

► NEWS BRIEF

CMA SUSPENDS OIFC'S MERGER DECISION

Muscat - Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued a decision to suspend implementation of resolutions made during the Extraordinary General Meeting of Oman Investment and Finance Company (OIFC) held on June 21, 2023. The resolutions involved the merger of OIFC with Dhofar International Development and Investment Holding Company through consolidation.

The decision was prompted by objections raised by a group of shareholders who collectively own more than 5% of the company's shares.

Oman unfazed by oil price drop

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oil below US\$80 is "not a problem" for Oman, H E Said bin Hamoud al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, has stated.

Speaking to Bloomberg Television last week, H E Mawali said that the sultanate is unconcerned by the oil price dropping more than 10% this year even as the global economy slows because of the position Oman is in today.

He highlighted the significant improvement in decision making over the past few years, enabling the sultanate navigate the global economic slowdown. "In the last two to three years, there has



In the last two to three years, there has been a significant improvement in decision making which has led us to focus on diversification in many sectors

H E SAID AL MAWALI

been a significant improvement in decision making which has led us to focus on diversification in sectors like logistics and mining, and developing large green hydrogen projects."

Discussing Oman's strategic location and its advantages, the minister emphasised the sultanate's longstanding maritime heritage, saying, "We have been doing this for thousands of years;

one of the reasons for this is our location."

He stressed the importance of leveraging this location for logistics, tourism and other opportunities, citing the historical trade routes between Oman and China.

Highlighting the investments in logistics-related infrastructure, H E Mawali said that the sultanate has spent approximately \$26bn on developing such facilities. Currently, the logistics sector contributes around 5% to Oman's GDP. He revealed the sultanate's ambitious goal to further enhance the logistics sector's contribution to more than 10% of the GDP by 2040.

Commenting on Oman's role in the region, the minister emphasised the sultanate's position of responsibility and advantage in resolving regional conflicts.

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"When you are on good terms with your neighbours and the rest of the world, that helps in investments and reaching out to countries that are in conflict with each other."

Oman's diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries create opportunities for business and serve as a bridge to foster economic cooperation, he added.

H E Mawali expressed Oman's confidence in weathering the oil price slump, thanks to the sultanate's focus on diversification in five important sectors - transport and logistics, mining, tourism, agriculture and fisheries, and manufacturing.

04



Oil exports reach 128mn barrels by May end

07



UN warns Sudan faces 'full-scale civil war'

'Wages must be transferred within 7 days of due date'

Our Correspondent Muscat

H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, has issued Ministerial Decision No 299/2023, mandating implementation of the Wages Protection System (WPS).

The electronic system, jointly developed by the Ministry of Labour and Central Bank of Oman, ensures the secure and timely transfer of employees' wages in the private sector to their authorised bank accounts.

Under the decision, employers are obligated to transfer employees' wages to local banks within a maximum of seven days from the due date,



utilising the salary information file of the WPS.

Prompt updates to the ministry regarding any changes to employees' wages are also required to ensure accurate records

that reflect the actual amounts received by employees.

Certain exemptions from utilising the WPS are provided in emergency cases, including labour disputes resulting in

work cessation and voluntary termination of employment without legal justification. New employees within first 30 days of employment and employees on unpaid leave are also exempt from the system's application.

The ministry's inspection teams will monitor implementation of the WPS and ensure payment of wages to private sector employees.

Violators of the system will face sanctions, including initial warnings for non-compliance, suspension of services related to preliminary work permits, and imposition of an administrative fine of RO50. The fine will double for repeated violations.

Sheikh Mohammed bin

Ghaleb al Hina, Chairman of the Main Committee for the completion, operation and development of the WPS, informed that it has undergone numerous enhancements to ensure seamless transactions and the confidentiality of information.

An executive committee, established in March 2022, has been working on the final development of the system, comprising officials of the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Central Bank of Oman, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, General Federation of Oman Workers, and Public Authority for Social Insurance.

Hijri New Year holiday on July 20

Muscat - July 20 has been announced an official holiday for employees of the public and private sectors on the occasion of the Holy Prophet's Hijra Anniversary and advent of the new Hijri year 1445 AH.

A decision issued by the Ministry of Labour to this effect also stated that moon-sighting of the month of Muharram will be announced by concerned departments.

Employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday - due to the nature of their work - provided they compensate the workers for the holiday.

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KEEPING IT COOL

During the scorching summer months, electricity consumption peaks as air-conditioners work around the clock. Managing electricity consumption during summers in Oman is an ongoing challenge requiring the collective efforts of the government, businesses and individuals. With the mercury often crossing 40°C, air conditioning is an absolute necessity in homes, offices, shopping malls and cars, leading to a significant surge in energy usage. What measures can be adopted to reduce electricity consumption during summers? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said -



Ruskeen S
Sales Manager

Change of certain habits will help. First, a simple measure will be to put unwanted lights off during daytime. Use ACs in living rooms and sit together with family members instead of using individual ACs in each room. Replace old power consuming electrical and electronics products with less power consuming LED and 5-star products.

Muzakkir Ahmed Syed
Pharmacist

Remember to turn off the lights when exiting a room and consider utilising LED lighting. Additionally, opt for energy-efficient appliances and strive to minimise water usage.

Sabra al Maskari
Government employee

There are many steps that can be taken to reduce electricity consumption during summers, including educating the whole family and communities on how to save electricity cost via media and public awareness. Along with this, people must take steps to reduce water-heating expenses, use solar energy

facilities, replace light bulbs and instal programmable thermostats. Some of the other methods can be using energy-efficient appliances and upgrade HVAC systems, using toaster-ovens instead of ovens, using natural light and servicing air conditioners. Also, one can use fans instead of ACs.

Zainab Sagar
Housewife

Relying solely on solar panels can be inconvenient. Implementing solar panels everywhere would impose a financial burden on the government. Instead, we could launch an initiative where we kindly request all families in Oman to voluntarily switch off their lights, air conditioners, refrigerators and other appliances for one hour. This candlelight hour would be a choice rather than a mandate, allowing us to reminisce about the good old days and also encourage family gatherings.

Janika Sharma
Marketing specialist

Power off unused electronics to prevent unnecessary electricity consumption. Instal efficient solar panels for long-term savings; these do not stop working

under cloudy skies. Upgrade old air conditioning units with newer models that offer energy-efficient features. Improve home insulation. The more you insulate, the less you will rely on air conditioning and heating systems. Use curtains and drapes on all windows to manage indoor temperatures effectively. Consider switching to carpeted floors to enhance home insulation.

Mohtesan Maqsood
Private sector employee

It is important to purchase eco-friendly electronic devices and practise turning off unnecessary lights, fans and ACs. We must educate our children and society about the significance of responsible electricity consumption and usage.

Mohamed Asiq
HSE engineer

Some techniques to achieve this can be to take advantage of the cool breeze by opening windows and using fans during early morning and late evening hours. Keep windows and blinds closed during the hottest part of the day to keep out heat. Another can be to raise the temperature a few degrees to reduce the workload on your air conditioner.



What can be done to develop summer tourism in governorates?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/ 2456782/2023	GIS Survey, Mapping Services, Asset Register Verification, Valuation for Nama Water Services (Muscat Governorate)	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned specialized in the works mentioned	R.O. 1500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	14/8/2023
T/2457839/2023	Construction of Water Distribution Network and House Connections in Al Lakbi Area in Al Jazer Wilayat (Al Wusta Governorate)	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O. 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	21/8/2023
T/2460858/2023	Consultancy Services for Design and Construction Supervision of Reinforcement of Sur Transmission System	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	R.O. 500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	21/8/2023
T/2460868/2023	Construction of Sewage and Irrigation Connection Pipelines and Associated Works for Hai Al Naseem Project in Barka Wilayat	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O. 1500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	14/8/2023
T/2459833/2023	Supply, Installation, and Commissioning of Sand Filter at Khasab STP	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	14/8/2023
T/2453381-3/2022 Re-float	Call off Contract for General Buildings Maintenance Works for Nama Water Services in Muscat Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	14/8/2023
T/2456815/2023	Call Off Contract for Supply & Delivery of Butterfly Valve PN 16 & 25 for Two Years.	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	14/8/2023
T/2457841/2023	Call off contract for Supply and Delivery of DI Fittings for Two Years	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	14/8/2023
T/2457840/2023	Call off Contract for Air Release valve & Non-Return Valve for two years	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	24/7/2023	14/8/2023

The tender document can be purchased from Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from the date of publication of this announcement until 24/07/2023.

The applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway through Supplier Login. Applicants who are not registered with Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) shall register from <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> to have the login credentials of Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login). All participating Companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 3:00 pm on the bid submission date.

Bid Bond must be obtained from a Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services). The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 3:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.owwsc.nama.om or Email to: tender@owwsc.nama.om



www.owwsc.nama.om 1442

Oman courts handle 8,669 cases in Q2 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Courts across Oman received a total of 8,669 cases during the second quarter of 2023, the Public Prosecution has stated. There were a total of 45,868 judicial orders and 16,826 investigations conducted in this period.

The Public Prosecution received 736 complaints electronically in Q2 2023, 197 of which

were directed to the Department of Customer Service. A total of 11,017 individuals were accused for various violations and crimes, while the total number of judicial decisions issued was 6,989.

In an effort to expedite the resolution of labour disputes, the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary established three evening labour courts in the Governorate of Muscat earlier this year. The decision to form these

courts in Muscat, Seeb and Amerat was made in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit. The objective was to implement legal provisions, streamline litigation procedures, reduce litigation time, improve the business environment, and minimise the number of court visitors.

Introduction of evening labour courts primarily benefits workers, businessmen and investors, offering them a more efficient and accessible platform to address labour-related issues.



Al Naseem International Circus performing in Amerat till July 24

Muscat - Al Naseem International Circus began shows at Amerat Park on Sunday which will continue till July 24. The circus hopes to captivate both citizens and residents alike with these shows.

Performances will take place seven days a week at 6pm and 8.30pm. Each show promises an hour and a half of mesmerising entertainment for all age groups. Dr Musab al Hinai, CEO of Al Naseem Group, spoke to Muscat Daily about the uniqueness of the circus. "The captivating performances include awe-inspiring acrobatics, impressive puppetry, thrilling aerial displays, encounters with extraordinary creatures, and world-class martial arts featuring renowned artists from Colombia, Africa, Iran and other parts of the globe."

Wail al Hinai, HR Manager of Al Naseem Group, informed that following the shows in Amerat, the circus will move to Salalah for a 20-day run.

Standard tickets for the circus for adults and children are priced RO8, while VIP tickets are available for RO10. Children under the age of two enter for free, and raffle coupons can be purchased for RO3, offering a chance to win exciting prizes.

Sharing plans for the future, Musab said, "We are preparing



The captivating performances include awe-inspiring acrobatics, thrilling aerial displays and world-class martial arts featuring renowned artists

DR MUSAB AL HINAI

to open the largest water park in Salalah by the end of July, and also have plans to establish a

water park in Muscat governorate." (Contributed by Deeba Parween)

National space development programme gathers pace

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is actively working to develop its space programme and attract investments in the space sector. Key projects in progress include an open satellite data platform, a CubeSat project, an earth station project, and a cloud-computing project for space data.

An announcement to this effect was made during the fourth meeting of leaders of the space economy, held in India last week.

The two-day meeting, held as part of a G20 summit, focused on the significance of the space sector to the global economy and



Oman's delegation, led by H E Dr Ali Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications

Oman recognises the space sector as a crucial component of the National Digital Economy Programme. It is important for the economic diversification efforts

H E DR ALI AMER AL SHIDHANI

and Information Technology in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information

Technology, participated in discussions.

The sultanate's participation in the meeting aligns with its commitment to develop the space sector and achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. "The sultanate recognises the space sector as a crucial component of the National Digital Economy Programme," H E Shidhani said.

He highlighted the importance of the space sector in Oman's economic diversification efforts and emphasised the ministry's dedication to enable the space sector to play a significant role in realising Oman Vision 2040.

ROP seeks information on missing S Sharqiyah citizen

Muscat – Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the family of Ali Hamad Ali al Ghanbousi from Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, South Sharqiyah, are seeking information on his whereabouts.

'ROP announces that Ali Hamad Ali al Ghanbousi left his place of residence in the Suwayh area in the wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali on Wednesday, June 14, and has not returned since,' a statement said.

ROP called on all to assist in locating Ghanbousi. 'Those who have any information on his whereabouts kindly contact the Police Operations Centre at 9999 or the nearest police station.'

Event promotes opportunities in date harvesting

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Nakheel Oman Development Company hosted a symposium titled 'Investment Opportunities in the Tabseel Industry in Oman' in Bidiyah, North Sharqiyah on Sunday.

The symposium took place during the activities of the ongoing tabseel season or date harvesting in Oman.

The aim of the symposium was to explore modern market-



ing channels and facilitate the purchasing process of date crops from farmers. Various institutions from the public and private sectors participated in the event.

Dr Ali al Araiimi, CEO of Nakheel Oman Development Company, emphasised the importance of facilitating the tabseel season and collaborating with innovators, researchers, and small and medium enterprises involved in manufacturing products derived from the harvesting process.

The symposium featured six working papers, including topics such as Oman's experience in date production and marketing, empowering agricultural projects, and scientific research in

tabseel-related manufacturing industries.

The discussions resulted in several recommendations, including enabling Omani private sector companies to utilise tabseel products for food manufacturing and other purposes, as well as focusing on marketing, promotion and ensuring food security.

The date harvest season, also called jidad, starts in June and continues till September, depending on the type of palm tree and the method of harvesting.

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Complex spine surgery performed at Sohar Hospital

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A female patient who suffered a complex fracture of the spine and rupture of the spinal cord in a traffic accident has undergone a successful four-hour medical intervention performed by a specialised team from Khoula Hospital in cooperation with the Department of Orthopedics at Sohar Hospital.

According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Health (MoH), the patient's condition necessitated immediate surgery, which took place on Saturday night. During the procedure, the Khoula Hospital team suc-



cessfully operated the complex fracture and stabilised her condition.

According to Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Kindi, Senior Specialist in Orthopedic Surgery at Sohar Hospital, the 21-year-old woman was involved in a traffic accident in which her spine and right femur were fractured and spinal cord damaged, requiring urgent surgical intervention.

He informed that such operations align with the MoH's decentralisation policy, which aims to extend healthcare services beyond Muscat governorate, particularly for cases demanding immediate medical attention.

ASMED launches new programme to help SMEs grow

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has introduced a new programme called 'Escalation of Small and Medium Enterprises' to improve standards of SMEs.

The programme aims to facilitate growth, ensure classification improvement and promote development of SMEs.

In a statement highlighting the objectives of the programme, ASMED said it consists of two phases - an acceleration phase targeting registered SMEs that have updated their data, and a future path phase for announcement of SME registrations and selection of the most qualified enterprises for escalation.

The programme focuses on various aspects to help SMEs achieve goals, including generating job opportunities and supporting expansion and growth of enterprises locally and regionally.

