

Oman behind all GCC countries in economic freedom index 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is ranked 93rd, behind all the GCC countries, in the annual *Economic Freedom of the World* 2022 report, published by Fraser Institute of Canada.

The report measures economic freedom - the ability of individuals to make their own economic decisions - by analysing the policies and institutions of 165 countries and territories. Indicators include regulation, freedom to trade internationally, size of government, property rights, government spending and taxation.

The pandemic had an effect, with 146 countries and territories experiencing a decline in economic freedom after governments worldwide imposed COVID-19 restrictions.

"While the report takes no position on whether public health measures were merited, there's no question that government policies during the first year of the pandemic reduced economic freedom," said Fred McMahon, Dr Michael A Walker Research Chair in Economic Freedom at the Fraser Institute.

Oman scores 7.56 in the freedom to trade internationally indicator and also performs well in

PERFORMANCE IN KEY CATEGORIES

Size of Government	4.66 (158)
Legal System and Property Rights	5.3 (77)
Sound Money	8.8 (83)
Freedom to trade internationally	7.6 (52)
Credit market regulations	6.7 (130)
Labour market regulations	6.7 (73)
Business regulations	7.6 (34)

Points (out of 10)/ Global rank



the category of Business Regulations within the regulations indicator with an overall score of 7.58 out of ten. It has high scores in Starting a Business sub-cate-

gory (9.82), Licensing Readiness (8.8) and Cost of Tax Compliance (9.24).

Within the Labour Market Regulations (6.69) category, the

sultanate scores high in Hiring Regulations and Minimum Wage sub-category (8.9).

Bahrain leads the ranking within the GCC at 39th place, followed by UAE (49th), Qatar (76th), Saudi Arabia (86th) and Kuwait (88th).

Hong Kong ranks first followed by Singapore, Switzerland, New Zealand, Denmark, Australia, the United States, Estonia, Mauritius and Ireland.

"Hong Kong remains the most economically-free jurisdiction in the world, but this ranking is based on 2020 data and more recent interference from China threatens to undermine Hong Kong's rule of law, which helps ensure equal freedom for all," McMahon said.

The rankings of other major countries include Japan (12th), Germany (24th), Italy (43rd), France (54th), Mexico (65th), India (90th), Russia (94th), Brazil (114th) and China (116th).

People living in countries with high levels of economic freedom enjoy greater prosperity, more political and civil liberties, and longer lives.

For example, countries in the top quartile of economic freedom had an average per capita GDP of US\$48,251 in 2020 compared to US\$6,542 for bottom quartile countries.



H M RECEIVES WRITTEN MESSAGE FROM ALGERIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a written message from President Abdel Majid Taboun of Algeria on Wednesday. The message was handed over to Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, by Mohamed Arkab, Algerian Minister of Energy and Mines, when they reviewed the distinguished relations binding the two countries (ONA)

Air India Express aircraft catches fire in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Over 140 passengers were evacuated from a Kochi-bound Air India Express aircraft at Muscat International Airport after smoke and fire were detected in its engine as it taxied for take-off on Wednesday morning.

An Air India official in Muscat told Muscat Daily, "There were no serious injuries, though 13-14 passengers sustained very minor injuries."

The official added that an alternate flight was arranged to Kochi at 9.20pm on Wednesday.



An initial investigation indicated that the fire was seen in one of the engines by another aircraft on the runway, which alerted the Air India Express pilot, following which it was taxied back to the bay and its passengers evacuated.

The Civil Aviation Authority

said it engaged with the concerned authorities at Muscat International Airport following the emergency situation on the aircraft.

The authority added that the incident occurred at 11.33am as Air India Express' Flight IX442 was about to take off.

'Before the aircraft could take off, there was fire in one of its engines, which required immediate evacuation of passengers. Some light injuries were reported among passengers.'

Arun Kumar, director general of Directorate General of Civil Aviation, India, said, "We will investigate and take appropriate action."



FINAL FAREWELL

Members of Britain's Royal family follow the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II, adorned with a Royal Standard and the Imperial State Crown and pulled by a Gun Carriage of The King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, during a procession from Buckingham Palace to the Palace of Westminster, in London on Wednesday. Queen Elizabeth II will lie in state in Westminster Hall inside the Palace of Westminster till her funeral on Monday (AFP)



Omani delegation in Saudi to explore business opportunities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani delegation is visiting Saudi Arabia to explore investment opportunities between the two countries.

The delegation, led by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, is looking to strengthen cooperation between the two countries and introduce Omani companies to Saudi expertise in several sectors.

According to a ministry official, H E Yousef met Khalid Abdulaziz al Falih, Saudi Minister of Investment, on Wednesday. The two sides explored prospects for trade cooperation and investment opportunities in various economic fields.

"The visit aims to strengthen trade relations, discuss import-export between the two countries, and resolve the challenges faced by the private sector," the ministry official said.

The delegation will follow up with investors interested in investing in Oman, and facilitate bilateral meetings between Omani businessmen and their Saudi counterparts.

"We expect the visit will result in increasing the volume of investment between the two countries, diversifying import sources, creating new opportunities for Omani exports, and facilitating the movement of goods between the two countries," the official added.

According to ministry data,



H E Qais al Yousef and his Saudi counterpart on a factory visit

the volume of trade between Oman and Saudi Arabia rose to RO959.9mn in 2020 from RO506.2mn in 2010 - an increase of RO453.7mn in a ten-year period.

The number of Saudi companies in the sultanate grew from 467 in 2010 to 1,235 in 2021 - an increase of 768 companies in 11 years.

Saudi Arabia is a strategic partner in several projects in the sultanate, including the Salalah Independent Power Plant, Manah Power Plant, Salalah Independent Water Desalination Plant, Ibri II Solar PV Independent Power Plant Project and the Saudi Development Fund.

The ministry affirmed that Oman-Saudi trade relations are historic and sustainable, with scope of integration between Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030 for economic diversification, improving policies and legislation and investment opportunities.



Dhofar's bountiful nature through a photographer's eye

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Photographer Ghaniya al Majraf has captured stunning landscapes formed by overflowing springs and waterfalls during khareef in Dhofar.

Famed for its 'ayn' or springs, which come to life after the rains, Dhofar's bountiful nature is a visual splendour for khareef visitors.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ghaniya from the wilayat of Ibri, Dhahirah, said rains in Dhofar lead to the formation of waterfalls in many parts of the governorate. "Recently, I clicked many photos of Darbat and Ayn Athum waterfalls - where the water falling from the top of the mountain make stunning sceneries - to promote Omani tourism."



