowd," De Minaur said.

AFP

Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz share a light moment

break points he faced.

"I have had a tough year until now, I had some unfortunate

Al Zubair and Co forced to retire after leading Silver Cup at 24 hours of Spa

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and team-mates Fabian Schiller, Axcil Jeffries and Daniel Morad were forced to withdraw from the 74th edition of the TotalEnergies 24 Hours of Spa after 58 laps and under three hours of racing.

Schiller and Al Zubair had dominated the early exchanges in the Silver Cup category and been running as high as sixth overall when Theo Nouet's Beechdean AMR Aston Martin was beached in the barriers at Les Combles and this required an immediate full-course yellow flag.

Unfortunately, Al Zubair was unable to slow in time and

slammed the Al Manar Racing by HRT Mercedes-AMG GT3 into the rear of the slowing Allied Racing Porsche and the damage meant the Omani could not continue.

Victory on the flagship round of the 2022 Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe Powered by AWS eventually fell to the series-leading Team WRT Audi of Benjamin Goethe, Thomas Neubauer and Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer, who completed 533 laps just ahead of the Attempo Racing Audi of Marius Zug, Juuso Puhakka, Nicholas Scholl and Alex Aka.

The Emil Frey Racing Lamborghini of Tuomas Tujula, Stuart White and Konsta



Al Manar Racing by HRT Mercedes-AMG GT3 in action at the TotalEnergies 24 Hours of Spa

Lappalainen rounded off the podium places.

Al Zubair said: "It was a very tough race. It started amazing. It

was the best qualifying of my life so far, Q1 and pole position for myself. Then, with the team average we made it into Super Pole

with all the Pro drivers. We were in the top 20 and there were 25 Pro Cars.

"Fabi (Schiller) started the

race in P8 overall, which was amazing. We had a really good stint and moved into P6. During my stint, there was a full-course yellow where we usually have to be 80km/h at the one-second mark before it gets to zero.

"But, unfortunately, at 10 seconds, an amateur driver was in front of me and, once he heard the course yellow call, he slammed on the brakes and, at that speed, it was too late to manoeuvre around or do anything and we had quite a big impact and the race was over for us. This was definitely a tough pill to swallow. Hopefully better the next time."

After a competitive warm-up session, the Al Manar Racing by

HRT Mercedes was guided to the fastest lap of 2min 16.774sec in the Super Pole session that preceded the start of the 24-hour race. They recorded the ninth fastest lap behind eight Pro Cup cars and were well ahead of their Team WRT series rivals on the grid.

Schiller made a great start and were able to move up from third to the Silver Cup lead shortly after the hour mark and maintained the early initiative from Team WRT and Emil Frey Racing. Al Zubair took over at the start of the third hour and retained the lead from Team WRT and the Garage 59 McLaren. But that all ended on lap 59 with the accident.



Alonso to replace Vettel at Aston Martin

London, United Kingdom - Veteran Spanish Formula One driver Fernando Alonso said he "intends to win again" after Aston Martin announced Monday that he would be joining the team on a multi-year contract from 2023.

The double world champion, who turned 41 on Friday and was coming to the end of his contract with French team Alpine, will replace German driver Sebastian Vettel, a four-time champion, who last week announced his retirement from Formula One at the end of the current season.

Alonso, who won his world titles with Renault in 2005 and 2006, said the Aston Martin team - which is owned by Canadian billionaire Lawrence Stroll whose son Lance drives the other car - "is clearly applying the energy and commitment to win" and is "one of the most exciting teams in Formula One today".

"I have known Lawrence and Lance for many years and it is very obvious that they have the ambition and passion to succeed in Formula One," said Alonso who came eighth in Sunday's Hungarian Grand Prix and is currently 10th in the world championship standings.

The Spaniard made his F1 debut in 2001. After winning his world titles with Renault - the precursor to Alpine - he failed to add any more in two spells with McLaren and during a five-year stint with Ferrari.

AFP

HAPPINESS FACTOR

If Kylian, Leo and myself are happy, PSG will do well, says Neymar after leading the Parisians to Champions Trophy triumph on Galtier's debut



Paris Saint-Germain players celebrate winning the French Champions' Trophy after beating Nantes in Tel Aviv on Sunday (AFP)

Tel Aviv, Israel - Neymar scored twice with Lionel Messi also on target as Paris Saint-Germain thrashed Nantes 4-0 in the Champions Trophy in Tel Aviv on Sunday in new coach Christophe Galtier's first match in charge.

After an underwhelming first season in French football, Messi struck 22 minutes into the traditional curtain-raiser, being played in Israel for the second year in a row.

Neymar, whose future at the club has been the source of much speculation this summer, doubled the lead just before the break with a magnificent free-kick.

Sergio Ramos added a third and Neymar bagged his second late on from the penalty spot as PSG, the reigning Ligue 1 champions, eased to victory over last season's French Cup winners.