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SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Grade In Tender Board Registration	Last day to purchase tender documents	Last date of tender submission
7/2023	Services	Maintenance, Operating & Gardening Services To Horse Riding Centre At Barka From 01/01/2024 To 31/12/2025	First Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
8/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Sohar Sports (Including Director Of Culture At Sohar) Complex From 01/01/2024 To 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
9/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Nizwa Sports Complex (Including Nizwa Culture Center & Sports Centre At Izki) From 01/01/2024 To 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
10/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Rustaq Sports Complex (Including Sports Centres At Nakal & Awabi And Beach Game Facility At Musannah Sports City) From 01/01/2024 To 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
11/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Buraimi Sports Complex (Including Art Association At Buraimi & Sports Centre At Sumaina) From 01/01/2024 To 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
12/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Sur Sports Complex (Including Annex Sports Centre At Sur & Sports Facilities At Tiwi, Khallat And Ras Al Haad) From 01/01/2024 To 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
13/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	Maintenance, Operating Services To Saadah Sports Complex (Including Sports Centres At Thumrait, Mughshin, & Sadah) Dhofar Governorate From 01/01/2024 To 31/12/2025	Excellent Grade	22/07/2023	21/08/2023
14/2023	Supply	Supply And Installation Of Medical Equipments	Excellent & First Grade	15/07/2023	31/07/2023
15/2023	Supply	Supply And Installation Sport Scientific Equipments	Excellent & First Grade	15/07/2023	31/07/2023
Re -Tender 19/2022	Supply	Supply And Installation Of Fencing & Floodlight For Football Pitch To Ahly Sidab Club At Muscat Governorate	Excellent & First Grade	15/07/2023	21/07/2023

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Oman's oil exports reach 128mn barrels by May end

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman's total oil exports by the end of May 2023 stood at 128,070,300 barrels with an average oil barrel price of US\$81, according to the preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Oil exports constituted 80% of the total oil production which stood at 160,144,300 barrels.

Crude oil production increased by 0.7% during the same period to stand at 125,757,600 barrels.

The production of condensates also rose by 5.6% till the end of May this year compared to the corresponding period in 2022 to stand at 34,386,700 barrels.

Average daily production of oil stood at 1,060,600 barrels till the end of May 2023.

China topped the list of countries importing Oman's oil with total exports standing at 117,120,500 barrels, followed by Japan with 4,783,500 barrels.



India came next with 2,716,200 barrels. Exports to other countries stood at 3.450mn barrels.

Meanwhile, gas production (including imports) in Oman registered a growth of 3.9% to reach 21,833.1mn cubic metres till the

end of May 2023 compared to 21,004.9mn cubic metres during the corresponding period in 2022.

Consumption of natural gas at industrial projects constituted 60.2% till the end of May 2023.

Consumption of gas for industrial projects stood at 13,163.1mn cubic metres.

Gas consumption for the following uses stood as the following: 5,580.5mn cubic metres at oil fields, 2,977.7mn cubic metres

at energy plants and 111.8mn cubic metres at industrial areas.

Non-associated production of gas (including imports) stood at 17,469.9mn cubic metres.

Associated gas production reached 4,369.1mn cubic metres.



Saudi Arabia, France looking for cooperation in energy sector

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman on Sunday met with visiting French Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher, as the two sides sought to prioritise energy as one of the main pillars of their long-term partnership.

According to a statement issued after his meeting with the French Minister for Energy Transition, Saudi Arabia and France affirmed their commitments to a memorandum of understanding, which was signed on February 2 this year for cooperation in the field of energy.

Both countries also acknowledged the importance of advancing the implementation of the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement in accordance with the principles, objectives and goals defined therein, including pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C," a joint communiqué stated.

Addressing climate change and promoting secure, reliable, affordable and sustainable supplies of energy are shared strategic priorities of Saudi Arabia and France. Moreover, the two countries recognised that clean hydrogen is an essential fuel to reach the shared objective of promoting a sustainable economic development while mitigating the impact of climate change.

Additionally, both countries agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of electricity, and ex-

change experiences in the field of electricity generation from renewable energy resources, grid interconnection projects, as well as encouraging the participation of private sectors in power sector projects including generation, transmission, distribution, storage and network automation technologies.

Both countries have agreed to engage in joint efforts to enhance energy efficiency, and to enhance their cooperation in the field of nuclear energy in a peaceful and safe framework, the management of radioactive waste and the nuclear applications, and the development of human capabilities.

Both countries agreed to cooperate on advancing climate technologies and solutions including carbon capture utilisation and storage for hard-to-abate sectors such as cement, aviation, marine, and petrochemicals, among others.

Saudi Arabia aims to become the leading exporter of hydrogen and electricity produced from low emission resources globally, capitalising on its ability to produce hydrogen and electricity produced from low emission resources at competitive cost.

The Gulf nation has the necessary resources of renewable energy, natural gas and carbon sinks, to export hydrogen in addition to its strategic location with proximity to major global demand centres.

SPA

Yellen says visit helps put US-China ties on 'surer footing'

Beijing, China - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Sunday that her talks with top Chinese officials have helped put ties on 'surer footing', as she wrapped up a trip aimed at stabilising fraught relations between the two biggest economies.

During her four-day trip - which came on the heels of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit - Yellen stressed the need for healthy economic competition and improved communication, and urged cooperation on the 'existential threat' posed by climate change.

"We believe that the world is big enough for both of our countries to thrive," she told journalists at the US Embassy in Beijing on Sunday.

"Both nations have an obligation to responsibly manage this relationship: to find a way to live



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen addresses a press conference at the Beijing American Center of the US Embassy, in Beijing on Sunday (AFP)

together and share in global prosperity," she added.

While it did not produce specific breakthroughs, Yellen's trip furthers a push by President Joe Biden's administration to steady ties with China.

Beijing's official Xinhua news

agency said on Saturday that Yellen's meeting with Vice Premier He Lifeng yielded an agreement to 'strengthen communication and cooperation on addressing global challenges'.

Both sides also agreed to continue exchanges, the readout

added.

Yellen said on Sunday that while there are 'significant disagreements' between the countries, her talks had been 'direct, substantive, and productive'.

"My bilateral meetings - which totalled about 10 hours over two days - served as a step forward in our effort to put the US-China relationship on surer footing," she said.

"I feel confident that we will have more frequent and regular communication."

Sources of tension

Topping the laundry list of disagreements are Washington's trade curbs, which it says are crucial to safeguard national security.

On Sunday, Yellen said she had stressed that Washington's measures "are not used by us to

gain economic advantage".

"These actions are motivated by straightforward national security considerations," she said.

And with the US mulling fresh curbs that could more strictly regulate American outbound investment to China, Yellen said any new moves would be implemented in 'a transparent way'.

"I emphasised that it would be highly targeted and clearly directed narrowly at a few sectors where we have specific national security concerns," she said.

"I want to allay their fears that we would do something that would have broad-based impacts on the Chinese economy.

"That's not the case, that's not the intention."

She also said she had raised 'serious concerns' over 'unfair economic practices' by Beijing.

AFP

Bangladesh, ITFC sign \$1.4bn deal for energy finance

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - The International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), which is a member of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group, has signed a US\$1.4bn financing plan with Bangladesh, a report said.

The signing took place during a recent official visit by a high-level delegation from Bangladesh to the ITFC headquarters in Jeddah. This financing plan will enable the Bangladesh Petroleum Company to import oil products from July this year to June next year, the report added.

This agreement reflects the successful long-term partnership between the two parties and will contribute to ensuring energy security for one of the fastest-growing economies in South Asia.

Furthermore, it demonstrates the corporation's commitment to supporting the economic development of its member states and providing financing solutions that meet the needs of its customers.

SPA



Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt (right)

Hunt to unveil new measures for UK financial sector

London, UK - Finance minister Jeremy Hunt is on Monday due to announce new measures to support Britain's financial sector, seeking to make the UK the 'most innovative and competitive' financial centre in the world.

Hunt will set out "how Britain's financial services will support the drive for long-term sustainable growth across the country", the UK Treasury said ahead of his speech at London's Mansion House in the City of London financial district.

"I want to lay out plans to enable our financial services sector to increase returns for pension-

ers, improve outcomes for investors and unlock capital for our growth businesses," Hunt is expected to tell an audience of CEOs and leaders from the sector. The new measures will in particular seek to make the UK stock market more attractive to firms looking to take their businesses public.

The number of companies conducting IPOs in London last year plunged to around 40 listings compared to more than 100 in 2021. Hunt will lay out plans for an 'entirely new kind of stock market'.

AFP

Saudi, Russia supply cuts reflect demand concerns: Experts

Ankara, Turkey - The recent decision by Saudi Arabia and Russia to extend existing crude oil supply cuts did not have the expected effect on prices, but analysts said the limited increase in prices reflects demand-based worries by investors.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter of crude oil, announced its intention to unilaterally extend production cuts of 1mn barrels per day (bpd) through August, leaving the door open for further extensions.

Russia followed suit with an announcement of a voluntary reduction of exports by 500,000 bpd in August, on top of the 700,000 bpd in place since March.

Algeria later said it would also reduce output by an extra 20,000 bpd in August, bringing its total cut to 68,000 bpd since April.

The new reductions were additions to the group's already-existing output cap of around 2mn bpd announced in October 2022 and 1.6mn bpd in May.

The supply restrictions came amid concerns about dwindling supplies and deteriorating global economies as a result of inflation



and rising interest rates.

Russia and Saudi Arabia said the cuts, which were approved despite persistent requests from the International Energy Agency and the US for more production amid rising threats of a global recession, are intended to maintain market balance.

Several statements that many countries, including the US, would maintain strict monetary policies, concerns that China's post-pandemic recovery is not progressing at the expected pace and uncertainty regarding Beijing's oil consumption continue to feed negative market sentiment.

Although there are short-term rises in oil prices due to produc-

tion restrictions from Saudi Arabia, Russia and Algeria, fears about weak oil demand limit price increases.

The Brent oil price closed at US\$74.65 per barrel, down 0.33% on Monday after Saudi Arabia and Russia confirmed their decision to cut production. Brent ended the week at US\$78.17 with a 4% gain. According to the International Monetary Fund, Saudi Arabia requires Brent crude to trade at roughly US\$81 to balance its budget.

Investors not optimistic

Saudi Arabia and Russia would be willing to keep the market balanced "only to the extent that

ensuring a balance in the oil market helps keep prices from falling below \$70 or so," Doug Sheridan, director and founder of US-based Energy Point Research, told Anadolu.

"We've tended to view moves like this as providing price support in the near term, even as it increases chances of lower prices in the longer term as Saudi Arabia eventually tires of carrying the load," he said. Sheridan said the latest decision also sets the table for a potential all-out production announcement down the road by the Saudis "to remind global producers of the risk of overproduction".

"In the end, and as always, the solution to balancing the market will be to let prices go lower," said Sheridan.

ADM Investor Services' Chief Global Economist Marc Ostwald affirmed that Saudi Arabia and Russia are "definitely trying to stabilise prices".

"Though in both the case of Saudi Arabia and Russia, the perspective is that they need prices higher to meet their budget outlays, in Russia's case obviously as it wages war against Ukraine."

Anadolu Agency



MHD ACERE brings Ironman 4X4 accessories to add to thrills

Auto Expert Oman - a subsidiary of MHD ACERE - has added to its wide range of facilities by introducing high-quality off-road accessories from Ironman 4X4 to add to the thrills of driving enthusiast of the sultanate.

Auto Expert Oman - a state-of-the-art diagnostic training and development centre - is a 'one-stop-shop for all your vehicle maintenance, service, and repair needs', the company stated.

Located in Muscat and Salalah, Auto Expert Oman offers a range of services, including oil changes, engine diagnostics, window tinting, detailing, polishing, and more. The facility is equipped with the latest diagnostic tools and equipment to ensure your vehicle runs at its best.

'In addition to its maintenance and repair services, Auto Expert Oman also offers a wide range of high-quality off-road accessories

from Ironman 4X4,' the company stated in a release.

Ironman 4x4 products are essential for off-road enthusiasts because they are designed to withstand the toughest conditions and provide reliable performance when you need them most.

'Whether you're navigating rocky terrain, crossing rivers, or driving through the desert, Ironman 4x4 products are built to

help you conquer any challenge,' it added.

Ironman 4x4 offers a wide range of products designed to help you get the most out of your off-road adventures.

Some of the different types of products that they offer are - suspension systems, bull bars, winches, roof racks, recovery gear, and more. Whether one is an avid off-roader or simply looking to add some extra functional-

ity to one's vehicle, Ironman 4x4 Accessories has the products one needs to take on any challenge.

'No matter what service you're looking for, Auto Expert Oman has the expertise and experience to get the job done right. With a commitment to customer satisfaction and a team of highly trained professionals, you can be sure that your vehicle will be in good hands,' the company added.

Alizz Islamic Bank introduces Chatbot service for instant responses to inquiries

Alizz Islamic Bank recently revealed their Chatbot service that responds to customer inquiries related to products and services and enables customers to communicate with the bank directly and around the clock on 24166000.

This comes as part of the bank's vision toward adopting digital transformation and enhancing customer experience. The Alizz Islamic Bank Chatbot has been launched on WhatsApp and the bank's official Instagram page and it will also be introduced to the bank's corporate website very soon.

Customers can send a message via WhatsApp on 24166000 and experience instant responses to their questions on products, services, branch locations, fees, cards, finances, accounts and much more.

The same applies for the bank's Instagram page, all customers have to do is send a direct message and the machine learning solution will respond instantly. Additionally customers can show their interest for a particular product or service by providing their contact information, select the nearest branch to them and they will be contacted by the sales team.

Ali al Mani, General Manager of Alizz Islamic Bank, stated, "Digital transforma-

tion is inevitable and not optional for any entity that provides direct services to its customers, especially the banking sector. Improving digital solutions naturally leads to enhancing the customer experience journey within the banking sector.

"At Alizz Islamic Bank, we have continued to invest in our existing digital platforms and entered into various partnerships in order to provide the right customer solutions. The bank continues to work towards obtaining a digital business model to keep pace with changing customer requirements and technological advancement. This approach has led to a doubling of the number of our customers' using digital channels of all kinds."

Alizz Islamic Bank believes in putting the customer first and the modern customer is constantly changing their methods of communication. That is why adopting artificial intelligence (AI) is crucial towards meeting customer expectations.

The vast majority of the public continually resort to social media to search for information and receive answers to enquiries from the bank. It is no secret that artificial intelligence technologies are the future for various industries.

Al Maha celebrates 30 years of being in business

This year sees Al Maha Petroleum Marketing Company SAOG celebrating 30 years of its excellence in business.

Established back in 1993, Al Maha is Oman's pioneering distributor of petroleum products and has since been a strategic partner in developing and supporting the sultanate's infrastructure sector.

The company maintains a network of service stations throughout Oman. Through capital investment and growth, they have developed services that reach the most inaccessible parts of the sultanate.

Company's Chief Executive Officer Hamed Salim al Maghdiri viewed this occasion as "an incredible milestone for any company", and felt "extremely proud to be celebrating our 30th anniversary".

"We have dedicated ourselves to 30 years of product innovation and improving our business processes, to ensure that we provide our customers



and partners with the most effective solutions and services we can," he further said.

Over the years Al Maha went from strength to strength and "we have had several key milestones, which have helped build Al Maha into what it is today", the CEO pointed out.

With over 242 filling stations, he asserted that the company not only gained an edge over its competitors in retail sales but also captured commercial sales and other allied sales including aviation fuel and lubricants.

In addition, the company also provides services such as convenience stores, auto services, smart card services and aircraft refuelling. They are committed to the environment and maintain international safety standards for sustainable operation.

"Despite the ever-changing times, our company has adapted itself to successfully steer its way through any challenges that may arise. We've come a long way and are proud of our achievements," the CEO concluded.