I love taking photos of nature and wildlife, especially microphotography of insects

GHANIYA AL MAJRAF

Darbat and Ayn Athum are seasonal waterfalls that come to life mostly in July and August, subject to sufficient rains during the monsoon season,

Ghaniya informed.

Another favourite spot for tourists, Mughsail Beach also makes for a perfect setting for shutterbugs. "It has many caves embedded in rocky crags. The panorama of the beach from the ridge above is breathtaking. You can hear the sound of crashing waves before you reach the cliff overlooking the sea. It is an awesome sight."

A member of Photographic Society of Oman and International Federation for Photographic Art (FIAP), Ghaniya has won several local and international awards, besides participating in photography exhibitions.

"I love taking photos of nature and wildlife, especially microphotography of insects."

She hopes to hold a solo exhibition soon.

Floward's Collaboration with Abdul Samad Al Quraishi



September X, 2022: Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts delivery destination in MENA and UK, collaborated with Abul Samad Al Quraishi at Salalah Gardens Mall to celebrate their partnership.

Floward celebrated "Khareef Salalah" and the "Sarab Season" with Abdul Samad Al Quraishi in a special event at Salalah Gardens Mall on Sunday, August 20th, 2022, by providing store customers the unique opportunity to mix their own perfumes and giving them flowers as a gift.

Floward also launched a mesmerizing new collection of floral arrangements and products which were on display in the mall, where mall visitors were given vouchers and special gifts in collaboration with Abdul Samad Al Quraishi.

The event was attended by many prominent figures in Salalah and by members of both companies including senior management members of Abdul Samad Al Quraishi in the Sultanate and Floward Oman Country Manager Mr. Muhammad Haris Aslam who said: "We are always happy to collaborate with a household name like Abdul Samad Al



Quraishi, our relationship with this brand is a prime example of the perfect partnership. At Floward, we always aim to support our partners in their ventures and special events."

Established in 2017, Floward is a full-fledged e-commerce solution that offers prime fresh-cut flowers sourced from the best growers and farmers around the world and arranged locally by a team of florists, and designers. Floward also offers cakes, chocolate, and perfumes curated by the region's most exciting designers bundled with its flower arrangements and manages last-mile same-day delivery to ensure the best customer experience

Akbar Group plans 4th branch, to promote inbound tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Akbar Travels in India, the largest travel agency of that country with over 155 branch networks across the world, is all set to open its fourth branch in the sultanate on Friday.

This was divulged at a press conference addressed by Akbar Group's International Division director Ashiya Nazar at the Golden Tulip Headington Ruwi on Wednesday. "We are planning to open five more branches in Oman in the near future as part of our expansion in the sultanate," Nazar added.

The Akbar Travels' office in Muscat will play a key role in organising inbound and outbound travels, including umrah, besides making a special arrangement for those studying abroad.

"One of the core areas of focus for the Akbar Group in the sultanate is to promote inbound tourism industry in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

"With our pan-India presence, we will exploit the market to the



fullest," she added.

The group is aiming to create opportunities for the Omani citizens to hone their skills in the tourism sector. "We aim to nurture and encourage local talents in the tourism sector, an area that holds great potential. It is an exciting prospect for us in the Akbar Group to see the expansion plans for Oman transcending beyond the conventional travel products."

The group, with a global network of 155 branches, and other network arrangements is India's largest travel agency in terms of

the number of IATA registered branches. In the Middle East, the group has its offices in the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, apart from those in Oman.

The group was started in 1978 by K V Abdul Nazar, and ever since the company has carved a niche for itself in the industry.

Santosh Cheriyan, the group vice president, said, "Being a market leader, the group is known for its best practices in the industry. In a short span of five years in Oman, the group has emerged as one of the leading players in the travel sector in the sultanate."

Cheriyan claimed that the company is providing jobs and training opportunities to the Omani workforce in the travel industry. "The recruitment is backed by in-house training so as to equip them with the necessary skill-sets to further their personal growth in the industry and enhance their contribution to the nation's economic growth."

Akbar Group's services extend across the travel spectrum encompassing online and offline ticketing for corporate and individuals with a robust Ecom platform.

EA to set up nurseries in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) is calling for retender to establish two nurseries for wild saplings in Musandam to increase the green cover.

A statement issued by EA said, "As part of the national initiative that started in 2020 to plant 10mn wild trees in ten years, the authority is re-offering a tender to establish two nurseries, one in the wilayat of Khasab and the other in the wilayat of Dibba in Musandam governorate."

The deadline for submitting bids is October 23.

Besides increasing the number of wild trees and green



cover, the authority hopes to raise awareness on the importance of preserving indigenous species of trees among the community members through this project.

In January 2020, EA, in co-operation with Petroleum Development Oman, launched an

initiative to plant 10mn wild trees in the next ten years. The wild tree species include ghaf, sumr, sidr, shue, tiq, talh, mitan, sarh and alalan.

Under the initiative, EA is distributing seedlings of Omani wild trees among organisations and individuals in order to in-

crease the area of vegetation and combat desertification across all governorates.

Of the targeted 10mn wild trees, EA has already planted 4.75mn seeds of wild trees in different parts of the sultanate in close coordination with relevant authorities.

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70,000 wild trees to be planted in Dhofar

Salalah - The Environment Authority (EA) is pressing ahead with the 70,000 tree-planting drive in different wilayats of the Governorate of Dhofar. The project comes within the framework of the national initiative to plant 10mn wild trees.

Mohammed Salim al Hardan, Director General for Environment Conservation told ONA that the project includes planting trees in government-owned and private sites. Hardan added that 9,278 trees have already been planted in different areas in Dhofar.

The national initiative to plant 10mn wild trees aims to improve the green cover in depleted natural grazing areas.

ONA

Advertisorial



Donor gives RO400,000 for Al Jarda Health Centre

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Directorate General of Health Services in North Sharqiyah, signed a funding agreement for the establishment of Al Jarda Health Centre in Mudhaibi at a cost of RO400,000 on Wednesday.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs in the ministry, and Ishaq Khalifa al Rahbi on behalf of his father Khalifa Mohammed al Rahbi, who is funding the project.

H E Dr Fatima affirmed the significance of public-private partnerships in the interest of providing services for the public. She commended Khalifa's gesture to finance such a vital project.