"It was a good match. There was a trophy on the line so we wanted to win it," Neymar told Prime Video, drowning out rumours of his potential departure. "If Kylian (Mbappe), Leo and

myself are happy, PSG will do well," he added. "I hope this season all three of us will stay and it will go well."

It is the ninth time in 10 seasons PSG have lifted the Champions Trophy. They lost 1-0 to Lille at the same venue a year ago.

It was a good match. There was a trophy on the line so we wanted to win it. I hope this season all three of us will stay and it will go well

NEYMAR

PSG begin their quest for a record 11th French league title away to Clermont on August 6.

Galtier became PSG's seventh different manager since the Qatari takeover of 2011 when he was appointed on a two-year deal in early July as the replacement for Mauricio Pochettino.

Mbappe suspended

The club won a protracted battle with Real Madrid in May to convince Kylian Mbappe to stay, but

Galtier was without the France star for his first official match due to suspension.

Pablo Sarabia, on loan at Sporting Lisbon last term, took Mbappe's place in the attack alongside Messi and Neymar, while Portugal midfielder Vitorino

made his debut following his arrival from Porto.

Achraf Hakimi forced Nantes goalkeeper Alban Lafont into an early stop and Sarabia went close before PSG captain Marquinhos headed against the crossbar.

Gianluigi Donnarumma, confirmed as PSG's first-choice goalkeeper ahead of Keylor Navas, turned away a Ludovic Blas effort, but Neymar and Messi soon combined to break the deadlock.

The Brazilian's deflected pass

rolled kindly towards Messi and the Argentine nonchalantly rounded Lafont to apply the finishing touch.

Lafont denied Messi a second but was left powerless minutes later as Neymar whipped a 25-yard free-kick into the top corner.

Nantes coach Antoine Kombouare got the better of Galtier in the French Cup final three months ago but found his former club in unforgiving mood here.

Ramos, who also endured a tough first year in Paris beset by injury, back-heeled home a third goal on 57 minutes after Lafont could only parry Sarabia's low cross.

France defender Nordi Mukiele came on in the closing stages for his PSG debut after arriving from RB Leipzig this week on a five-year deal.

And Neymar, having made no secret of his desire to remain at PSG, completed the rout with a penalty after Jean-Charles Castelletto was sent off for hauling him down inside the area.

AFP

Ronaldo plays 45 minutes in Man United friendly

Manchester, United Kingdom - Cristiano Ronaldo played 45 minutes as he made his first Manchester United appearance in 12 weeks during a 1-1 pre-season draw with Rayo Vallecano at Old Trafford on Sunday and later proclaimed: "Happy to be back".

The 37-year-old Portugal forward, who missed the club's pre-season tour to Thailand and Australia for personal reasons, reportedly wants to leave the club he rejoined last year.

Former Real Madrid and Juventus star Ronaldo finished as United's top scorer last season with 24 goals.

But the campaign as a whole was a huge disappointment for the club, with a sixth-place finish in the Premier League meaning they missed out on qualification for the Champions League.

Ronaldo was left out of United's squad for Saturday's friendly with Atletico Madrid in



Cristiano Ronaldo

Oslo.

But, commenting on a post on a fan page about him missing the game in Norway, Ronaldo wrote Friday: "Domingo o rei joga" which translates as "Sunday the king plays".

Ronaldo applauded fans on both sides of the ground as he led the team out for their pre-match warm-up on Sunday.

AFP

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DREAM COME TRUE!

Chloe Kelly scores in extra-time as England beat Germany at Wembley to win Euro 2022

Wembley, United Kingdom - England won a major women's tournament for the first time as Chloe Kelly's extra-time goal secured a 2-1 victory over Germany at a sold-out Wembley on Sunday.

In front of a record crowd of 87,192 for any match in the history of the European Championships, Kelly prodded home a loose ball from close range to end English football's 56-year wait for a World Cup or Euro victory.

Kelly fought back from an anterior cruciate ligament tear to be fit in time for the tournament and made herself a national hero by being in the right place to pounce when Germany failed to clear a corner in the 110th minute.

The Manchester City winger tore off her shirt in celebration in scenes reminiscent of Brandi Chastain's famous reaction to scoring the winning penalty at the 1999 World Cup for the USA. "This is what dreams are



England's players celebrate with the trophy after their triumph against Germany in the Euro 2022 final at the Wembley stadium in London on Sunday (AFP)

made of, as a young girl watching women's football," said Kelly, who broke off a post-match interview to join in a chorus of

"Sweet Caroline" with the crowd and her teammates. "Thank you for everyone who played a part in my rehab. I al-

ways believed I'd be here, but to be here and score the winner, wow. These girls are amazing." England looked set for victory

in the 90 minutes when substitute Ella Toone's sublime chip over Merle Frohms put the hosts in front.