Al Mouj Marina partners with United Finance for boat financing

Al Mouj Marina signed an agreement with United Finance for Oman's leading finance and leasing services company to provide financing solutions for boat purchases at Al Mouj Muscat's Gold Anchor marina.

The new partnership will make the process of boat ownership easier and more straightforward. Al Mouj Marina is one of Al Mouj Muscat's prime leisure attractions and this latest initiative adds to the variety of bespoke boat ownership services already in place such as helping to find the right boat, arranging certification and insurance and providing advice and direction on general maintenance as well as water safety.

Through the new arrangement, anyone looking to buy a boat can benefit from United Finance's attractive borrowing rates and the convenience of a single point of contact in place to help streamline the process towards securing finance.

"Al Mouj Marina is a world-class amenity enjoyed by resi-



dents, visitors and tourists all year round and for boat owners and lovers of the ocean it is where life can be lived and enjoyed at its very best," said Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat.

"Al Mouj Muscat is proud of this new partnership which demonstrates our on-going commitment to providing services our community will value and is another way of opening up our marina to more people so they may embrace the opportunity to sail in crystal clear water off the shores of our beautiful country."

The agreement comes at a time when 33 more berths have

been added to the world-class harbour which can accommodate vessels of between 10 and 40 metres in length and where moorings include a number of benefits from 24-hour assistance and security to ample car parking and a boat fuelling station, changing rooms and shower facilities and an excellent on-water lounge.

United Finance was established in 1997 and commenting on the new collaboration, its CEO Nasser Salim Said al Rashdi said, "We are pleased to be working with Al Mouj Marina and as a non-banking financier, we are always looking to broaden our

offer to customers which includes making financing and loans readily available to a wider group of people and to support different types of purchases.

"It is particularly gratifying to know that through this new service we will be helping sailing enthusiasts to buy the boat they have probably always dreamed of," Rashdi added.

Al Mouj Muscat is a dynamic and diverse luxury lifestyle community, a joint venture between Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Omran and Tanmia.

It offers a superb mix of apartments, townhouses, villas and sea-facing mansions.

Trend Micro blocked over 12mn cyber threats in Oman last year

Trend Micro, a global leader in cybersecurity, announced the findings of its annual cybersecurity report, which revealed a significant 55% increase in global threat detections and a massive 242% surge in blocked malicious files in 2022.

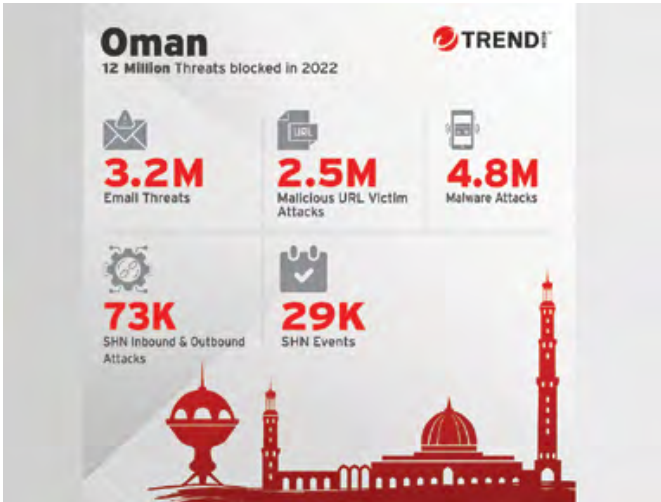
Titled 'Rethinking Tactics', the report highlights concerning trends that have significant implications for the future of digital security. It emphasised that threat actors indiscriminately targeted both consumers and organisations across all sectors,

making 2022 a challenging year for cybersecurity professionals.

In Oman, in particular, Trend Micro solutions detected and blocked over 3mn (3,284,958) email threats, prevented 2.5mn (2,524,312) malicious URL victim attacks, and 20,488 URL hosts.

In addition, close to 4.9mn (4,895,508) malware attacks were identified and stopped.

"Technology continues to rapidly evolve, presenting both opportunities and challenges for businesses. With the increasing complexity of the digital land-



scape comes a growing number of cyber threats that can compromise operations and data. To stay ahead of these risks, organizations need to take a proactive approach to cybersecurity and invest in the latest threat intelligence solutions," said Assad Arabi, Managing Director, Gulf and Emerging Markets at Trend Micro.

"By understanding their vulnerabilities and implementing a comprehensive, multi-layered security strategy, businesses can effectively mitigate risks and fu-

ture-proof their digital infrastructure. At Trend Micro, we're committed to equipping Oman-based companies with the tools and expertise they need to navigate the ever-changing cybersecurity landscape and achieve their digital transformation goals in line with Oman Vision 2040."

Furthermore, the report highlighted an increase in failed patches adding extra time and money to corporate remediation efforts and exposing organisations to unnecessary cyber risks.

Also, Webshells were the top-

detected malware of the year, surging 103% on 2021 figures, while ransomware groups rebranded and diversified, with LockBit and BlackCat being the top ransomware families of 2022. To address the current attack surface, Trend Micro advises organisations to take a proactive approach by conducting thorough assessments and securing their digital infrastructure. The company aims to support Oman's efforts and stay at the forefront of the fight against cyber threats.

OTE celebrates Oman debut of TANK 500

The Sultanate of Oman accorded a rousing welcome to a new global automotive sensation - the TANK 500 - an off-road luxury SUV from Great Wall Motor (GWM).

The launch was celebrated at a gala event organised by OTE Group, exclusive distributors of GWM's entire range of SUVs and pick-up trucks in Oman. Joining in the celebrations were leading personalities from the Omani corporate sector, existing and prospective customers, and media representatives.

OTE Group, one of Oman's biggest automotive distributors, was represented by Sheikh Salim Saad Suhail Bahwan, Director, and Prakash Vedula, Assistant General Manager - GWM Oman. In attendance from GWM GCC were Sunny Bhat, General Manager - Sales and Marketing, Alex Guo - Marketing Director, Gautam Arun - Product Director, and Victor Shen - Sales Manager.

Taking centre-stage, however, was the TANK 500 - a new premium off-road SUV making its highly anticipated entry into Oman as part of a wider rollout across the Gulf region. Developed on the TANK platform, this latest offering from GWM - China's largest SUV and pickup manufacturer - comes with impressive power, intelligent off-road capabilities, and exceptional comfort and safety.



As the flagship brand of the GWM family, the TANK 500 has benefited from comprehensive upgrades in engine, system and performance - all aimed at delivering a luxurious SUV motoring experience even amid the challenging terrains of the Middle East.

The TANK 500 is equipped with a high-performance powertrain and four-wheel drive system designed to offer unmatched stability and safety for the passengers.

A muscular 3.0L twin-turbo engine delivers 348 hp of power with 500 nm torque. Paired with a 9-speed automatic transmission system, it enables a quick

response during acceleration and overtaking.

In addition, this model offers specialized off-road configurations according to customer needs, including electronically controlled mechanical differential lock, offroad Creep Mode and so on.

These configurations can provide a more practical and safer driving experience for customers under harsh driving conditions. For example, if a tyre slips when driving over a pothole, the driver can quickly get out of trouble by using an electronically controlled button to activate the differential lock.

Imposing in stature, the TANK

500 is an extraordinary 4,886 mm long, 1,934 mm wide, and 1,905 mm tall and carries a wheelbase of 2,850 mm - stats that attest to its segment-leading presence. Both variants - Signature and Prestige - come loaded with top-notch features, including Automatic LED headlamps, LED tail lights, 20-inch alloy wheels and power-retractable side steps.

Plush materials and innovative convenience features take luxury in the TANK 500's interior to a new level. In addition to Nappa leather upholstery, the SUV features a 14.6 inch High-Definition Central Control Infotainment unit that makes

motoring a pleasure-filled experience as well. A panoramic sunroof (with the Prestige) along with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay connectivity, add to the model's luxurious interior setting.

A standout feature of the all-new TANK 500 is its all-encompassing emphasis on safety. Thus, in addition to its intelligent driving assistance system, the TANK 500 comes with an active safety system based on advanced sensors and intelligent algorithms that can monitor road conditions in real-time to provide accurate driving advice with comprehensive security.

Standard across both trims are a total of six airbags each, in

addition to a host of safety features that place the TANK 500 in a distinctive category for passenger care. The list includes: Adaptive Cruise Control, Intelligent Cruise Assist, Intelligent Turning, Lane Departure Warning, Lane Centered Keeping, Blind Spot Warning, Driver Fatigue Detection, 360-degree View, Reversing Radar, Forward Collision Warning, Automotive Emergency Brake, and Children's Safety Lock. Exclusive to the Prestige variant is an Integrated Automatic Parking Assist, Cross Traffic Alert, and Reverse Side Braking, among other features.

"OTE Group, together with Great Wall Motor, is delighted to bring this stunning new SUV to the Omani market. The TANK 500, with its intelligence features and powerful engine, is proven to deliver an exceptional performance both in urban and off-road settings," said Prakash Vedula, Assistant General Manager - GWM Oman.

"Together, with the superior levels of luxury and comfort that it offers, this superb offering from GWM will resonate well with SUV-lovers in Oman."

OTE Group is the exclusive dealer for the diverse product line-up of vehicles from GWM in the Sultanate of Oman. Backed by a nationwide service network, OTE Group offers excellent sales and after-sales service support on par with global standards.

OMPay adds option for remittance to nine countries

OMPay's digital wallet - Oman's emerging mobile payment service platform - is offering services to remit money to nine foreign countries, a release said.

OMPay has been designed to cater to the diverse demographic population of the country. The mobile app offers a wide range of convenient services for sending and receiving payments, and it has recently introduced a new feature to its portfolio: International remittance through the app, the release further stated.

This latest addition showcases OMPay's dedication to providing advanced fintech solutions that extends beyond borders.

"We are constantly evolving and enabling international remittance through the digital wallet was part of our vision. We have successfully achieved it," said Abdulaziz al Rawahi, CEO of OMPay.

The international remittance option is available in nine countries, including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Uganda. Users can choose either the cash pickup option through designated agents or have the funds directly transferred to the recipient's digital wallet or bank account, instantly.

Bank Dhofar revised offer announcement to acquire 100% of Ahli Bank shares

This is an announcement of a revised offer (the offer) to all of the shareholders (together the ABO shareholders and each an ABO shareholder) of Ahli bank SAOG (ABO) by Bank Dhofar SAOG (the offeror) acting in concert with a trust established by the offeror to acquire the entire issued share capital of ABO (the issued capital) pursuant to the takeover and acquisition regulation (E/2/2019) (the takeover regulation). This announcement is dated 05 July 2023.

The Offeror: Bank Dhofar SAOG, an Omani public joint stock company incorporated under the laws of Oman with commercial registration number 1291106 and its registered office at P.O. Box, 1507, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Muttrah, Oman.

The Trust: A joint account registered with Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC (MCD) established by shareholders of the Offeror to act in concert with the Offeror with respect to the Offer in order to pay part of the Cash Consideration in return for the registration of the relevant number of ABO shares under the Trust.

Offer Rationale: With total assets of over RO4.6bn as at 31 March 2023, the Offeror has a strong presence in corporate banking, consumer banking, treasury and project finance in Oman. The Offeror continuously evaluates avenues for accelerating its growth, advancing its customer service, attracting and developing talent, and ultimately creating better shareholder returns.

The Offeror has determined that attaining a larger scale through a combination with another bank would facilitate achieving all of these objectives. More specifically, a combination of the Offeror and ABO is a compelling opportunity to:

- Create a leading domestically-focused Omani bank with a robust competitive position, well placed to serve the entirety of the market with leading market positions across a number of customer segments;
- Combine the banks' highly complementary activities and

expertise across retail, corporate and Islamic banking for the benefit of the combined group and its customers;

- Optimise its organisation to create efficiencies and provide career development opportunities for both banks' employees;
- Provide opportunities to create value for both sets of shareholders, notably through an improvement in the combined group's cost of funds; and
- Provide enhanced liquidity for both sets of shareholders.

All in all, the proposed transaction offers an immensely attractive opportunity for shareholders of both entities to benefit from value creation with significant synergy possibilities and to participate in the long-term growth story, whilst ensuring a strong and well capitalized bank on day one.

Offer details

Consideration Shares: 1.2910 newly issued ordinary shares in Bank Dhofar (the Offeror) per ABO (the Offeree) share, valuing each ABO share at RO0.223 based on the Offeror's share price as at 8 June 2023.

Cash consideration: RO0.215 per ABO share. The Cash Consideration shall not exceed in aggregate RO215mn, being 51.3% of the value of the Issued Capital (which, based on a cash offer of 0.215 per ABO share, gives the Issued Capital an implied value of RO420mn) (the Cash Cap).

Choice of consideration: Any ABO Shareholder has the option to elect to receive either:

- 100% of its consideration as Consideration Shares; or
- 100% of its consideration as Cash Consideration, subject to the Cash Cap.

The Cash Cap shall be applied in the following order of priority and on a pari passu basis:

- Firstly, to any ABO Shareholder who as at the date of this Offer announcement (i) is a Sharia compliant juristic shareholder or is a subsidiary of a Sharia compliant juristic shareholder; and (ii) holds a valid Sharia investment licence (the Cash Acceptance Qualification), to reflect its (or its



parent shareholder's, as the case may be) de jure inability to receive shares in a conventional bank; and

- Secondly, to any other ABO Shareholder who elects to receive 100% Cash Consideration and in the event such ABO Shareholders elect to receive an amount of Cash Consideration which, when aggregated with the amount of Cash Consideration elected to be received by any ABO Shareholder who meets the Cash Acceptance Qualification exceeds the Cash Cap, the rest of the consideration for their shares in ABO will be paid in the form of Consideration Shares on a pro rata basis in accordance with the percentage of shares they hold in the Issued Capital.

Mechanism to fund the cash consideration: Any Cash Consideration due to any ABO Shareholder shall be funded by the Offeror and/or the Trust from internal liquidity and capital sources.

Other details

Voting shares in ABO already held by the Offeror and the Trust:

The Offeror and the Trust, respectively, hold no voting shares in ABO as of date of this Offer.

Existing or proposed arrangements between the Offeror and the ABO Shareholders: The Offeror and certain major ABO Shareholders (representing over 74% of the shares in ABO) have reached an understanding on their response to the Offer and relating to their voting requirements, through either share purchase agreements, shareholder undertaking letters, or letters of support (as the case may be) prior to the date of this Offer.

Acceptance of offer - terms, conditions, & procedure

Notice Procedure: Only an electronic copy of this announcement and the Offer document will be shared with ABO Shareholders based on MCD data and will be available on the Offeror's and the CMA's websites.

Acceptance Form: The acceptance form to be used by ABO Shareholders to submit their acceptance to the Offer pursuant to the terms of the

Offer document will be sent to each ABO Shareholder by the MCD. The acceptance form will also be available on the Offeror's and the CMA's websites.

Procedure for acceptance of offer by ABO Shareholders:

1. In order to accept the Offer, the ABO Shareholders are required to send the Acceptance Form duly completed, signed and:
 - Delivered to the Offer Manager at the address below: Attn: Parag Mathur Investment Banking P.O. Box, 1507, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Muttrah, Oman +968 2265 2199 or alternatively,
 - emailed to the Offer Manager at p.mathur@bankdhofar.com or f.allawati@bankdhofar.com on or before 2pm on the offer closing date. Please ensure that the Acceptance Form clearly specifies the ABO Shareholder's choice of one of the following consideration options: (i) 100% Consideration Shares or (ii) 100% Cash Consideration and attach the requisite documents (as set out below).
2. The Offer will remain open for

acceptance for a period to be agreed with the CMA pursuant to the Takeover Regulation, during business hours i.e. 8am-2pm. Acceptances received after working hours on the Offer Closing Date shall not be entertained.