"The signing of this agreement will promote development

Pact signed to support hearing impaired

Muscat - The Imam Jabir bin Zaid Waqf Foundation and Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired signed an agreement on Wednesday to provide devices to people with hearing disabilities.

The agreement aims to provide hearing devices to support needy students and patients.

The agreement was signed by Ismail al Sawafi, chairman of the Charity Committee at Imam Jabir bin Zaid Waqf Foundation, and Sultan bin Nasser al Amri, chairman of Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired.

"The signing of this agreement is in line with the objec-



tive of the foundation, which is to empower all members of society," said Sawafi.

On his part, Amri said, "The agreement supports the association's objectives to help

The signing of this agreement is in line with the objective of the foundation to empower all members of society

ISMAIL AL SAWAFI

persons with hearing disabilities in the sultanate, raising awareness of their issues and integrating them into society, promoting sign language, informing people with hearing

disabilities about their rights, engaging them in all social activities, helping them unleash their full potential, and enabling them to play their role towards their homeland."

and healthcare services in Mudhaibi."

Ishaq said his father is keen to

partner and cooperate with the government and non-governmental sectors for development

in the country, including health services.

The signing of the agreement

will facilitate health services in the villages surrounding Al Jarda, MoH stated.

Qurun fish farm to produce 4,600t of shrimp by 2023



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) announced on Monday that the Shrimp Aquaculture Project in Qurun, Jalan Bani Bu Hassan, South Sharqiyah, will produce 4,600 tonnes of shrimp annually by 2023.

Construction work of the project started in November 2018 and it was commissioned in November 2021. First commercial harvest from the project started in May 2022.

A statement issued by FDO said, "Spread over an area of 500 hectares, the project consists of

220 grow out ponds that will produce 4,600 tonnes of shrimp annually by 2023."

The farm grows Pacific White Shrimp, (*Litopenaeus vannamei*), using specific pathogen-free brood stocks imported from the United States.

The entire production operation is carried in a highly bio-secure and hygienic environment without the use of drugs, antibiotics or any chemical of public health concern. The shrimps, on attaining market size, are harvested mechanically, chilled to maintain the highest freshness and delivered to a pre-processing plant within 30 minutes.

REGIONAL WEATHER

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	42	29
Doha	39	29
Kuwait City	43	29
Manama	39	30
Riyadh	42	25

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.38am
Sunrise	5.53am
Duhr	12.07pm
Asr	3.34pm
Maghrib	6.16pm
Isha	7.27pm



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (33 / 2022)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding description	Document fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for Submission
1	BB/03/2022	Use of Muscat Municipality sites to hold events Accompanying for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022	25/- OMR	26/09/2022	26/09/2022	27/09/2022
2	BB/04/2022	Rental & Operating Muscat Municipality shops at Al Seeb (Specified for SMEs)	25/- OMR	11/10/2022	09/10/2022	13/10/2022

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate as per the following:

- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat	0423010702710024
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- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
- The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond will not be accepted.

Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and drop in the box located in Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om)
- 10:00 AM on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 08:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-210/2022	Maintenance Work at Tawi Atayr Hospital in Dhofar Governorate	22/September/2022	On Wednesday 12/October/2022	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Second Grade	R.O 25,000 Per set
MOH/HQ-211/2022	Maintenance Work at Various Health Establishments in North Al Batinah Governorate	29/September/2022		Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	
MOH/HQ-213/2022	Replacement of Tomography Computed System at Al Nahdah Hospital	22/September/2022		Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	
MOH/HQ-214/2022	Provision of Cleaning, Laundry and Pest Control Services for Local Hospitals in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate	18/September/2022	On Thursday 29/September/2022		R.O 30,900 Per set
MOH/HQ-216/2022	Supply of Pharmaceutical for the Royal Hospital				R.O 27,500 Per set

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

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MARKET WATCH
MSX30 4,489.97
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FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian	206.60
Pakistan	611.92
Bangladesh	270.39
Philippines	148.38
Sri Lanka	949.41

*Rates as on September 14
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US budget deficit stands at \$200bn in August

The US federal budget deficit stood at approximately US\$200bn in August, according to official figures released on Wednesday.

Total receipts were US\$304bn against outlays of US\$523bn, the Treasury Department data showed as reported by agencies.

As for receipts, individual income taxes were US\$141bn, while social insurance and retirement came in at US\$123bn.

For outlays, social security was US\$104bn, while health was US\$78bn, the data showed.

The total deficit reached almost US\$946bn since the beginning of the 2022 fiscal year on October 1.

For fiscal year 2022, total receipts were US\$4.41tn against outlays of approximately US\$5.35tn, according to the figures.

The total deficit reached almost US\$946bn since the beginning of this year, the Treasury Department data showed.

Petrofac, OHC to develop green hydrogen capabilities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petrofac, the UK-based leading provider of services to the global energy industry, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Oman Hydrogen Centre (OHC) to collaborate in building capabilities for Oman's renewable energy sector, particularly in green hydrogen.

Located at the German University of Technology (GUtech), OHC is the first research facility of its kind in the sultanate, supporting the country in accelerating its transition to renewable energy. The centre provides an international hub for research, technology, education, industry applications and economy, aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Petrofac has a growing track record in supporting new energy projects across a wide range of technologies and has recently completed front-end engineering design (FEED) for large-scale green hydrogen productions facilities, as well as numerous studies for small-scale industrial users across the world.

According to a press statement, Petrofac will provide technical expertise, leveraging their extensive experience in designing, managing and executing complex projects, and building capacity through knowledge transfer.

The Petrofac-OHC partnership will bring considerable benefits to the efficient



implementation of green hydrogen projects and help accelerate Oman's energy transition. As well as providing expertise and supporting growth of the hydrogen sector, the collaboration is structured around the development of Omani talent.

The Takatuf Petrofac Oman (TPO) training centre will also provide access to educational resources, technical training and hands-on learning to skill up students from its base in Knowledge Oasis Muscat.

Dr Khalid al Jahwari, Petrofac's country manager for Oman, said, "To meet the global energy demand, while achieving energy efficiency targets, industry is looking at every potential technology.

Green hydrogen provides an opportunity to help accelerate the energy transition in Oman

through the decarbonisation of many parts of our industries. Our partnership with OHC is designed to meet the needs of new complex energy assets, with the focus on engineering excellence and an ever-more skilled workforce. With our combined knowledge, experience and capabilities, we are here to support this transition."