Germany showed remarkable resilience to bounce back as Lina Magull levelled 11 minutes from time.

But for once, England were not to be denied a major tournament success.

Fortune did not favour Germany, who lost captain and top goalscorer Alexandra Popp to a muscle injury in the warm-up.

But England will feel their time for some luck was due as 12 months on from the Three Lions' defeat on penalties to Italy in the Euro 2020 men's final, the nation's women went one better.

England manager Sarina Wiegman has now led the home nation to the title in back-to-back women's Euros after leading the Netherlands to victory five years ago.

"The game was so tight, there was a little bit of fight in there, but who cares, we won 2-1," said Wiegman.

"We are European champions."

Under Wiegman, England are unbeaten in 20 games but were pushed to the limit by the eight-time winners despite missing the massive presence of Popp.

The Wolfsburg striker, who missed the entirety of Euro 2013 and 2017 through injury, had scored six goals in five games en route to the final.

Despite losing their major goal threat and facing the intimidating atmosphere of a full Wembley waiting to party, Germany still posed a threat and came close to opening the scoring early in the second half when Magull prodded just wide.

AFP

Serial winner Wiegman helps England 'change society' in Euro triumph

Wembley, United Kingdom - England women's manager Sarina Wiegman hailed the impact her players have made in changing perceptions beyond the pitch after the Lionesses won a major tournament for the first time at Euro 2022, beating Germany 2-1 after extra-time.

"Winning is what we are here for, we try to win and do our job as good as possible," said Wiegman. "But through football you can make little changes in society and that is what we hope for."



England's coach Sarina Wiegman (L) celebrates with the players after their final victory against Germany on Sunday (AFP)

Winning is what we are here for, we try to win and do our job as good as possible

SARINA WIEGMAN

Queen Elizabeth II was among those to pay tribute to the England squad for providing "inspiration for girls and women today, and for future generations."

Chloe Kelly and Ella Toone became national heroes by coming off the bench to score the goals as not for the first time in the tournament, Wiegman's substitutions changed the course of the game. Five years on from leading her native Netherlands to their breakthrough on the international stage in the women's game at Euro 2017, Wiegman repeated the trick to inspire another home nation.

In between times, the former PE teacher also led the Dutch to

the 2019 World Cup final.

"When I took the job you hope one thing, we knew there was quality and such big potential in this country," she added. "My challenge was to bring people together from another country and it worked out. It's something you dream of and hope for."

Wiegman's ability to foster team spirit was even more remarkable as she revealed her sister died leading up to the tournament.

AFP



Martina Voss-Tecklenburg

Germany boss baffled by penalty call in Euro 2022 final defeat

Wembley, United Kingdom - Germany manager Martina Voss-Tecklenburg said she was troubled by the decision not to award a penalty to her side in the first half of Sunday's Euro 2022 final defeat to England.

Lionesses captain Leah Williamson escaped after the ball hit her hand in a goalmouth scramble with the score still at 0-0.

England went onto win a first ever major tournament in extra-time through Chloe Kelly's winner after Lina Magull cancelled out Ella Toone's opener for the hosts in the 90 minutes.

After a VAR check, Ukrainian referee Kateryna Monzul was not told to review her initial decision not to give a penalty.

"On this level at final of the European Championships this shouldn't happen," said Voss-Tecklenburg.

"I'd like to have a discussion why did no one look at it? This is something I would really like to ask. It happened to us today, but if it had happened to them I would feel the same. It really bothers me."

AFP

I always believed I'd be here: Kelly

London, United Kingdom - Chloe Kelly said this was "what dreams are made of" after scoring the winning goal as England beat Germany 2-1 in the Euro 2022 final on Sunday.

Kelly struck in extra-time after Germany's Lina Magull levelled 11 minutes from the end of 90 minutes.

Having fought back from an anterior cruciate ligament tear to be fit in time for the tournament, Kelly pounced when Germany failed to clear a corner in the 110th minute.

"It's amazing, thank you everyone, this is what dreams are made of as a young girl watching women's football," Kelly told the BBC. "This is unbelievable."

She added: "Thank you for everyone who played a part in my rehab. I always believed I'd be here, but to be here and score the winner. These girls are amazing."

The result meant England manager Sarina Wiegman had won back-to-back European Championships after guiding her native Netherlands to the 2017 title.

England captain Leah Williamson said victory was the proudest moment of my life".

"I just can't stop crying," she added. "Something like this, we



Chloe Kelly celebrates after scoring the winner against Germany in the Euro 2022 final on Sunday (AFP)

talk and we talk and we talk and we finally did it. It's about doing it on the pitch and I'll tell you what, the kids are alright.

"It is the proudest moment of my life until the day I have kids I suppose.

"I am taking everything in,

every piece of advice was take every single second in so I can relive it forever."

AFP

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