Required Documents:

1. Acceptance Form furnished by the ABO Shareholder(s) without the requisite documents may be rejected by the Offer Manager as being incomplete and invalid.
2. Acceptance Form must be accompanied by the following documents:
 - For Individual Applicants:**
 - A copy of Omani ID for Omani national ABO Shareholders and passport copy for non-Omani national ABO Shareholders.
 - Birth certificate of the minor ABO Shareholder, if father is accepting on behalf of his minor children.
 - A copy of valid power of attorney duly endorsed by the competent legal authorities must be included in the event the acceptance is on behalf of another person (with the exception of an acceptance made by a father on behalf of his minor children).
 - For Corporate Applicants:**
 - A copy of a board or shareholder resolution authorising persons to accept the Offer with specimen signatures of such authorised persons; and
 - If relevant, a certified copy of the valid Sharia investment licence of the ABO Shareholder or its parent company (as the case may be).

Acceptance by the Offeror: The acceptance by the Offeror and the Trust of the ABO shares tendered by the ABO Shareholders and settlement is subject to the following conditions:

- Unless elected otherwise by the Offeror and the Trust, the Offer receiving the minimum threshold acceptance (75% of the Issued Capital).
- Receipt of approval of an extraordinary general meeting of the Offeror.

- Receipt of approval of the final Offer result from the CMA and CBO.
- The settlement for the tendered ABO shares not contravening any applicable laws and regulations.
- The letter/form of acceptance being duly and validly completed along with the required documents and submitted to the Offer Manager on or before the Offer Closing Date.
- The person accepting the Offer being a valid ABO Shareholder.
- The Offeror and the Trust not withdrawing the Offer in accordance with the provisions of the Takeover Regulation.

Payment of Cash Consideration to ABO Shareholders: The Offer Manager will notify the eligible ABO Shareholders regarding acceptance of the Offer and arrange to make payment by bank draft/pay order/cheque/bank transfer in favour of the ABO Shareholder within 10 (ten) days of the Offer Closing Date net of Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX)/MCD fees or charges, as applicable.

No interest, mark-up, surcharge, tax or other increment will be payable for any cause or reason on the aggregate price for the ABO shares purchased by the Offeror or the Trust from any ABO Shareholder for any cause or reason.

Issue of Consideration Shares to ABO Shareholders: The Offer Manager will notify the eligible ABO Shareholders regarding acceptance of the Offer and the Offeror will arrange to issue the relevant number of shares and the MCD will register such shares to securities accounts of the respective ABO Shareholders, within 14 (fourteen) days of the Offer Closing Date net of MSX/MCD fees or charges, as applicable.

No interest, mark-up, surcharge, tax or other increment will be payable for any cause or reason on the aggregate price for the ABO shares purchased by the Offeror or the Trust from any ABO Shareholder for any cause or reason.

UN warns Sudan faces ‘full-scale civil war’ as air strike kills 22

Wad Madani, Sudan - Conflict-torn Sudan is on the brink of a ‘full-scale civil war’ that could destabilise the entire region, the United Nations warned on Sunday, after an air strike on a residential area killed around two dozen civilians.

The Ministry of Health reported ‘22 dead and a large number of wounded among the civilians’ from what it described as an air strike on Saturday on Khartoum’s sister city Omdurman, in the district of Dar al-Salam, which means ‘House of Peace’ in Arabic.

After nearly three months of war between Sudan’s rival generals, the air strike is the latest incident to provoke outrage.

Around 3,000 people have been killed in the conflict, survivors have reported a wave of sexual violence and witnesses have spoken of ethnically targeted killings. There has been widespread looting, and the UN warned of possible crimes against humanity in the Darfur region. A video posted by the health ministry on Facebook showed apparently dismembered bodies lying partly covered on the ground after the air strike. Several women were among the victims.

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), fighting the regular army, claimed that the ‘air strikes’ killed 31.

Residents contacted by AFP also confirmed an air strike but on Sunday, the armed forces released a statement ‘clarifying that the air force did not deal with any hostile targets in Om-



Displaced children who fled the ongoing violence by two rival Sudanese generals, rest on a bed in the courtyard of the university of al-Jazira, transformed into a makeshift shelter, in al-Hasaheisa south of Khartoum on Saturday (AFP)

durman yesterday’.

Since the war began, paramilitaries have established bases in residential areas, and they have been accused of forcing civilians from their homes.

Witnesses reported more air strikes near the presidential palace in central Khartoum on Sunday, as well as machine gun clashes and artillery fire in the city’s south.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Sunday condemned the air strike in Omdurman, which he said ‘reportedly killed at least 22 people’ and wounded dozens, his deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said in a statement.

Guterres ‘remains deeply con-

cerned that the ongoing war between the armed forces has pushed Sudan to the brink of a full-scale civil war, potentially destabilising the entire region’, Haq said.

‘Dangerous and disturbing’

Sudan, in northeast Africa, borders other impoverished countries which have a history of unrest.

Nearly three million people have been uprooted by Sudan’s fighting, among them almost 700,000 who have fled to neighbouring countries, according to the International Organization for Migration.

The UN and African blocs

have warned of an ‘ethnic dimension’ to the conflict in the western region of Darfur, where the United States, Norway and Britain have blamed the RSF and allied militia for most of the widespread violations.

Concentrated in Darfur and the capital Khartoum, fighting has also been reported in Blue Nile state near Ethiopia, as well as in South Kordofan state.

Overnight on Saturday-Sunday residents in El-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan and a commercial hub south of Khartoum, reported renewed fighting in their area.

“There is an utter disregard for humanitarian and human rights law that is dangerous and

Antonio Guterres (the UN chief) remains deeply concerned that the ongoing war between the armed forces has pushed Sudan to the brink of a full-scale civil war, potentially destabilising the entire region

FARHAN HAQ

disturbing,” said Haq, expressing support for efforts by the African Union and East African bloc IGAD to end Sudan’s crisis.

On Monday leaders of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan - IGAD members handling the Sudan file - are to meet in Addis Ababa.

Sudan’s army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo have been invited but neither side has confirmed they will attend.

Several Sudanese civilian figures are already there, however, ‘in order to accelerate peace efforts’, said Khalid Omer Yousif, who was fired from the government in 2021 when Daglo and Burhan led a coup, before their falling out.

Numerous ceasefires in the war have been announced and ignored.

AFP



Demonstrators wave Israeli flags and stand by smoke flares to block a highway during a protest in Tel Aviv on Saturday (AFP)

Israel protesters mobilise ahead of reforms vote

Tel Aviv, Israel - Tens of thousands of Israeli protesters packed Tel Aviv and other cities on Saturday to demonstrate against proposed legal reforms they say could mean more authoritarian government.

Demonstrators have kept up the pressure with weekly rallies against the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who returned to power in December at the head of a coalition with ultra-Orthodox Jewish and extreme-right allies.

Israeli media estimated turnout at Saturday’s protest in Tel Aviv - the 27th since the reform agenda was unveiled in January - at 150,000, ahead of a vote on Monday in parliament on a key provision of the proposed overhaul.

Police do not give the number of demonstrators.

“We must act against what the Netanyahu government is doing to our country and to the Israeli dream,” historian Yuval Noah Harari told the rally.

“If the Netanyahu government does not stop, it will soon learn what happens when we get angry,” he said.

Police used water cannon to disperse some 100 demonstrators who blocked a main highway in the coastal city, an AFP journalist said.

The government argues the judicial reform, which would give politicians more power over the courts, is necessary to ensure a better balance of power.

After unsuccessful talks with the opposition following Netanyahu’s late March announcement of a ‘pause’ to allow for negotiations, the government is taking the offensive once again this week.

Monday will see the first reading of a bill aimed at excluding the judiciary’s right to rule on the ‘reasonableness’ of government decisions.

One of its potential effects would be on the appointment of ministers.

AFP

BULL-RUN IN PAMPLONA



Participants run ahead of bulls during the ‘encierro’ (bull-run) of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, northern Spain, on Sunday. Thousands of people every year attend the week-long festival and its famous ‘encierros’, in which six bulls are released at 8am every day to run through the narrow streets of the old town (AFP)

Thai PM frontrunner rallies supporters ahead of July 13 parliamentary vote

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand’s progressive frontrunner for prime minister told supporters on Sunday he would ‘not step back’ ahead of a parliamentary vote this week that will determine if he will lead the country.

Pita Limjaroenrat’s pro-democracy Move Forward Party (MFP) netted the most seats at the May 14 election but there are no guarantees it will be able to form government or that he will become the premier.

MFP’s eight-party coalition has a total of 312 lower house seats but remains short of the 376 votes needed across both houses of parliament to endorse



Move Forward Party leader Pita Limjaroenrat (AFP)

Pita for the top job.

He faces resistance from the military-appointed, 250-member Senate, due to his party’s

controversial push to reform Thailand’s royal defamation laws, as well as plans to shake up business monopolies.

Meanwhile, outside parliament, he is being investigated over claims he was ineligible to run for office since he allegedly owned shares in a now-defunct media company. Legislators are not allowed to own media shares. Pita said the kingdom faces a momentous day this week when both the upper and lower houses will vote.

“If you do not step back, I won’t,” he told hundreds of supporters gathered in the rain in central Bangkok.

“If we make the right decision and give Thailand a chance, our country will develop,” he told the crowd.

But if the decision was wrong, he said Thailand’s cycle of poor democracy would continue.

“I don’t know how long we will have to wait before the golden chance of 13 July will come again,” he added, referring to the date of the vote.

Pita urged senators to remember ‘we’re all the people’s politicians’. “My thanks to those that say they’re on the people’s side and siding with the people’s majority,” he said.

AFP

France: Man injured in arrest during memorial rally

Paris, France - A man arrested in Paris during a memorial rally for his brother, who had died in police custody seven years ago, has been released from hospital on Sunday, amid calls for more protests.

The calls came with France still on edge after the police killing of a teen near Paris sparked the worst rioting in the country since 2005.

Youssef Traore, 29, was detained by police on Saturday amid protests across the country that commemorated the death of his brother Adama Traore in 2016, many of them in defiance of police bans on gatherings.

According to a police source, Youssef Traore was injured in the eye during his arrest at the Paris protest attended by some 2,000 people, and was taken to hospital after becoming sick at the police station.

Youssef Traore appeared



Youssef Traore gestures as he arrives to take back his belongings at a police station, after leaving the hospital, in Paris on Sunday (AFP)

with a swollen right eye and torn T-shirt sleeve in a video posted on Twitter on Sunday, which has been verified by AFP, by the account ‘Truth for Adama’.

According to the account, he suffered a fractured nose, head trauma with a black eye, and contusions to his chest, abdomen and lumbar.

The account’s managers said a complaint will be lodged ‘to denounce this serious violence’.

Youssef Traore was arrested on charges of violence against a public official, having been accused of hitting a police officer at the start of the rally at Place de la Republique, according to a source close to the case.

The charges had been lifted due to his hospitalisation, the Paris prosecutor’s office said, but could be reinstated later.

Pent-up frustrations

The forceful arrest, filmed by several witnesses, showed him resisting and being tackled and held face down by several police officers, provoking condemnation by several left-wing politicians on social media.

A joint statement by left-leaning associations, unions and political parties had called for a rally on Sunday afternoon in front of a

central Paris police station to demand that he and another person detained with him be released. At least 20 people including two lawmakers were seen by AFP journalists outside the station, which was protected by eight officers, around 2pm (12:00 GMT).

France has been on edge since a police officer shot dead Nahel M, a 17-year-old with Algerian roots, during a traffic stop on June 27 in a Paris suburb.

The shooting rekindled long pent-up frustrations and accusations of systemic racism among France’s security forces and sparked nights of rioting, the worst urban unrest in the country since 2005. More than 3,700 people were taken into police custody in connection with the protests since Nahel’s death, including at least 1,160 minors, according to official figures.

AFP

N Korea slams IAEA for Fukushima water approval

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea on Sunday slammed the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog for approving Japan’s plan to discharge treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant.

The International Atomic Energy Agency approved Tokyo’s plan to release treated water from the tsunami-hit nuclear plant into the sea over the next few decades.

The plan has raised concerns in neighbouring countries, prompting China to ban some food imports and sparking protests in South Korea.

The release of the treated water will have a ‘fatal adverse impact on the human lives and security and ecological environment’, an official from Pyongyang’s environmental protection ministry said in a

statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

“What matters is the unreasonable behaviour of IAEA actively patronising and facilitating Japan’s projected discharge of nuclear-polluted water, which is unimaginable,” the statement added.

Some 1.33mn cubic metres of groundwater, rainwater and water used for cooling have accumulated at the Fukushima nuclear plant, where several reactors went into meltdown after the 2011 tsunami overwhelmed cooling systems.

The plant operator treats the water to remove almost all radioactive elements except tritium, and plans to dilute it before discharging it into the ocean over several decades.

AFP

‘Stronger together’: Polish leader Duda visits Ukraine ahead of NATO summit

Kyiv is hoping to get a clear signal that it could one day join the alliance at the summit

Kyiv, Ukraine - Poland's president emphasised the need for unity with Ukraine on Sunday as he visited the country ahead of a NATO summit where Kyiv is hoping to get a clear signal that it could one day join the alliance.

"We are stronger together," President Andrzej Duda said on social media, as he visited the western city of Lutsk with Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky.

Poland is one of Ukraine's biggest supporters within NATO and has said it wants 'security guarantees' for the country from other NATO members.

Zelensky returned from Turkey on Saturday after a regional tour to drum up support ahead of the summit with Western allies, who have pledged billions in military aid. Zelensky was accompanied by five top commanders from the Azov regiment



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (left) speaks with Poland's President Andrzej Duda in Lutsk on Sunday (AFP)

who were supposed to have remained in Turkey until the end of the conflict under a prisoner exchange deal with Moscow.

Their return to Ukraine angered the Kremlin, with spokesman Dmitry Peskov quoted by Russian news agencies on Saturday as saying that it was 'a direct violation' of the agreement with Turkey. One of the men, Denis Prokopenko, was

quoted by Interfax Ukraine news agency as saying that he would return to the front.

"That is why we have come back to Ukraine. It is our main aim," said Prokopenko, who along with the others had been living in Turkey since September.

Peskov said the return was linked to the 'failure' of Ukraine's counteroffensive, and Ankara's desire to show 'solidarity' ahead

of the NATO summit in Lithuania. "Preparations for the NATO summit are underway and of course there has been a lot of pressure on Turkey," he said.

Biden headed to NATO summit

US President Joe Biden is expected in Vilnius on Monday along with other NATO leaders for talks on Tuesday and

Wednesday.

Zelensky has said he does not expect Ukraine to actually join NATO until after the war but he hopes the summit will give a 'clear signal' on the intention to bring Ukraine into the alliance.

The Ukrainian leader hailed Ukraine as 'the country of the brave' in a video clip released on social media on Saturday, the 500th day of the war.

The video showed him visiting Snake Island in the Black Sea - a symbol of Ukraine's defiance against Russia. The island was captured by Russian forces after the start of the invasion.

A radio exchange went viral in which Ukrainian soldiers told the crew of Russia's attacking warship demanding their surrender to go away, using a swearword.