Dr Sausan al Riyami, director of Oman Hydrogen Centre, said, "Remarkable efforts from governmental units, industries, and scientists take place towards accelerating the energy transition and green economy. Our cooperation with Petrofac is aiming to develop certain studies regarding renewable energies and green hydrogen economy by focusing on technical training that includes a hands-on operation session. This will enable the building

of our Omani talents in energy sector."

Petrofac has been supporting the sultanate's energy industries since 1988 to design, build, operate, and maintain facilities, as well as developing local workforce competence and generating in-country value.

Asyad Group on Monday also signed an MoU with Oman Hydrogen Centre to study the potential of Oman's ports and logistics services in shaping the nation's green hydrogen economy.

Asyad Group's agreement with OHC includes conducting in-depth research and analysis against global best practices to enhance the efficiency of Asyad's ports and logistics operations as well the competencies and human resources required to cater for this clean energy sector.



National Gas sells its India investment for \$15.6mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

National Gas Company, the pioneer in liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) marketing in Oman and the region, announced that it has fully completed the divestment of its entire 60 per cent stake in the Indian project.

Earlier this year, the board of directors of National Gas had resolved to dispose the company's investment in subsidiary NGC Energy India Pvt Ltd and classified the investment as assets held for sale.

"Total sales proceeds of this transaction is US\$15.61mn, which includes a premium of US\$3.5mn. The profits resulting out of the transaction as disclosed would be accounted for the current quarter," National Gas said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Wednesday.

The company intends to use the proceeds from this divestment to bring down its loan exposures, consolidate and strengthen its balance sheet for future expansion and growth

purposes.

"We thank the acquirer of our shares Petregaz India Holdings for a smooth takeover and support for the closure of the transaction in a prompt way," National Gas added in the disclosure.

In March, National Gas had informed its shareholders that due to the pandemic effects and substantial escalation in the steel prices and construction costs, it is envisaged that the India LPG terminal project cost could escalate. 'In shareholders' interest, the company has been in negotiations for the divestment of its entire 60 per cent share in India project,' Nationa Gas had said in March.

National Gas had formed its India subsidiary, NGC Energy India Pvt Ltd, in 2018 for setting up a refrigerated LPG storage and import terminal at Krishnapatnam port in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. In November 2019, the company onboarded Petredec India Holdings Pte Ltd (Singapore) as a joint venture partner by issuing additional equity shares to make them 40 per cent partner in NGC Energy India Pvt Ltd.

OPEC keeps global oil demand forecast unchanged for 2023

Ankara, Turkey - The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) estimated that the global oil demand would remain unchanged from its report last month at 102.7mn barrels per day (bpd) in 2023, according to OPEC's latest monthly oil market report.

This forecast marks a rise of 2.7mn bpd compared to 2022 as global oil demand remains unchanged from last month's forecast at 100mn bpd.

According to the report, gas-to-oil substitution for power generation and industrial consumption in OECD Europe and Asia represents an important component of the demand outlook for the year.

In the non-OECD region, oil demand for the year is expected to rise by 1.5mn bpd to 53.7mn bpd.

A steady increase in industrial and transportation fuel demand, supported by a recovery in economic activity and the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in China, is projected to boost demand in 2022.

In the OECD, oil demand is forecast to rise by 600,000 bpd, with OECD Americas expected to climb firmly and with US oil demand above 2019 levels mainly due to the recovery in transportation fuels and light distillate demand.

OECD Europe and the Asia Pacific region will also see rises above 2019 consumption levels.

OPEC expects solid economic performance in major consuming countries, potential improvements in COVID-19 restrictions and reduced geopolitical uncertainties will support oil demand next year.

As per OPEC report, global oil supply in August increased by



China lockdowns weigh on oil demand: IEA

Paris, France - China's repeated Covid lockdowns and a slow-down in developed economies are weighing on the growth of global oil demand this year, the International Energy Agency said Wednesday.

The deceleration of demand for crude is partly offset by a switch from gas to oil for power generation, as soaring gas prices have prompted countries to change fuels, said the IEA. Global oil demand is now expected to grow by two million barrels per day (bpd) this

year, slightly down from the previous forecast of 2.1mn bpd.

Total demand is projected to reach 99.7mn bpd in 2022 before returning to pre-Covid levels next year, at 101.8mn bpd, if China reopens to the world, said the Paris-based agency, which advises developed countries on energy policy.

"A deteriorating economic environment and recurring Covid lockdowns in China continue to weigh on market sentiment," the IEA said in its

monthly report on global oil demand.

China is the world's biggest importer of crude, so a slower economic activity there affects global demand for the fossil fuel.

Meanwhile, Russian oil production and exports "have proved resilient", with August levels only 400,000-450,000 bpd under pre-war levels, the IEA said, despite Western sanctions against the country over the Ukraine conflict.

AAP

around 1.3mn bpd compared to the previous month to an average of 101.3mn bpd.

OPEC crude oil production averaged 29.6mn bpd in August for a month-on-month increase of about 618,000 bpd.

Crude oil output increased mainly in Libya and Saudi Arabia, while production in Nigeria declined.

The share of OPEC crude oil in total global production increased by 29.3 per cent, or 200,000 bpd, in August compared to the previous month.

During this period, OPEC natural gas liquids were recorded as 5.4mn bpd, while non-OPEC production rose month-on-

month by around 700,000 bpd to 71.6mn bpd in August.

OECD Americas and OECD Europe along with other Eurasian countries drove increased production in August, which saw a rise of 500,000 bpd, while production in Russia and some other countries declined.

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MUSCAT DAILY

EU plans to cut energy bills

Brussels, Belgium - The European Commission on Wednesday set out proposals to bring down the soaring price of gas and electricity in the EU, notably by taxing excess profits of power producers.

EU energy ministers are to review the plans in an extraordinary meeting in Brussels on September 30.

Levy on electricity producers

In the EU's electricity market, the price is based on the last source used to meet demand - often a gas-fired power plant - and that is applied to all electricity operators, regardless of whether they use nuclear, hydro-power, solar or other sources.

Wholesale energy prices thus soared together when the war in Ukraine sent the cost of gas skyrocketing.

The commission is calling for a "cap" on exceptional profits raked in by energy producers using cheaper sources but priced at the much higher market rate - effectively a tax, though it veers from calling it that because that would require unanimity by all 27 EU countries.