The Ukrainian soldiers were taken prisoner but later exchanged for Russian captives and the island was recaptured by Ukrainian forces in June last year.

Danger 'for many years'

Zelensky on Friday secured Turkey's backing for Ukraine's NATO aspirations after winning a US pledge for cluster munitions that could inflict significant damage to Russian forces.

Washington's decision to supply Ukraine with cluster bombs - banned across a large part of the world - dramatically ups the stakes in the war.

Biden admitted that it had been 'a difficult decision', while humanitarian groups strongly condemned it.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, whose country still grapples with deadly war remnants, on Sunday urged Ukraine not to use cluster bombs.

"It would be the greatest danger for Ukrainians for many years or up to a hundred years if cluster bombs are used in Russian-occupied areas in the territory of Ukraine," Hun Sen tweeted.

He cited Cambodia's 'painful experience' of US cluster munitions dropped in the early 1970s, a foreign legacy that has left tens of thousands maimed or killed.

Russia, which itself uses cluster munitions in Ukraine, said the decision was an 'act of desperation' that would have 'no effect' on the conflict.

Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Sunday urged NATO leaders instead to discuss the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station in southern Ukraine.

Kyiv and Moscow have accused each other of planning a provocation at the site, raising alarm over the risk of a disaster at Europe's largest nuclear plant.

"The NATO summit should have focused on this topic. After all, the vast majority of Alliance members would be in the direct contamination zone," Zakharova said on social media.

The plant is held by Russian forces, who accuse Ukraine of regularly shelling the site. Kyiv has accused Moscow of rigging up the site with explosives.

AFP

Pope says will create new cardinals

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis said on Sunday he would create 21 new cardinals from across the world at the end of September.

"Their provenance expresses the universality of the Church that continues to proclaim God's merciful love to all people on earth," said the pope, following his weekly Sunday Angelus prayer from the window of the Apostolic Palace on Saint Peter's Square. The consistory will be the ninth for the creation of cardinals under Pope Francis, who is in the tenth year of his papacy.

His choices are closely watched as an indication of the future direction of the Catholic Church and its priorities for its 1.3bn faithful. Cardinals under the age of 80 will participate in the vote to nominate the successor to Francis.

Since becoming pope, Francis



Pope Francis waves as he addresses the crowd from the window of the apostolic palace at the Vatican on Sunday (AFP)

has sought to promote clergy from developing nations far from Rome to the highest ranks of the Church, as part of his general philosophy of diversity and inclusion. The names Francis announced on Sunday include clergy in regions where Christi-

anity is growing, such as Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Among the archbishops to become cardinals are those of Juba, South Sudan, Cape Town, South Africa, and Tabora, Tanzania. The list also includes bishops from Penang, Malaysia, and

Hong Kong.

Also to become cardinal is the Italian Claudio Gugerotti, currently prefect for the Dicastery of the Eastern Churches, and Argentina's Victor Manuel Fernandez, whom Francis chose in July to head of the powerful Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Included from Latin America is the emeritus archbishop of Cumana, Venezuela, and a Capuchin priest from Buenos Aires.

The last consistory was held in August 2022, when Francis inducted 20 cardinals.

As of last year's consistory, Francis had chosen around 90 out of the 132 cardinals eligible to elect a new pope, around two-thirds of the total.

Cardinals, who wear the scarlet robes of their office, serve as the pope's top advisors and administrators.

AFP

Toll rises to 14 in Brazil building collapse

Rio De Janeiro, Brazil - Fourteen people have died in the partial collapse of an illegally occupied building in northeastern Brazil, the authorities said on Saturday, as they concluded a search for survivors.

Earlier, a toll of 11 dead was announced, but firefighters searching through the debris later found the bodies of a woman and two children following the collapse on Friday in Paulista, a city in the state of Pernambuco.

The dead included men, women and children, aged five to 45, according to a statement on Saturday from the Pernambuco civil defense services.

Three people - a 65-year-old woman and two adolescents - were rescued.

The authorities provided no information on their condition. The three-story structure, which was attached to a larger housing complex, had been closed in



Rescue teams search for victims in the rubble of a collapsed building in Brazil's northeastern state of Pernambuco, on Friday (AFP)

2010 due to a risk of collapse but had been illegally occupied since then, the authorities said.

In April, a building in similar condition collapsed in the city of Olinda, also in Pernambuco, leaving six people dead.

Building collapses in Brazil generally happen in poorer

neighbourhoods where illegal construction is rampant.

In 2020, two irregularly constructed buildings in a poor neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro collapsed after days of intense rainfall.

Twenty-four people died.

AFP

Reporter for Mexican newspaper found slain

Mexico City, Mexico - A regional correspondent for leading Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* was found slain on Saturday, shortly after he went missing in the western state of Nayarit, prosecutors said.

Luis Martin Sanchez Iniguez is one of three active or former journalists to have been abducted in the state in recent days, the prosecutors' office said in a statement, adding to Mexico's surging attacks on the press that are often linked to the country's powerful drug cartels.

His body turned up in a village near the state capital Tepic 'with signs of violence' and two cardboard messages pinned to his chest, the office added. The statement did not indicate the content of the scrawled cardboard messages left on Sanchez's body by his abductors, a common tactic used by organised crime in Mexico to sow terror.

On Friday, armed and hooded men also broke into the home of teacher Osiris Maldonado de la Paz, who had previously worked for digital media, in the town of Xalisco and he remains missing, prosecutors said.

A third missing journalist was later found alive.

In all three cases, attacks were 'related to their journalistic work', prosecutors said.

Sanchez, 59, is the first active journalist to be killed in 2023 in Mexico, one of the most dangerous nations in the world for members of the news media.

Early indications suggest Sanchez was slain between 24 and 48 hours before his body was discovered in the village of El Ahuacate, prosecutors said.

His wife, Cecilia Lopez, told investigators she had been unaware of his whereabouts since Wednesday night.

AFP

Gabon President Ali Bongo says will run for third term

Libreville, Gabon - Gabon's President Ali Bongo Ondimba said on Sunday that he would seek a third term as the oil-rich African nation's head of state.

The Bongo family has ruled the country for 55 years already and is branded a "dynastic power" by the opposition after Bongo, 64, took over from his father, Omar Bongo Ondimba in 2009.

"I officially announce today that I am a candidate," he told a crowd of supporters in a speech broadcast live on his Facebook page.

Presidential elections will be held on August 26.

His powerful Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) holds strong majorities in both houses of parliament.

The president was narrowly re-elected in 2016, with just 5,500 more votes than rival Jean Ping who claimed the elec-



File picture of Gabon's President Ali Bongo (AFP)

tion had been fixed.

Announcement of the results sparked violence in the capital Libreville that killed four civilians and a policeman, according to the government, while the opposition says 30 people were

shot dead by the security forces.

Bongo suffered a stroke in 2018 and spent months on the sidelines recovering, leaving the opposition to question his fitness to run the nation.

He still has a stiff arm and leg

and has mobility difficulties, but in recent months has held "republican meetings" around the country and made official visits abroad, including for summits.

Opposition disunity

The failure of the opposition to agree on a single candidate for the presidential election left some 15 candidates to announce their intentions to stand.

Former minister Paulette Missambo, head of the National Union party, has said she will run, as has Alexandre Barro Chambrier, who served as a minister to the current president and his father.

The official closing date for candidates to announce their intention to run is Tuesday.

In April, the Gabonese parliament voted to amend the constitution and reduce the president's term from seven to five years.

Sections of the opposition criticised the changes, in particular the end of two rounds of voting, as a means of "facilitating the re-election" of Bongo.

The presidential ballot will coincide with elections for the National Assembly and regional and municipal councils, with July 11 set as the deadline for filing candidacies.

Gabon is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of per capita GDP due largely to its oil revenue and relatively small population of 2.3 million.

Crude represents 38.5 percent of its GDP, and 70.5 percent of its export revenues.

Other areas of activity are manganese mining and forestry, but efforts to diversify the economy remain in low gear.

A third of the population live below the poverty threshold, according to the World Bank.

AFP

Murder of Sikh leader sparks dueling protests in Toronto

Toronto, Canada - A few hundred members of Canada's Sikh community demonstrated outside the Indian consulate in Toronto on Saturday to protest the unsolved murder of one of their leaders last month in the Vancouver area.

They accused the Indian government of being responsible for the gunning down of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, president of a Sikh temple and campaigner for the creation of an independent Sikh state that supporters hope to call Khalistan.

"When an Indian agency and system commit a crime, they have to be held accountable," Kuljeet Singh, spokesperson for Sikhs for Justice, a US-based organization behind the rally, told AFP. Nijjar, whom India had declared a wanted terrorist, was gunned down on June 18 in Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver that is home to one of the largest Sikh populations in Canada.

Another protestor, Hakirt Singh, a lawyer, told AFP that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) 'should investigate this murder' as a political assassination. "When there is vandalism



Sikhs protest for the independence of Khalistan in front of the Indian Consulate in Toronto, Canada, on Saturday (AFP)

against a member of Parliament you see tweets and reactions from politicians. Here it is an assassination of a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil. That is foreign interference."

Nijjar advocated for the creation of an independent Sikh state to be carved out of parts of northern India and perhaps part of Pakistan. India accused Nijjar of carrying out terrorist attacks in India, a charge he denied.

The demonstrators, almost exclusively men, carried yellow flags with blue logos representing their separatist movement, and shouted 'Khalistan! Khalistan!' Setting off from the Toronto suburbs, they arrived in front of the Indian consulate, where they were greeted by around 50 members of the diaspora in support of the Indian government.

"They have a poster here calling to kill Indian diplomats. We are concerned because these groups have committed terrorist acts in the past and politicians are not taking actions," one of the counterdemonstrators, Vijay Jain, an IT consultant, told AFP.

A line of 20 policemen intervened to separate the two groups, and one Sikh protester was taken away after forcing down a barrier and running to the other side. Since the murder of the Sikh leader, tensions have risen between Canada and India.

New Delhi regularly accuses Ottawa of laxity in its handling of Sikh protesters in Canada.

"We have asked the Canadian government to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of our diplomats," Arindam Bagchi, spokesman for India's foreign minister, said on Thursday.

AFP



Passersby and gunmen gather around a body at the site of a reported drone strike in Bzaah town in Syria's Aleppo governorate on Friday (AFP)

US raid in Syria kills IS leader: Centcom

Beirut, Lebanon - A US drone strike has killed an Islamic State group leader in Syria after Russian warplanes harassed MQ-9 drones over the war-torn country, the US Central Command said on Sunday.

The strike on Friday resulted in the death of Osama al-Muhajer, IS leader in eastern Syria, Centcom said in a statement.

"We have made it clear that we remain committed to the defeat of ISIS throughout the region," Centcom chief General Michael Kurilla was quoted as saying, using another acronym for the IS militant group.

"ISIS remains a threat, not only to the region but well beyond," he added.

According to Centcom, no civilians were killed in the operation but coalition forces are 'assessing reports of a civilian injury'.

Friday's strike, Centcom said, 'was conducted by the same MQ-9s (drones) that had... been harassed by Russian aircraft in an encounter that had lasted almost two hours'.

US drones taking part in operations against IS in Syria were harassed on Thursday, for the second time in 24 hours, by Russian military aircraft, a US commander said at the time.

Air Force Lieutenant General Alexis Grynkeiwich said the planes 'dropped flares in front of the drones and flew dangerously close, endangering the safety of all aircraft involved'.

In another incident on Wednesday, three Russian jets dropped parachute flares in front of US drones, forcing them to take evasive action, Grynkeiwich has said, calling on Moscow to 'cease this reckless behaviour'.

Russia is a key ally of the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. With the support of Moscow as well as Iran, Assad has clawed back much of the ground lost in the early stages of the Syrian conflict that erupted in 2011 when the government brutally repressed pro-democracy protests.

The last pockets of armed opposition to the regime include large swathes of the northern rebel-held Idlib province.

AFP

At least 15 people dead in monsoon floods in India

New Delhi, India - At least 15 people were killed in floods and landslides triggered by monsoon rains that battered northern India, with New Delhi receiving the most rainfall in decades, reports and officials said on Sunday.

Roads in several parts of the capital were submerged in knee-deep water as it was inundated with 153mm of rain, the highest precipitation in a single day in July in 40 years.

With at least another day of heavy rain forecast, authorities have ordered schools shut in New Delhi on Monday.

The Press Trust of India news agency reported on Sunday that 15 people had been killed in the past 24 hours in six northern Indian states.

Hill states were the worst affected, leaving six dead in Himachal Pradesh alone where landslides blocked about 700 roads, Omkar Sharma, a disaster management official told AFP.



A commuter drives his car through a flooded road after heavy monsoon rains in Gurgaon on Sunday (AFP)

Hill states were the worst affected, leaving six dead in Himachal Pradesh alone where landslides blocked about 700 roads, according to Omkar Sharma, a disaster management official

entists say climate change is making the monsoon stronger and more erratic.

New Delhi recorded 153mm of rain in 24 hours ending 8.30am on Sunday, the highest in a single day in July since 1982, the IMD has said.

According to the IMD, New Delhi's Safdarjung recorded the third highest 24-hour rainfall (for the month of July) on 8th and 9th of July, since 1958.

In 1958, Safdarjung Observatory had recorded 266.2mm of rain during the July 20-21 period while in 1982, it logged 169.9mm during the July 25-26 period, the IMD said.

Moderate to heavy rain continued to lash several parts of the city and its adjoining areas on early on Sunday morning with the IMD predicting high-intensity showers over the national capital for the next two days.

Amid the heavy rains in different parts of the country, the IMD on Sunday predicted that rainfall activity will continue over north-west India, 'but the intensity of showers may differ'.

Dr Charan Singh, Head of the Regional Meteorology Center, New Delhi said: "The intensity of rain that was yesterday will be the same in the mountains today, although the intensity of rainfall will decrease in plains from today. Yet there are chances of heavy rainfall."

"If I speak about Delhi NCR (national capital region), there are chances of heavy rainfall at one or two locations. The region will not be witnessing heavy rainfall for the next four to five days. Though rain will continue to occur intermittently, the intensity will be less," Singh said.

He further said that in north-west India, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand will witness extremely heavy rainfall for the next two days.

In view of incessant rains in the national capital, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday spoke to Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and took updates.

The heavy downpour that lashed several parts of the national capital and its adjoining areas slowed down the traffic movement after waterlogging in several parts of the city.

Pictures and videos of commuters wading through knee-deep water flooded social media platforms, raising concerns about the efficiency of the city's drainage infrastructure.

AGENCIES

Ukrainian partygoers help clear away ruins of war

Yagidne, Ukraine - To the sound of club beats, hundreds of young Ukrainians swarmed over the ruins of bombed-out homes in several villages in the north of the country this weekend.

The gathering in the Chernigiv region was no ordinary party but part of an initiative for volunteers to help clear away debris and rebuild their country. "This is an example of how young people can be useful, while not compromising the way we like to spend our time listening to music," said Dmytro Trofymenko, a DJ.

"We're cleaning up the consequences of Russian occupation," said the moustachioed 31-year-old as volunteers dressed to party formed a human chain to carry away bricks from a ruined building.

The initiative called Repair Together started last year and has been active in different parts of Chernigiv that were either under Russian control or on the front line for several weeks.

"We communicate with the local authorities. They give us a list of buildings and addresses that need to be dismantled," said Bogdan Bieliaiev, 29, one of the organisers.

Professional builders then get to work once the debris has been cleared away.

There are regular outings in the summer and most of the volunteers come from the capital Kyiv or the surrounding region.

Beliaiev estimated up to 350 people were taking part in this weekend's gathering and the average age was around 25.

"Most of them want to help. They don't want to be at home," he said.

Oleksandra Horgan, a 28-year-old agriculture expert wearing sunglasses and a leopard-print kerchief on her head, said she was 'inspired by patriotism'.



People dance around the fire during the Kupala night celebrations near Yagidne village, Chernihiv region, on Saturday after volunteering to clear debris from destroyed buildings in the region (AFP)

"Unfortunately, my hometown is currently occupied. I cannot physically help them, only financially. I feel like somehow, this way, I'm making up for it," she said.

Yaryna Kvasnii, 21, said: "Sometimes you want to help people with your hands.

"Plus it benefits the community. They don't need to hire anyone, just proactive young people who will do it for free."

After a hard day's work, the volunteers took time to relax, joining in celebrations for the folk tradition of Kupala Night - usually held on the day of the summer solstice.

The volunteers stripped down and took a dip in a nearby lake, some of them wearing embroidered linen shirts and elaborate crowns made of flowers.

Later, they danced around a fire.

Anna Pendyukh, a 30-year-old graphic designer, said the gatherings were a way of getting rid of 'a lot of negativity'.

AFP

Sri Lanka: Amnesty offered for return of stolen artifacts

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka offered an amnesty on Sunday for the return of historical treasures looted when protesters stormed the presidential palace a year ago, forcing then-leader Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee.

Months of protests over Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis since gaining independence from Britain in 1948 culminated in thousands of people breaking into the palace on July 9, 2022.

"Various valuable artifacts and archaeological items went missing, including coats of arms associated with former governors and presidents of Sri Lanka," the office of Rajapaksa's successor Ranil Wickremesinghe said in a statement, announcing a month-long amnesty to surrender the items.

The artefacts were stolen from the palace in the heart of

the capital Colombo - a symbol of state authority for over 2000 years - during its five-day occupation.

Officials released photos of five coats of arms, including one of Jorge de Albuquerque, the seventh Portuguese governor appointed in 1622 to administer the island.

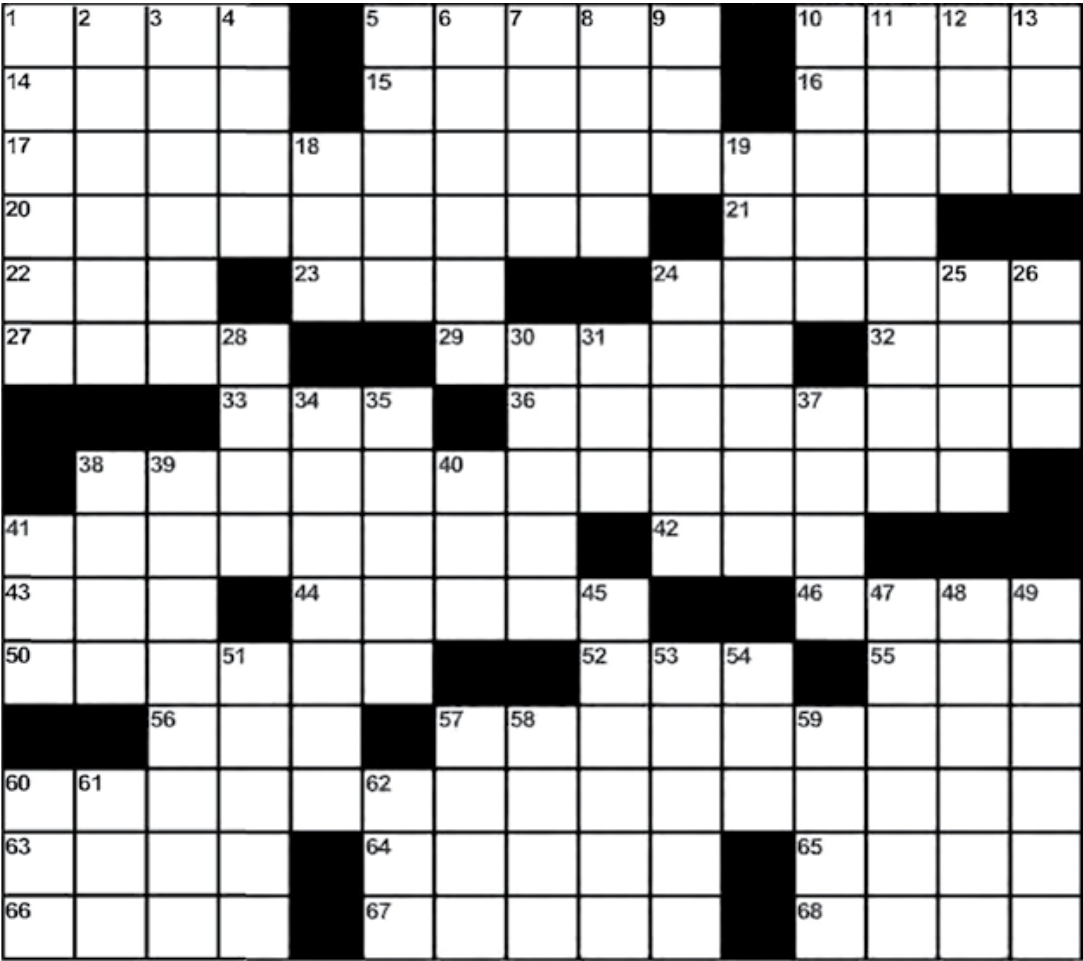
Other coats of arms belonged to governors during British colonial rule in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Soon after protesters overran the palace, social media posts showed them frolicking in the presidential pool and bouncing on four-poster beds.

As Rajapaksa escaped through a back entrance, security forces stepped back while crowds took selfies in front of valuable artefacts. Rajapaksa was blamed by protesters for corruption and mismanaging the nation's finances.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1) Make something close?

41) Hall-of-Fame pitcher Pedro

5) Judges' wear

42) Cape in Massachusetts

10) Bouquet vessel

43) Street address abbr.

14) Conservative in Britain

44) Internal Revenue Service, 15) NBA setting e.g.

16) Clickable item on a monitor

46) Divisions of history

17) "Purple Haze" or 50) Expensive pleasure crafts

"Satisfaction"

52) Put into practice

20) New Testament book

55) One of the Gabors

21) Bettor's marker

56) Ballerina's prop

22) One attending Yale

57) Denies or renounces

23) Tire pressure fig.

60) Some daring circus

24) Politically correct suffix performers

27) Space-age drink?

63) Cornstalk units

29) Water nymph of myth

64) Stand near a painter?

32) Bit of body art, slangily

65) "What...can I do?"

33) Alcohol chaser?

66) Emerald Isle language

36) Single great stone, such as

67) Dermatologists' subjects, an obelisk sometimes

38) Simple kid's meal

68) One way to enjoy the snow

DOWN

1) It's curbed

2) Fanfare, informally

3) Mischievous waif

4) Little nipper

5) Indian queens

6) Appoint

7) Swiss canton

8) Adam's grandson

9) "Do the Right Thing" role

10) Baseball-cap feature

11) Kind of guitar

12) "Favorite" relative

13) Chang's twin

18) It has a nasty bite to it

19) Canine command

24) Bamboo eater

25) Witness stand pledge

26) To the...degree (extremely)

28) With an expensive coat?

30) Astonish

31) Physicists get a charge out of it

34) Squinted one's eyes

35) Mimicking birds

37) Prompter's whisper

38) Coffee, informally

39) Skyscraper construction crew, essentially

40) Item on a driver's license

41) When morn gets her due

45) Small stream

47) Spin the same yarn?

48) Strongly opposed (with "to")

49) Answered with attitude

51) It has two pairs of shoes?

53) Flies off the shelf

54) Humility obstacle

57) Off the premises

58) "Largemouth" creature

59) Renders speechless

60) Rise to a raise

61) General purpose?

62) "Just a..."

NOTE PAD

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
A foreign person will have a very positive influence in your life today, especially if they're someone from your past. What they have to say is going to surprise you, but you should give them the benefit of any doubt. They are reaching out to you, and it's a good idea for you to reach right back. Exploring a different culture will be fun when they are your guide, and they're eager to show you things that are familiar to them. Take them up on any invitation they extend to you.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
If you've been trying to start a new romance or are just looking to amp up the romance in your current relationship, today could give you a wonderful opportunity to do just that! You can create the perfect environment for some sizzling moments and show a certain someone how much you value them in your life. After all, isn't romance all about making someone realize how special they are? Flirting and flattering is one thing, but being open and vulnerable about how you feel is another.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Meeting new people can sometimes feel like a chore, but today it will feel like an adventure when a distractingly fascinating person moves into your orbit. Before you engage in conversation, observe them for a while. Listen to what they say, how they say it, and how people react to it. This is a person who likes to be taken seriously, so you shouldn't send out any messages that you don't really stand behind. Go slowly with this one, and don't get caught up in the excitement.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Today will bring you a wonderful chance to stir up your normal routine. So if you want to get a real adrenaline rush, you're in luck! The only catch is that in order to feel this rush, you have to be prepared to take a risk, not a big one, but one you might not be comfortable with. Put yourself into an uncertain situation where you could be rejected or come out with less than you put in. Trust yourself and just see what happens. No matter what the outcome, you will be better off

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You've been waiting for the right time to go out on a limb and take that risk, and that time could come today! When you see that the right people are finally opening up their minds and coming around to your way of thinking today, you should take that as your green light to move full steam ahead. It's going to feel a bit scary at first, but it's also going to feel very invigorating! Don't be surprised if a friend asks to come along on the adventure. The more the merrier!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Today, you'll be moved more by facts and figures than by tears or emotion. You're hungry for analytical thinking right now, and your mind wants to see things in black-and-white terms. You're willing to see the other side of an argument, but you're not going to give people credit for sob stories. Therefore, you will get along best with people who aren't interested in making small talk or being charming all day long. You're in the mood to get things done, and you will.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Are you feeling overwhelmed by someone or something new in your life? Whether you're overwhelmed in a good way or a bad way, today brings you the chance to get the control you so desperately need. Once you put one last clue into place, things will start to click. You'll be able to steer the situation right where you want it to go. Overall, your life is becoming a lot less erratic, and you're experiencing a lot more calm and quiet. Make the most of your free time by relaxing by yourself tonight.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Ugly emotions are bubbling up inside you today, and it doesn't matter why. You're feeling out of sorts, and you need to deal with these feelings by sharing them. Be more expressive about your emotions than you typically are. For example, if you're upset with someone, don't suppress it. Don't underestimate other people by assuming they'll react negatively. They have a lot more empathy than you think, and they're ready to listen. Be vulnerable and tell them how you feel.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Keep in mind that your friends have their own lives, and be careful not to be too needy right now. Yes, they've always been there to listen to your problems and encourage you, but try to handle some of your stuff on your own for a while. Not only is it good to learn to be more independent, but they'll appreciate a little break. Blurring the line between friendship and therapy is never a wise idea. Avoid it at all costs to keep your friendships healthy.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
At work, you have to remind yourself that not everything is resting completely on your shoulders. Stop putting so much pressure on yourself. No one else is. Coworkers are there for a reason. They're there not only to do their job but also to fulfill their roles on the team. If you need them to step it up a bit, you should feel free to ask them. Just do it in person. An email won't convey the right tone and could ruffle their feathers.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Don't rein in your instincts today. If something doesn't seem right, then it isn't right. Even if you're in the middle of a business deal, you should listen to your gut if it tells you to walk away at the last minute. Your mind is tuned in to the energies of other people today, and you'll be able to sense when someone is lying through their teeth as they smile at you and tell you that they're trying to help. This suspicious phase is going to be very brief.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Thanks to a recent accomplishment, you should be feeling much more confident! Today, you'll get a great opportunity to gain more authority over your life and put some new ideas into play. Your independence is something you should savor. Go out for a solo date and treat yourself like royalty (or as much like royalty as you can comfortably afford). Luck will be on your side in terms of any upcoming travel plans. There won't be any delays, and you might even get a nice little upgrade!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In various English-speaking countries, a flag is flown at what is said to be half mast as a mark of respect or mourning; in the U.S. (on land) the gesture is known as half what?

A. Trunk
B. Pole
C. Pile
D. Staff
02. What was the first of a succession of Soviet state security organisations, created by a decree issued on 20 December 1917 by Vladimir Lenin and subsequently led by Felix Dzerzhinsky?

A. The Cheka
B. SPECTRE
C. SMERSH
D. Tass
03. Which of these sports has

A. Shooting
B. Fencing
C. Cycling
D. Swimming
- Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. C
- KIDS COLOURING
- BOGGLER

N	E	S	U
C	S	K	D
A	F	O	H
N	E	B	D

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average
- DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

JABEUR ENTERS LAST 16

Tunisian takes advantage of rain delay to rally from set down and beat Canada’s Andreescu

London, United Kingdom - Ons Jabeur thanked the rain after battling back from a set down to beat Canada’s Bianca Andreescu and reach the Wimbledon fourth round on Saturday.

A single break in the first set cost last year’s finalist at the All England Club but she engineered a break of her own in the second set to level the match.

Andreescu, the 2019 US Open champion, struck first in the decider, opening up a 3-1 lead, but the Tunisian sixth seed broke back immediately.

The match was halted at 3-2 in the decider as rain returned to Wimbledon, resuming after a prolonged inspection under the roof.

The turning point came in the ninth game when Jabeur, 28, broke her 50th-ranked opponent to love and she sealed the 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 win with an ace.

Jabeur will play two-time champion Petra Kvitova in the last 16.

“I’ve got to thank the rain a little bit for letting me speak to my coach and have a bit of perspective about the match,” she said. “I felt like I didn’t play my best tennis.”

Jabeur last year became the first Arab woman to reach a Grand Slam women’s singles final, also making the final of the US Open.

She said it felt emotional to return to Centre Court after her painful defeat to Elena Rybakina in 2022.

“I love the energy, love how beautiful it is and hopefully I can



Tunisia’s Ons Jabeur returns the ball to Canada’s Bianca Andreescu during their round of 32 match at Wimbledon on Saturday (AFP)

I’ve got to thank the rain a little bit for letting me speak to my coach and have a bit of perspective about the match. I felt like I didn’t play my best

ONS JABEUR

come back and play more matches here,” she said.

Defending champion Elena Rybakina swept past Katie Boulter, the last British player in the singles draw, to make the fourth

round.

The third seed raced to a 6-1, 6-1 victory in just 57 minutes and will take on Brazil’s Beatriz Haddad Maia for a place in the quarter-finals.

Russian-born Kazakh Rybakina unleashed seven aces in her total of 20 winners and broke the 89th-ranked Boulter five times.

World number two Aryna Sabalenka reached the fourth round

for the second time with a straight-sets win over Russia’s Anna Blinkova.

Australian Open champion Sabalenka, who has a chance of taking Iga Swiatek’s world num-

ber-one ranking at the tournament, won 6-2, 6-3 on the back of 30 winners, including nine aces under the Court One roof.

The Belarusian will take on another Russian, 21st-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova, for a place in

the quarter-finals.

Sabalenka reached the semi-finals on her last appearance at Wimbledon in 2021 but was banned last year due to Belarus’s support of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Alcaraz toughs it out to reach Wimbledon last 16

London, United Kingdom - Carlos Alcaraz was forced to dig deep on Saturday to see off the challenge of Nicolas Jarry and reach the last 16 at Wimbledon.