According to a commission draft seen by AFP, the cap would be set at 180 euros per megawatt hour, and anything above that would go to EU member states' coffers, to be shared out to struggling households and businesses. Coal and methane production is excluded. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the levy, or cap, would raise at least 140bn euros (US\$140bn).

Going further, she also called for a "deep and comprehensive



Ursula von der Leyen delivers a speech during a debate on 'The State of the European Union' as part of a European parliament plenary session in Strasbourg, France, on Wednesday (AFP)

reform" of the EU's energy market which would include decoupling the price of gas from electricity production from other sources.

The effects of the levy would vary from country to country in the EU. In France, where most electricity comes from nuclear plants and is sold via fixed-price contracts, much of the profit already goes to the government.

'Crisis contribution'

Brussels wants to impose a temporary "crisis contribution" on major oil, gas and coal companies that are pulling in big profits because of the global scramble for energy resources.

"Because we are in a fossil fuel crisis, the fossil fuel industry has a special duty, too," von der

Leyen said.

"In these times it is wrong to receive extraordinary record profits benefiting from war and on the back of consumers," she said. The commission draft envisages a 33 per cent levy on excess profits, defined as profits going more than 20 per cent beyond the average earned between 2019 and 2021.

The commission wants to place a requirement on EU countries to cut electricity consumption "by at least five per cent" during peak hour, when the price of electricity is at its highest.

Brussels calculates that this would reduce gas consumption for electricity in the bloc by 3.8 per cent.

It also wants the countries to

reduce monthly consumption by 10 per cent. It would be up to each EU country to decide how to meet those goals.

Acknowledging the precarity faced by energy suppliers facing liquidity problems because of price volatility, Brussels intends to loosen regulation and bring in anti-speculation mechanisms.

"We will amend the temporary state aid framework in October to allow for the provision of state guarantees, while preserving a level playing field," von der Leyen said.

Gas price ceiling?

The commission wants to slash the revenues Russia is earning from its gas exports and has floated the idea of putting a lid on how much the bloc will pay

for those supplies.

But some eastern EU countries highly dependent on Russian gas - and wary of President Vladimir Putin's warning that he would cut all supplies to any country imposing a price cap - are baulking.

The issue is still being negotiated, after some EU energy ministers last week suggested a ceiling on all gas imports into the bloc, including liquified natural gas (LNG).

The commission is eyeing more a cap on pipeline gas only, which would impact Russia, and avoid problems related to capping prices for LNG, which can be shipped anywhere around the globe, to where prices are highest.

AFP

Oil prices drop on rising prospect of US interest rate hike

Ankara, Turkey - Oil prices slipped on Wednesday following an increase in US consumer prices in August, raising the prospects of a sizable interest rate hike at the Fed meeting next week.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$92.95 per barrel for a 0.23 per cent decrease on Wednesday from the closing price of US\$93.17 a barrel in the previous trading session.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at US\$87.19 per barrel at the same time for a 0.14 per cent loss after the previous session closed at US\$87.31 a barrel.

Higher-than-expected inflation in the US triggered concerns that the Federal Reserve could make large-scale rate hikes that may push the dollar higher, putting downward pressure on prices. The rising value of the dollar discourages investors as it makes dollar-indexed oil prices more expensive for its buyers.

US Labor Department figures showed that the US annual consumer inflation amounted to 8.3 per cent in August, much higher than the 8.1 per cent estimated increase. High inflation triggered fears that the Fed could make an interest rate hike of 100 basis points next week. This probability climbed to as high as 24 per cent on Tuesday, according to the FedWatch Tool provided by US-based global markets company Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) Group.

A more hawkish Fed move could lower the value of the euro against the dollar, which is hovering around its lowest level in



two decades.

Both oil benchmarks rose slightly during previous trade, with Brent hitting US\$95.49 a barrel over reports that the US would consider buying oil for its Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) at US\$80 a barrel.

According to data released by the US Department of Energy on Monday, emergency crude oil stocks in the country dropped by 8.4mn barrels last week to reach 434.1mn barrels, its lowest level since October 1984.

This drawdown was the highest from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) since May, with the batch including roughly 6.3mn barrels of sweet petroleum and about 2mn barrels of sour crude.

The stock withdrawal was in line with US President Joe Biden's pledge in March to release 1mn barrels per day over six months from the SPR to fight high fuel prices in the country.

Late Tuesday, the American Petroleum Institute (API) also announced its estimate of a rise of over 6mn barrels in US crude oil inventories, relative to the market expectation of a 200,000-barrel fall.

Anadolu Agency

US wholesale prices dip in August as energy costs fall

Washington, US - Another sharp falloff in energy costs in August led to a small dip in US wholesale prices, but official data Wednesday showed ongoing price pressures in the pipeline.

Coming a day after the shock consumer price report, the modest 0.1 per cent decline in the producer price index seem to offer some small relief to American families struggling with soaring prices this year.

Consumers have seen improvement at the gas pump in recent weeks, and the 6.0 per cent plunge in wholesale energy costs in August was the key driver, helping to slow the annual pace of PPI inflation by nearly a full percentage point to 8.7 per cent, according to the

Labor Department report.

But when the volatile food and energy components are stripped out of the calculation, PPI rose 0.2 per cent compared to July and the annual rate eased just slightly to 5.6 per cent from 5.8 per cent in the prior month.

"While a move in the right direction, producer costs continue to rise at a rapid pace, well above target," said Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics.

She and other economists said the dismal CPI report, which showed continued increases in prices for food, housing and medical care, confirmed the Federal Reserve will continue its aggressive moves to contain inflation pressures.

And the PPI data did nothing

to change the view the Fed next week will announce a third massive 0.75 point increase in the benchmark interest rate, with more rate hikes to follow, as it tries to combat the highest inflation in 40 years. However, the PPI report showed wholesale food prices were flat compared to the prior month, with items like chicken eggs declining.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said the figures were skewed to the upside by a technicality and underlying figures show relief is coming, even while it will not change the Fed's path.

"The message from this report is that disinflation is underway. It has much further to go," he said.

AFP

EU to ban products made using forced labour, risking China anger

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union said Wednesday it will ban products made from forced labour as China faces rising criticism that the Uyghur people in the Xinjiang region are being forced into slave labour.

The plan by Brussels does not specifically mention China, but will instead focus on all products made from forced labour - including those made within the bloc.

"This proposal will make a real difference in tackling modern-day slavery, which affects millions of people around the globe," said the EU's trade commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis.

"Our aim is to eliminate all products made with forced labour from the EU market, irrespective of where they have been made," he added.