The Spanish top seed, seen as the man most likely to end Novak Djokovic’s long reign at the All England Club, was off-colour but still won 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 7-5.

A single break in the first set was enough for Alcaraz to edge ahead but he faltered in the second, slipping 4-1 behind.

The US Open champion clawed his way back, forcing a tie-break, but that went the way

of his Chilean opponent, seeded 25th.

Alcaraz regrouped and took the third set 6-3 but the errors crept in again and he found himself in trouble at 3-0 down in the fourth.

The 20-year-old survived two break points in the following game and broke back when Jarry went long with a forehand.

He conjured a searing backhand return to break again in the 11th game and served out for the win.

“I’m really happy with the level that I played to get through this really tough match,” said Al-

caraz.

He added: “It was really, really close. He has great shots... I would say the key is to believe all the time and stay focused.”

Third seed Daniil Medvedev lost the first set against close friend Marton Fucsovics but recovered to win in four sets.

Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who beat Andy Murray in a five-set thriller over two days in the second round, eased past Serbia’s Laslo Djere in straight sets.

Holger Rune saved two match points to defeat Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, with the

Spaniard left to regret deciding to serve underarm when he was just two points from winning.

The Danish sixth seed came through 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8) after Davidovich Fokina served underarm at 8/8 in the final-set tiebreaker.

Holger was quick to it, winning the point to go to match point, which he converted when the 31st seed netted a forehand.

“I didn’t expect the serve like that but I was fast to reach it,” said Rune after the four-hour clash. He will face former semi-finalist Grigor Dimitrov in the next round.



Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz celebrates a point against Chile’s Nicolas (AFP)

Vondrousova into first Wimbledon quarter-final

London, United Kingdom - Former French Open runner-up Marketa Vondrousova reached the Wimbledon quarter-finals for the first time on Sunday with a three-set win over Czech compatriot Marie Bouzkova.

World number 42 Vondrousova came through 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 on the back of 37 winners and 44 unforced errors. The 24-year-old will face either US fourth seed Jessica Pegula or unseeded Lesia Tsurenko of Ukraine for a place in the semi-finals.

It will be Vondrousova’s first appearance in the last eight of a major since reaching the French Open final in 2019 where she was defeated by Ashleigh Barty.

Mirra Andreeva’s fairytale season continued Sunday when the 16-year-old Russian



Marketa Vondrousova celebrates after beating Marie Bouzkova (AFP)

reached the fourth round.

Andreeva, who came through the qualifying tournament, defeated 22nd-seeded compatriot Anastasia Potapova 6-2, 7-5.

“Even if I wanted to show my emotions, I couldn’t be-

cause I was out of breath on every point,” said Andreeva.

The teenager had to battle hard in the second set, coming back from 1-4 down before squandering seven break points in the ninth game.

But she held her nerve to break Potapova in the 11th game before securing victory when her opponent buried an overhead into the net.

It was Potapova’s 45th and final unforced error.

“It was an amazing battle,” said Andreeva. “She played really well. I was 4-1 down in the second set and I didn’t feel great.”

Andreeva arrived at Wimbledon having made a run to the third round at the French Open, also out of qualifying.

She will rise in the rankings from 102 to the top 65 at least after Wimbledon.

London, United Kingdom - Matteo Berrettini has Carlos Alcaraz in his sights at Wimbledon after admitting he would “have signed in blood” to play at the All England Club when injury was threatening to derail his career.

A barnstorming run through the draw has taken the charismatic Italian into a fourth round blockbuster against the world number one on Monday.

“It’s what you want, right? You want to play against the best players in the world. Playing against Carlos, it’s always been a pleasure, a great fight,” said the 27-year-old Berrettini.

The Italian giant was runner-up to Novak Djokovic in 2021 but missed last year’s tournament through Covid.

A stomach injury, which restricted him to one match between April and June, pushed him to the brink of another withdrawal.



Italy’s Matteo Berrettini celebrates his victory against Germany’s Alexander Zverev (AFP)

“When I arrived I wasn’t sure even if I was going to play,” he said.

“I thought I’m not ready. But then I missed too many events in the last years and I couldn’t leave this place without trying.

“This place has something special. I feel a kind of energy I don’t feel anywhere else.”

Berrettini missed a chunk of the 2022 season with a hand injury before his latest physical issues struck.

He was forced to withdraw from the Monte Carlo Masters after two rounds because of his abdomen injury and sat out a second successive French Open.

His return for the grass-court season saw him slump to a first round defeat in Stuttgart against compatriot Lorenzo Sonego

However, at Wimbledon, the world number 38 has been reborn.

AFP



Lucas Hernandez

PSG make Hernandez of Bayern their fifth signing

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain signed Bayern Munich defender Lucas Hernandez on Sunday, the club's fifth signing this week. The French 2018 World Cup winner joins Manuel Ugarte, Milan Skriniar, Marco Asensio and Lee Kang-in as Parc des Princes newcomers since Luis Enrique's appointment as coach on Wednesday.

Hernandez has signed a deal until 2028 at the Qatari-backed side which approaches the upcoming season with Enrique now in the dug out after the sacking of Christophe Galtier.

"I'm feeling so happy, I've been waiting to join PSG for some time now and at last it's happened," said Hernandez, who will be experiencing Ligue 1 for the first time in his career.

The 27-year-old's transfer was estimated at around 40 million euros (\$44 million) by a source close to the deal, way below the 80 million originally sought by Bayern.

A question mark hangs over Hernandez's fitness with the player only turning out 107 times for the Bundesliga giants in four years.

He has been sidelined since undergoing surgery after rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament in his right

knee in the ninth minute of France's opening World Cup match against Australia in Qatar.

Hernandez will link up in defence with Slovakia captain Skriniar, who joined on a free transfer the day after Enrique's unveiling as manager,

I'm feeling so happy, I've been waiting to join PSG for some time now it's happened

LUCAS HERNANDEZ

with forward Asensio moving from Real Madrid.

Uruguay midfielder Ugarte followed the day after from Portuguese club Sporting, with the Ligue 1 champions signing South Korean international Lee from Real Mallorca on Saturday.

Former Barcelona and Spain boss Enrique has been quick to recruit as major doubts persist over the future of Kylian Mbappe.

PSG must sell their superstar player in the current transfer window or likely lose him for nothing when his deal ends next season.

AFP

ENGLAND UNDER-21 EURO CHAMPIONS



England players celebrate with the trophy after winning the UEFA European Under-21 Championship on Saturday (AFP)

Curtis Jones scores the winner as England beat Spain in dramatic final

Batumi, Georgia - England won the under-21 European Championship for the first time since 1984 as Curtis Jones' goal beat Spain 1-0 in Saturday's final.

In a dramatic finale in Batumi, Spain captain Abel Ruiz had a 99th-minute penalty saved by Manchester City goalkeeper James Trafford to preserve England's record of not conceding a goal all tournament.

"I told everyone this morning I was going to save a pen, and when it was a penalty I knew I

I told everyone this morning I was going to save a pen, and I knew I was going to save it. We are a very good team and we believe that no one can score against us and we showed it.

JAMES TRAFFORD

was going to save it," said Trafford, who has been strongly linked with a £19 million (\$24 million) move to Premier League newcomers Burnley.

"We are a very good team and

we believe that no one can score against us and we showed it."

Lee Carsley's men won all six games in Georgia and Romania to continue a golden age for England's youth sides.

The Three Lions are also reigning European champions at under-19 level and won the under-17 and under-20 World Cups back in 2017.

There was a hint of fortune about the only goal as the ball struck Jones from Cole Palmer's free-kick in first-half stoppage time and looped into the far corner. Spain did have the ball in net after the break when Ruiz headed home only to be denied by the offside flag.

The Braga striker had an even

better opportunity 20 minutes from time when he headed wide with the goal gaping.

England could also have put the five-time winners away before an incredible ending as Arnau Tenas made fine saves to deny Jones and Noni Madueke a second. But they needed Trafford to produce some heroics at the death. He parried Ruiz's spot-kick and a follow-up effort from Aimar Oroz to spark wild celebrations among the England players and coaching staff.

Mexico, Panama reach Gold Cup semis

Miami, United States - Mexico and Panama booked their places in the last four of the CONCACAF Gold Cup with victories on Saturday in their quarter-final ties against Costa Rica and Qatar.

Ismael Diaz blasted a hat trick in the space of nine second-half minutes as Panama marched on with a 4-0 win over Qatar.

Panama will face the winner of the quarter-final between the United States and Canada on Sunday in Cincinnati.

Record eight-time Gold Cup champions Mexico reached the last four of the tournament for the ninth straight edition thanks to a 2-0 win over Costa Rica.

In the semi-finals, El Tri will take on the winner of Sunday's clash between Jamaica and Guatemala after a hard-earned victory over the Central Ameri-



Panama's Ismael Diaz scores against Qatar in their Concacaf Gold Cup quarterfinal on Saturday (AFP)

cans at the home of the Dallas Cowboys in Arlington, Texas.

Ajax right-back Jorge Sanchez went close to a first-half opener for Mexico, driving into the box and firing a low shot at the near post that was well saved by Ticos keeper Kevin Chamorro.

Mexico, beaten by the USA in the final two years ago, dominated for long stretches but were given a reminder of Costa Rica's threat when Anthony Contreras found space for a shot but his effort lacked power and was comfortably dealt with by veteran keeper Guillermo Ochoa.

It threatened to be a frustrating night for Jaime Lozano's side but they finally broke through in the 52nd minute when Kendall Waston barged Henry Martin to the ground and Orbelin Pineda side-footed home the spot kick.

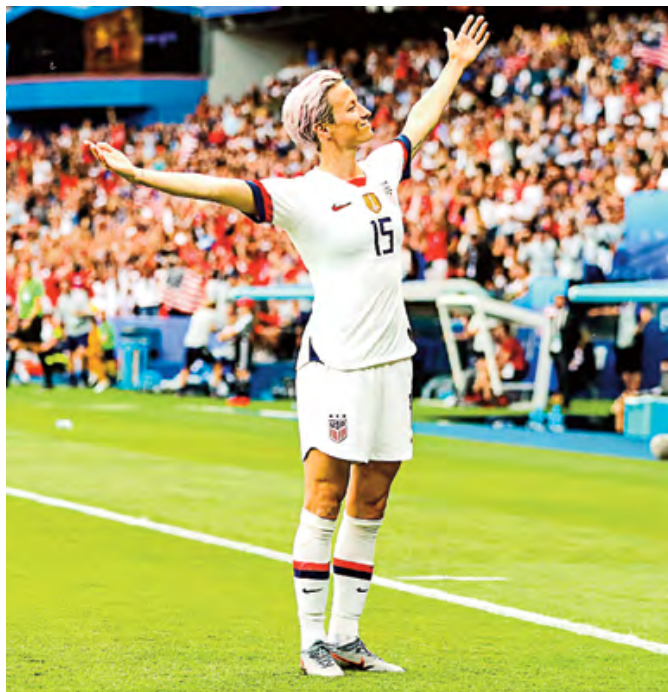
United States women's superstar Rapinoe to retire at end of season

Miami, United States - United States women's team star Megan Rapinoe announced on social media on Saturday that she would be retiring from football at the end of this season.

"It is with a deep sense of peace & gratitude that I have decided this will be my final season playing this beautiful game," the 38-year-old posted. "I never could have imagined the ways in which soccer would shape and change my life forever."

The two-time World Cup winner, well known for her activism, is part of the USA squad for the upcoming women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

Rapinoe plays in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) for Seattle based OL Reign - their season concludes in



Megan Rapinoe

November.

The winger currently has 199 caps over a span of 17 years playing for her country and also won an Olympic gold medal in London in 2012. She was awarded the Best FIFA Women's Player in 2019 but her fame came as much for her espousal of causes and her campaigning as for her skills on the field.

Rapinoe publicly came out as gay in July 2012 and has been a high-profile campaigner on social issues including LGBTQ+ rights, racial inequality and gender and pay equality. She was a leading voice in the US women's team's successful fight for equal pay and conditions which resulted in a lawsuit and eventual new collective agreement being struck in 2021.

Philippines hope 'meteoric rise' to World Cup is game-changer

Manila, Philippines - In a country obsessed with beauty pageants, basketball and boxing, the Philippines women's team hope to ignite interest in football when they make the nation's World Cup debut.

Long minnows in the sport, the Philippines have never played at a FIFA World Cup, either the men's or women's.

All that will change on July 21 when the women's side under their Australian coach Alen Stajcic play Switzerland in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Stajcic calls their journey from "almost ground zero" to the World Cup "miraculous". Half of his players do not belong to a professional club and some have been "running around the block on their own" for training, he said. "It's been a meteoric sort of



The Philippines will open their World Cup campaign against Switzerland on July 21

rise for the team," the 49-year-old told AFP via Zoom.

"The challenge for us is to somehow maintain and sustain that improvement, not be happy with where we got to."

Since Stajcic's appointment as coach in late 2021, the Philippines

have jumped from 68 in the FIFA rankings and are now a best-ever 46th place.

It began with the Women's Asian Cup in early 2022 when they made the semi-finals, losing to South Korea but securing a historic World Cup berth.

STAYING ALIVE

England beat Australia in thriller to remain in Ashes contention

Leeds, United Kingdom - England kept their Ashes hopes alive on Sunday as Harry Brook made an impressive 75 before the recalled duo of Chris Woakes and Mark Wood completed a thrilling three-wicket win over Australia in the third Test at Headingley.

The hosts' victory reduced Australia's lead in the series to 2-1 with two Tests to play.

England were struggling at 171-6 -- still needing 80 more runs to reach a target of 251 -- after Mitchell Starc had removed skipper Ben Stokes and Jonny Bairstow in quick succession after lunch on the fourth day.

It was then that Brook was joined by Woakes, playing his first Test since March last year.

But with Australia eyeing a win that would have given them a first Ashes series success in England in 22 years, Brook and Woakes shared a stand of 59 that took the hosts to the brink of victory.

The situation was as much a test of Brook's sometimes fallible temperament as his undeniable talent. But it was one the 24-year-old, in just his 10th Test, passed for the most part on his home ground. There was, however, a further twist when Brook fell for 75, skying Starc (5-78) to Australia captain Pat Cummins, who nearly collided with the bowler as



England's Mark Wood (R) celebrates with Chris Woakes after winning the third ashes Test against Australia at Headingley on Sunday (AFP)

he took the catch at mid-off.

England still required 21 to win but fast bowler Wood, fresh from his quickfire 24 in the first innings, got the target down to 12 when he hooked Cummins for six. Player-of-the-match Wood, who took 5-34 in Australia's first innings, then carved Starc for four in the manner of a top-order batsman. Woakes then blazed Starc through point for the winning boundary to finish on 32 not out, with Wood unbeaten on 16.

"It is absolutely too soon for all-rounder status!" Wood joked. "I'm happy down at number nine. I think that is too high and any higher I'm definitely getting a nose bleed."

England now have a chance to become just the second team to win a Test series from 2-0 down after the 1936/37 Australia side, inspired by great Don Bradman.

Afghanistan crush Bangladesh to seal series

Chittagong, Bangladesh - Openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran both scored hundreds as Afghanistan crushed Bangladesh by 142 runs on Saturday to seal their three-match one-day international series.

Bangladesh were attempting to put a strange week behind them after captain Iqbal shocked his teammates by announcing his immediate retirement on Thursday only to change his mind a day later.