Valdis Dombrovskis

The proposal will require the ratification by EU member states and the European Parliament before entering into force two years later.

The idea differs from an explicit ban by the United States on imports from Xinjiang that presumes products from the region involve forced labour and are therefore stopped at the border

unless businesses can prove otherwise.

Still, the EU proposal risks eliciting a strong reaction from Beijing if seen as linked to allegations of rights violations against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the far-western region.

Xinjiang is one of the world's largest producers of cotton and a key supplier of materials for solar panels. The EU plan will allow national customs authorities to launch investigations on products "for which there are well-founded suspicions that they have been made with forced labour", a statement said.

Investigators will be empowered to carry out checks and inspections, including in countries outside the European Union.

China has been accused for years of detaining more than one

million Uyghurs and other Muslims in the region. Beijing insists it is running vocational centres designed to curb extremism.

The European Union's diplomacy chief Josep Borrell earlier this month welcomed a damning United Nations report into China's crackdown on the Uyghur people in the Xinjiang region.

The Chinese government has condemned the report by the Office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as the work of a "thug and accomplice of the US and the West".

Another recent study by the UN's agencies for labour and migration along with the Walk Free Foundation found that at the end of last year, 28mn people around the world were in forced labour.

AFP

US inflation gloom casts dark shadow over markets

London, UK - Global equity markets sank further Wednesday as stronger-than-expected US inflation data sparked fears of a prolonged campaign of Federal Reserve interest rate hikes.

London was the heaviest faller in Europe after news that UK inflation slowed last month but held close to a 40-year high.

Asia tanked after Wall Street took its worst beating in weeks Tuesday on news of hot US inflation. US stocks opened to the upside, but then dipped into the red.

The dollar edged down in choppy trade, while oil prices climbed.

US inflation slowed slightly in August to 8.3 per cent on an annual measure, but this trumped market expectations of about

eight percent. Prices actually rose on a monthly comparison.

European markets are "caught up in the negative sentiment that has taken hold across global markets," said Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor.

"Hotter-than-expected US inflation figures prompted heavy selling on Wall Street," she added.

Global consumer prices have soared for months, exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine - which has hiked energy and food costs - as well as owing to supply chain strains and Covid lockdowns in China.

The Fed has already instituted two consecutive 75-basis-point hikes, and a third such move is



A pedestrian walks past a display showing for the Hang Seng Index in Hong Kong on Wednesday (AFP)

widely expected at its meeting next week.

After the latest US inflation data, some investors are even predicting the next Fed hike could be a full percentage point.

Aggressive rate tightening by central banks worldwide is denting economic activity as consumers and businesses face higher loan repayments.

Investors "still appear to be in a state of shock, trying to process how high the Fed will go with its policy rate and how low the economy and earnings growth will go as a result of the restrictive policy," said market analyst Patrick O'Hare at Briefing.com.

In the UK, inflation slowed to 9.9 per cent in August but re-

mained almost in double digits.

The news boosted the pound on hopes of another interest rate hike next week from the Bank of England.

"There has been a fresh bout of anxiety on financial markets amid worries that inflation is still proving to be a formidable opponent to take down," said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Susannah Streeter.

In Asia, Tokyo led the region's losses with the Nikkei plunging 2.8 per cent.

Hong Kong stocks closed down more than two per cent, with Chinese conglomerate Fosun hit hard by media reports that the group was under regulatory scrutiny.

AFP

Parmjot named Gulf Cluster Country Manager for Pfizer

Pfizer on Wednesday announced the appointment of Dr Parmjot Bains as Gulf Cluster Country Manager within its Emerging Markets business unit.

Dr Bains' experience spans more than 18 years in various fields with seven years heading several global roles at Pfizer. Previously, Dr Bains was the Regional Commercial Lead APAC for Pfizer's Hospital Business, where she worked cross-culturally with Pfizer's global teams across the US and Asia Pacific Region. In her new role, Dr Bains will oversee the Pfizer business in the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Yemen.

Commenting on her appointment, Dr Bains said, "It is an exciting time to be here and pursue our journey in the Gulf where Pfizer has been operating and serving patients' needs for over 40 years."

"I look forward to extending Pfizer's momentum, leading several ongoing projects and forging even closer partnerships and alliances with healthcare professionals, our distributors, communities, and governments that will change and impact the lives of millions of people across the Gulf countries," Dr Bains added.



'Darkverse' poses threat to Oman, MEA: Trend Micro

Trend Micro, a global leader in cybersecurity solutions, on Monday released a new report titled 'Metaverse or Metaworse? Cybersecurity Threats Against the Internet of Experiences', warning of a 'darkverse' of criminality hidden from law enforcement, which could quickly evolve to fuel a new industry of metaverse-related cybercrime. As per Trend Micro, the 'darkverse' will resemble a metaverse version of the dark web, enabling threat actors to coordinate and carry out illegal activities with impunity. Underground marketplaces operating in the 'darkverse' would be impossible for police to infiltrate without the correct authentication tokens.

Because users can only access a 'darkverse' world if they are inside a designated physical location, there is an additional level of protection for closed criminal communities. This could provide a haven for multiple threats to flourish - from financial fraud and e-commerce scams to NFT theft, ransomware, and more.

As per the report, cybercriminals might look to compromise the 'digital twin' spaces run by critical infrastructure operators, for sabotage or extortion of industrial systems.



Wasel Exchange sponsors event in Lulu to mark Onam

As part of the Muscat Onam celebrations, a porridge festival sponsored by Wasel Exchange was held at Lulu hypermarket in Ruwi High Street recently.

Payasa Mela, which was organised to hold a competition in porridge making for Onam, awarded Dr Ruksana Harsheed as the best porridge maker. Hairunisa Haidarali's preparation was adjudged the second, while Asha Rachel bagged the third prize for her preparation. Grills Founder and Secretary Chef Thomas Oommen, Lulu Oman Regional Chef Naseebul Khan and Chef Joseph Mathew graced the event as its judges.

After the competition, there was cultural programme that included a magic show, presentation of songs and dances as part of the Onam festival.

ahlibank ropes in Al Adrak to offer mortgage loans for Hai Al Naseem Housing



Aiming to provide financial solutions to help clients achieve the goal of owning a decent home that offers peace of mind and ensures their family's future, ahlbank has announced the signing of a new agreement with Al Adrak Contracting and Trading Company to provide attractive mortgage loans for customers aspiring to buy properties at the exclusive Hai Al Naseem Housing Project in Barka.

Described as an 'Urban Oasis', the prime property is a pilot initiative under the government's 'The Affordable Housing Project'.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution, ahlbank, and by Joseph Thampan - General Manager, Commercial and Mahmood Masoud al Ghafri - Director of HR & Administration from Al Adrak Contracting and Trading Company, at a formal ceremony held in the presence of officials from both parties.

Speaking on the sidelines of the signing ceremony, Balushi called it a decisive step in its endeavors to collaborate with the government in achieving national development goals.

"This significant agreement is a

huge affirmation of our commitment to uphold government initiatives and partner with relevant authorities to achieve the objectives of Oman's Vision 2040, which has social well-being as the main pillar. One of the Vision's key features is 'people and society'. Due to this, we have continually emphasized social responsibility programmes," Muneer al Balushi.

"It is an honour for ahlbank to be associated with a project of this stature. I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm our intent to facilitate a way forward to bridge gaps in realising the national development agenda. Through Hai Al Naseem, the pilot project in Barka under the government's 'The Affordable Housing Project' that was launched in 2017, we will, in cooperation with Adrak Developers, contribute to achieving the financial stability that the Omani citizen aspires, by providing adequate housing units," he added.

Reiterating similar sentiments, Corporate Communications Manager of Al Adrak Contracting and Trading Company, Muzna Sulaiman al Busaidi said, "We are happy to have ahlbank on board to provide an essential finan-

cial link to prospective customers. As the contracting arm of the consortium, our focus has been on creating a rare industry blend of turnkey solutions with complete in-house facilities, and this will prove to be a winning formula for ahlbank customers who have the opportunity and the solution on their hands. We have designed and built the housing unit to reflect a modern lifestyle, with facilities on par with global standards. And with Barka being a vibrant beachside city, homeowners are guaranteed safety and contentment at the 'Urban Oasis'."

The agreement aims to fulfill the homeownership goals of the bank's customers, by providing a new lease on lifestyle in Hai Al Naseem. ahlbank offers a mortgage loan - at attractive interest rates starting at 4.5 per cent per annum - before issuing the property to provide various housing alternatives to eligible citizens of residential lands. It will also mark a new phase in ahlbank's inspiring growth trajectory, as it demonstrates its flexibility in crafting financial solutions to fit the needs and aspirations of its varied clientele while partnering with the government in its development projects.

It is an honour for ahlbank to be associated with a project of this stature. I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm our intent to facilitate a way forward to bridge gaps in realising the national development agenda

MUNEER AL BALUSHI



Doha international airport opens Hamleys toy shop

Qatar Duty Free (QDF) is delighted to launch the finest toy shop in the world, Hamleys, to bring magic to Hamad International Airport (HIA). Families and youngsters are invited to step into a world where fairy tales come true, and a child's imagination runs free.

The Hamleys store at HIA features a wide range of toys, exclusive merchandise, and a magical experience. It also includes a selection of items from world-renowned brands such as Barbie and LOL dolls, plus all the classic family favourites.

In addition, the store will also have a selection of Hamley's original merchandise, renowned for its exceptional quality, such as the iconic Hamley bears. The store's vibrant red and white interior reflects the magical world of Hamleys and the signature fun, festiveness, magic, and theatre the brand represents.

The grand opening of the Hamleys boutique at Hamad International Airport was an exciting experience that included many activities for adults and children, such as a marching band, a clown magician, a balloon twister booth, and a photo booth.



In addition, guests were served branded Hamleys cookies and received gift bags with the store's best sellers. The famous Hamley bear and his friend Hattie Bear greeted passengers in the store and invited them to explore the fantastic and vibrant store.

Qatar Duty Free vice president Thabet Musleh said, "We are delighted to open the first Hamleys store alongside an extensive selection of launches coming soon at Hamad International Airport.

At Qatar Duty Free, we always focus on brands that offer our passengers a unique and exciting experience; and we look forward to welcoming families and children to build lasting memories of fun and joy at Hamleys; a globally recognised name and a welcomed addition to the World's Best Airport."

Hamleys CEO Sumeet Yadav said, "Hamleys has always been about offering magical experiences. In everything we do, we

hope for only one reward - a child's smile. And what better way to gift families unforgettable memories than at the Qatar Duty Free that's bustling with celebration at the cusp of the FIFA World Cup. Finding the perfect toy under the tree is now extra special with our updated store concept, designed to be perfectly insta-worthy. Presenting an atmosphere of interaction for young minds, this store includes Hamleys Room Of Wonders and

new periscopes that's sure to transport consumers to every part of the Hamleys universe."

Today Hamleys is more than a toy store, it's a toy emporium where children can play with their favourite toys and be marvelled by the live and interactive demonstrations of the many 20,000 toys on display.

Qatar's Hamad International Airport, in partnership with Qatar Duty Free, continues to look out for exclusive retail, hospitality and lifestyle experiences to match the needs of its millions of visitors - offering a unique opportunity for brands and businesses to connect with a truly global audience.

HIA's expansion will also further enhance the multi-dimensional offerings of the five-star airport by integrating art collections and lush greenery as well as hosting contemporary retail and dining concepts among other leisure attractions and facilities under one expansive world-class terminal.

As the Official Airport Partner for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, HIA is ready to create memorable experiences for travelling fans from across the globe.

Oman Air announces special discounts for travel from Europe

The national airline of the Sultanate of Oman is offering exclusive discounts on flights from Europe for the travellers to escape to warmer climes this winter with Oman Air.

Until September 19, those purchasing a business or economy class ticket from London, Frankfurt, Istanbul, Milan, Munich, Paris, Trabzon or Zurich can enjoy up to 20 per cent off. Choose from a wide selection of global destinations including Oman Air's hub, Muscat, which offers the perfect base to explore the natural beauty, rich heritage and warm and friendly culture of Oman.

Also, in anticipation of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the airline has announced a number of initiatives and promotions, including Match Day Shuttle flights between Muscat and Doha, and special stopover packages courtesy of Oman Air Holidays.

With seamless connections to Qatar for the year's most unmissable matches, football fans are presented with the perfect

chance to combine a historic sporting moment with the holiday of a lifetime.

Jamal al Azki, Oman Air's regional vice president - Europe, Middle East and Africa, said, "The winter is a peak season for travel, especially for our European guests seeking to escape the colder climates and go somewhere warm. As global travel continues to pick up, we wanted to offer our guests even more opportunities to go on their dream holiday. Our latest offer not only provides great value luxury travel but, coinciding with the FIFA World Cup, offers the perfect chance to stopover in Muscat and attend the matches in Doha, just an hour and a half away."