Afghanistan's openers laid the foundation for a mammoth total of 331-9 in Chittagong with their 256-run stand, a record ODI partnership for the tourists.

"Obviously very happy with how it's going, the way they played the shots," Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott told reporters.

"We were going to bat first as well, having looked at the weather... The way they played, it's natural."

Fazalhaq Farooqi claimed 3-22 and Mujeeb Ur Rahman took 3-40 as Afghanistan bowled out Bangladesh for 189 in the 44th over.

The victory makes Afghanistan just the second team to win an ODI series in Bangladesh in the past seven years after world champions England.



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium after winning the British Grand Prix on Sunday (AFP)

Verstappen reels off sixth straight win at Silverstone

Silverstone, United Kingdom - Max Verstappen claimed his first British Grand Prix victory on Sunday to deliver a record-equalling 11th consecutive win for his Red Bull team and his sixth in successive races.

In a race of attrition, interrupted by safety cars and influenced by tyre-wear, the Dutchman came home almost four seconds ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris who held off Mercedes' seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in a thrilling finale.

It was Verstappen's 43rd career win and his eighth in 10 races this year as he increased his lead ahead of team-mate Sergio Perez in the drivers' championship to 99 points.

Norris's McLaren team-mate Australian rookie Oscar Piastri finished fourth ahead of George Russell, Perez, two-time champion Fernand Alonso of Aston Martin and Williams' Alex Albon.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz came home ninth and 10th, a disappointing result for the Italian team after they had started from fourth and fifth on the grid.

For Norris, who led the opening laps after beating Verstappen at the start, it was his best result since finishing second at the 2021 Italian Grand Prix while for Hamilton, a record eight-time winner at his home race, it was a 14th British podium.

"Yes, a good race," said Verstappen. "The last stint was more difficult than I would have liked on these tyres, but a great job by the team again. Eleven in a row! That's pretty crazy. Well done everyone."

Red Bull drew level with McLaren who reeled off 11 wins in 1988.

The race began in warm and dry conditions, following light rain, as Norris, from second on the grid, took advantage of a sluggish start by Verstappen who held off Piastri to retain second.

The pre-event pomp and ceremony had been given a unique Hollywood twist with film star Brad Pitt joining the drivers for Damian Lewis's rendition of the British anthem, standing close to Verstappen, who may have been distracted.

Madushanka spearheads Sri Lanka victory over Dutch

Harare, Zimbabwe - Sri Lanka won the duel between the two World Cup qualifiers on Sunday thrashing the Netherlands by 128 runs in the final of the tournament in Harare.

The Dutch did well to skittle the Sri Lankans out for just 233 inside 48 overs after Dutch captain Scott Edwards won the toss and put them into bat.

However, the Dutch were never in the hunt after being reduced to 39-3 - man of the match Dilshan Madushanka taking three of the wickets - as they collapsed to 105 all out in just over 23 overs. Sri Lanka coach Chris Silverwood was beaming after his side achieved all the targets set for them.

The 48-year-old Englishman said the confidence gained from the tournament would serve them well for the sport's quadrennial showpiece which gets underway in India on October 5.

"First goal was to qualify and we did it," he said. "Second was



Sri Lanka's Dilshan Madushanka (2nd L) celebrates the wicket of Vikramjit Singh of the Netherlands (AFP)

winning the tournament and we have fortunately done that as well. We can go home happy. The confidence that we have shown in this tournament, we can take it into the World Cup."

Edwards put the heavy defeat down to failing to cope with the Sri Lankan spinners but took enormous pride in what they had achieved overall.

"It is obviously massive for our guys and for our supporters back home," he said. "The opportunity

to play in a ten-team World Cup is massive for us.

"We will lap it up and hopefully put in a few good performances there (in India)," added the 26-year-old Tonga-born wicket-keeper.

It had all looked a lot rosier for the Dutch when they were in the field. Edwards would have been especially happy with his side's performance with the ball as Bas de Leede the star in the victory over Scotland, which clinched their World Cup spot, missed the game having returned to his English county club Durham.

Vikramjit Singh dismissed both Sri Lankan openers including the prized one of the in form Pathum Nissanka, whose hopes of a third successive ton were dashed as he went for 23 caught by Aryan Dutt.

A fine 57 by Sahan Arahchige backed up by decent contributions from wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis (43) and Charith Asalanka (36) provided the backbone of their total.

Madushanka's devastating spell had the Dutch reeling and opener Max O'Dowd had to watch from the other end as his partners came and went at regular intervals.

Pedersen sprints to Tour de France stage win as Cavendish crashes

Limoges, France - Denmark's Mads Pedersen won stage eight of the Tour de France on Saturday in a mass bunch sprint as Britain's Mark Cavendish crashed out of the race injured.

Veteran Cavendish had been hoping to win a record 35th career Tour de France stage in Limoges, but the sprint was contested without him after he was taken away after 150km in an ambulance. Jasper Philipsen was second on the day with Wout van Aert finishing third.

Pedersen was swift to hail Cavendish who was racing in what is likely to be his final Tour de France in an effort to break the record of 34 stage wins he shares with Belgian great Eddy Merckx.



Lidl - Trek's Danish rider Mads Pedersen celebrates as he wins the eighth stage of the Tour de France on Saturday (AFP)

"It's sad a legend like him ends his Tour like that," said the 27-year-old Trek-Segafredo rider. "I hoped so bad he'd get his

It's painful not only for him but also for so many other people in cycling

MADS PEDERSEN

Sprint specialist Cavendish, 38, was forced to exit after suffering a suspected broken collarbone in a fall about 60km from the finish line. The Astana rider remained on the road for a couple of minutes rolling in agony every time he reached towards his right shoulder.

Cavendish was ashen-faced as doctors closed the ambulance door with organisers later con-

firmed his withdrawal.

Italian rider Gianni Moscon was behind Cavendish when he fell. "There was a crash in front of us and Cav had to break because someone changed line," he said.

"He just hit the rear wheel of the guy in front of him and went down."

A second crash occurred 5km from the finish line when an elderly spectator stepped slightly into the road sending Mikel Landa and Simon Yates crashing to the tarmac.

In the overall standings Jonas Vingegaard kept the leader's yellow jersey 25 seconds ahead of Tadej Pogacar a day ahead of an expected duel between the duo on the slopes of the Puy de Dome volcano.

AHMAD AL HARTHY SECURES FRONT-ROW START FOR MONZA

Muscat - First-year FIA World Endurance Championship racer Ahmad al Harthy produced a top-notch performance at Monza in Italy on Saturday to secure a front-row start for the fifth round of the 2023 season.

Aiming to bid for a third successive GTE Am podium with Oman Racing with TF Sport team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood in today's 6 Hours of Monza, the squad will have a tough challenge to match the top speed of the rival Ferraris and Porsches. Al Harthy's stand-out qualifying though in the grid-

determining run has brought a lot of positivity.

Starting off the Monza week-end steadily with the usual focus on delivering the best car possible for qualifying and the race, the Oman Racing entry was the 11th fastest in the two free practice sessions on Friday and was then an improved ninth in free practice three on Saturday morning.

Al Harthy took the reins of the No.25 Aston Martin Vantage for the subsequent 15-minute qualifying session and after the first flying laps were in the book the Omani was fourth, an initial effort

of 1m51.848s.

He then smashed that the next time around to shoot onto GTE Am pole with an excellent lap of 1m48.545 seconds, half a second clear of his closest challenger, and it proved a timely attempt as well with the session halted by a red flag stoppage mere moments later.

Qualifying resumed with just under eight minutes left on the clock and the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS supported racer set about trying to improve yet further on a new set

of Michelin tyres. On his first flying lap of the re-start Al Harthy circulated in 1m49.244 seconds, before then delivering a session best of 1m48.058 seconds on his penultimate run - moving him back up to second fastest and within 0.4 seconds of pole, where he would stay.

Ahead of the fifth race of the FIA WEC campaign, the Oman Racing drivers are second in the GTE Am Championship standings and the team itself is second in the Team Championship. After a historic second-place finish at last month's 24H Le Mans in

France, and taking third in round three at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium prior to that, Oman Racing would relish the chance to keep the run going.

"I'm really delighted with qualifying, it was the absolute best we could achieve as a package here at Monza. From FP1 we knew we didn't have the strongest package around this circuit, so to get P2 in qualifying is amazing. I'm really happy with my performance and equally happy with all the teamwork which has been put in for us to achieve this together," said Al Harthy.



Ahmad al Harthy

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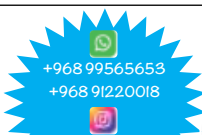
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Thitid Tassanakajohn has a degree in economics from Thailand's top university, but turned his back on a stable career in finance to launch a high-end restaurant in Bangkok - a city famed for its street food.

The 38-year-old, known as Chef Ton, is one of a group of top young cooks creating a buzz around fine dining in the capital, traditionally known for its affordable and spicy local fare. His Le Du restaurant, or 'Season' in Thai, topped this year's ranking of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, an influential British gastronomy guide.

The recognition was the culmination of a decade's work trying to expand perceptions of Thai cuisine, he said.

"Before, people thought that Thai food was cheap street food, and we only thought of fine dining as French or Italian. "I wanted to change that concept to show Thai food as a refined and elevated cuisine."

Highlights of his four-course and six-course tasting menus include a twist on traditional rice dish Khao Chae, made with a shrimp pate, pickled radish and jasmine ice cream. His signature river prawn, with meaty jam and shrimp-paste organic rice, channels his favourite street food.

"It is very important for me to showcase local products," he said.

Since 2017, around 30 restaurants in Thailand, almost all of them in Bangkok, have been awarded coveted Michelin stars.

"It is a golden era of fine dining in Thailand," said internationally-trained Pichaya Soontornyanakij, or Chef Pam, whose restaurant Potong was awarded a Michelin star last year.

Best of everything

In Bangkok's 'Chinatown' nestled between shoe shops on a narrow street, Potong serves Thai-Chinese dishes in a century-old Sino-Portuguese building inherited from her ancestors. It once sold traditional herbal medicine, but now the upscale restaurant features luxurious furniture, stunning floral wall art and antiques.

The 33-year-old's favourite childhood street food dish - the Chinese-influenced goose stew - sparked the initial idea for the restaurant.

"Bangkok's Chinatown is such an unusual place for fine dining," Chef Pam said.

Two-week aged duck with five spices, Surat Thani oyster with vinegar pearls, and crab with black pepper jam are among the standouts of her 20-course menu.

Only 35 diners can tuck into the degustation menu each night and there's a three-month wait for a reservation.

"I want Potong to be the reason why foreigners come to Thailand," she said.

Tourism officials hope Thailand can capitalise on the new upscale culinary hype to boost the kingdom's economy after the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the travel and hospitality industries.

Some influential food bloggers, such as American Mark Wiens, who has almost 10 million subscribers on YouTube, are spreading the word.

"Bangkok has the best of everything, whether you want a US\$1 or US\$200 meal," he disclosed.

However, some food critics are wary about the price point compared to other Asian mega cities.

Young Thai chefs shake up Bangkok's food scene

Food dudes



I want Potong to be the reason why foreigners come to Thailand
PICHAYA 'PAM'

Thailand is among the most expensive countries for fine dining, said Bangkok-based food critic Siriwatoo Ruksakiat, but "there are certain elements missing, such as the quality of service".

Pushing culinary boundaries

Le Du is located in the heart of Bangkok's busy financial district, but at midday, Chef Ton ventures to a local market to get inspired for his menu.

"I like to come to see which products are in season in Thailand, and I can start planning," he said, as he looked through a fruit shop overflowing with longan and mangosteen. Educated and trained at top restaurants in New York City, Chef Ton said he learned from the best about how to push culinary boundaries. Besides Le Du, Chef Ton manages seven other restaurants.

Avoiding 'putting all my eggs in one basket' was a deliberate business strategy, he said. "I have seen ups and downs of the restaurant business. There can be cycles of popularity. However, he hopes that the world's new understanding of Thai food is here to stay. "I want to prove that Thai cuisine is not inferior to any cuisine."

AFP



Michelin-starred Thai chef Thitid 'Ton' Tassanakajohn plating a shrimp paste rice-inspired river prawn dish at his fine dining restaurant Le Du, in Bangkok



I want to prove that Thai cuisine is not inferior to any cuisine
THITID 'TON'

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The Wasserfallboden dam near Kaprun, Austria and (inset) Florian Seidl, spokesman of the Austrian main electricity provider Verbund, in a tunnel under the Freudenau run-of-river power station built on the Danube river

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VARIED RENEWABLE ENERGY OPTIONS

High in the Austrian Alps, hundreds of construction workers toil in a huge underground project aimed at storing hydropower as climate change has reduced the country's water-dependent electricity production.

Austria draws more than 60% of its electricity output from the renewable energy source, compared to a global average of 16%, with more than 3,100 dams spread across its rivers. But the amount of electricity generated through hydropower in the European Union country is down - from some 45 terawatt hours (TWh) in 2020 to 42 TWh in 2021 - as water levels are falling.

For the first time last year, Austria - which also still relies heavily on Russian gas - had to import electricity, ringing alarm bells.

Inside the snow-capped mountain range, above the Austrian village of Kaprun in the Salzburg region, trucks thunder in and out of the vast subterranean construction site, which is dotted with statues of Saint Barbara, patron of miners and others plying dangerous trades.

Excavation work for the Limberg 3 pumped storage power plant is soon wrapping up.

Well prepared

The plant is to be operational by 2025 to store power in order to cater to peaks in electricity consumption and mitigate a change in weather patterns, including increasingly capricious and irregular rainfall.

"We want to be prepared well," said Klaus Hebenstreit, an executive of main electricity producer Verbund. "The distribution (of water) over the year will change - we will have less water in summer (due to drought) and more in winter (due to snow melt)," he added.

Two years of drought have hit Austria, like the rest of Europe, according to Roman Neunteufel, a senior researcher at Vienna's University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences.

"If there are several dry years in a row, then this becomes very noticeable... Water levels have never been lower since records began some 100 years ago," he said.

Europe should brace for more deadly

heatwaves driven by climate change, said a report last month by the World Meteorological Organization and the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

The report noted the world's fastest-warming continent was some 2.3 degrees Celsius hotter last year than in pre-industrial times.

In the Alps, glaciers saw a new record

mass loss for a single year in 2022, caused by very low winter levels of snow, a hot summer as well as deposits of wind-blown Saharan dust.

Difficult diversification

Verbund, a semi-public company, continues to pour billions of euros into hydropower generation despite criticism from activists who say the dams and plants have

a big impact on the environment.

"Hydropower expansion must be ecologically and socially compatible... The complete expansion of hydropower is not the solution to our energy problem. Instead, it is necessary to save energy," the World Wildlife Fund says on its site. Verbund is looking at alternatives.

"Water will continue to be extremely important for us, but we also want to develop photovoltaic and wind energy. We are diversifying," Hebenstreit told AFP in Vienna on a day temperatures soared to 37 degrees Celsius.

Austria, which aims to draw all of its electricity from renewable energy by 2030, has been slow to develop wind and solar



A construction site under the earth near Kaprun, Austria

Water will continue to be extremely important for us, but we also want to develop photovoltaic and wind energy. We are diversifying

KLAUS HEBENSTREIT

power, which make up only 13% of its electricity.

"Solar energy is wonderfully abundant in summer. But production is too low in winter, precisely when we need it for heating," Neunteufel said.

"And with wind, it's even harder to plan. There can be days any time without wind, and then wind power production largely stops," he said.

AFP