Combining exceptional value-for-money with the best hospitality, leisure and tourism experiences on offer, Oman Air Holidays unlocks unforgettable experiences at some of the world's most popular destinations. Every journey in Oman Air is enhanced by the airline's award-winning service.

Lebanese woman robs bank to ‘save ill-sister’

Another heist come as Lebanese depositors take matters into their own hands

Beirut, Lebanon - A Lebanese woman held up a Beirut bank on Wednesday and reportedly walked out with thousands of dollars to fund what she said was hospital treatment for her ill sister.

The move and another heist on Wednesday come as Lebanese depositors - whose savings have been devalued and trapped in banks for almost three years amid an economic collapse - take matters into their own hands.

Sali Hafiz streamed a live video of her raid on a Beirut branch of Blom Bank, in which she could be heard yelling at employees to release a sum of money while entrances to the bank were sealed.

"I am Sali Hafiz, I came today... to take the deposits of



Sali Hafiz (green shoes), is seen inside a bank in the Lebanese capital Beirut, after she stormed it demanding access to her sister’s deposits to allegedly pay for her hospital fees, on Wednesday (AFP)

my sister who is dying in the hospital," she said in the video.

"I did not come to kill anyone or to start a fire... I came to claim my rights."

In an interview with a local broadcaster after the heist, Hafiz said she managed to free

around US\$13,000 from the US\$20,000 she said her family had deposited.

Cancer treatment for her sister costs US\$50,000, she said.

An AFP correspondent at the scene said gasoline had been poured inside the bank during

I am Sali Hafiz, I came today... to take the deposits of my sister who is dying in the hospital. I did not come to kill anyone or to start a fire... I came to claim my rights

SALI HAFIZ

the heist, which lasted under an hour.

Hafiz told local media she had used her nephew’s toy pistol for the hold-up.

Hafiz and suspected accomplices managed to escape through a smashed window out the back of the bank before security forces arrived, the AFP correspondent said.

Also on Wednesday, a man held up a bank in the city of Aley northeast of Beirut, the official National News Agency (NNA) reported.

He was arrested, the NNA said, without specifying if he managed to take any money.

‘Thank you’

Hafiz is a 28-year-old activist and interior designer, her sister Zeina told AFP.

She said the family had not been in touch with Hafiz since the heist and was not involved in its planning.

Hafiz instantly turned into a folk hero on social media in Lebanon, where many are desperate to access their savings and furious at a banking sector perceived as a corrupt cartel.

Pictures and footage of her standing on a desk inside the bank carrying a gun went viral on social media.

"Thank you," one Twitter user wrote. "Two weeks ago I cried at Blom Bank. I needed the money for a surgery. I am too weak to hold a gun and take what is mine."

Last month, a man received widespread sympathy after he stormed a Beirut bank with a rifle and held employees and customers hostage for hours to demand some of his US\$200,000 in frozen savings to pay hospital bills for his sick father.

He was detained but swiftly released.

In January, a bank customer held dozens of people hostage in eastern Lebanon after he was told he could not withdraw his foreign currency savings, a source at the lender said.

Local media reported that the customer was eventually given some of his savings and surrendered to security forces.

Lebanon has been battered by its worst-ever economic crisis since 2019.

The local currency has lost more than 90 per cent of its value on the black market, while poverty and unemployment have soared.

AFP

Israel soldier, two Palestinians killed in pre-dawn clashes in West Bank

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - An Israeli soldier and two Palestinians were killed in pre-dawn clashes on Wednesday near Jenin in the occupied West Bank, an area hit by waves of recent deadly unrest.

Israel’s army said a major ‘was killed overnight during operational activity adjacent to the Gilboa Crossing during an exchange of fire with Palestinian terrorists’.

The Palestinian health ministry confirmed ‘the martyrdom of the two young men’ in clashes near the checkpoint, which is known to Palestinians as Jalameh, north of the militant stronghold of Jenin.

The Palestinians killed were named as Ahmed Ayman Ibrahim Abed, 23, and Abdul Rahman Hani Subhi Abed, 22, originally from the village of Kufr Dan outside Jenin, by the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

A Palestinian security source confirmed to AFP that Ahmed Abed was a serving intelligence officer of the Palestinian security services in the West Bank city of Qalqilya.



Palestinian fighters and civilians march in the village of Kafr Dan, to show solidarity with the families of two Palestinians killed in overnight clashes with Israeli security forces, on Wednesday (AFP)

The Israeli army named the slain soldier as Major Bar Falah, 30, from Netanya.

Prime Minister Yair Lapid hailed him as ‘a dedicated soldier who fought terror and led his troops until his last hour’.

“The operation in which he was killed thwarted a major terrorist attack and saved lives,” he said in a statement.

Israel’s armed forces chief Lieutenant General Aviv Kohavi extended ‘his deepest, deepest

condolences’ to the slain soldier’s family and girlfriend, adding that ‘we will embrace them’.

The Palestinian armed groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad both lauded the Israeli soldier’s death, but neither confirmed that its fighters were involved in the gun battle. A Hamas spokesperson praised the ‘heroic operation that was carried out by the resistance fighters’.

The army said the overnight

clash came after it had pursued ‘two suspects’ who were spotted ‘approximately 100 metres from the fence’.

“At approximately 2:15am, when the troops were just a few metres from (the suspects)... the suspects engaged fired,” said a spokesman.

The Jalameh checkpoint is a major thoroughfare for goods coming into the West Bank from Israel.

AFP

Iran wants closer ties with UAE, says foreign minister

Tehran, Iran - Iran’s top diplomat said on Wednesday his country wants to boost relations with the United Arab Emirates, welcoming an Emirati ambassador back to Tehran after a six-year absence.

The UAE and other Gulf states had scaled back their ties with the Islamic republic in 2016 after Iranian protesters attacked Saudi Arabia’s diplomatic missions in Iran following Riyadh’s execution of prominent Shiite Muslim cleric Nimr al-Nimr.

“We would like to broaden our relations with our neighbours, including the United Arab Emirates,” Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told the new Emirati ambassador, Saif Mohammed al-Zaabi, when they met on Tuesday, according to an official statement released early on Wednesday.

Despite the diplomatic downgrade, the oil-rich UAE has maintained strong economic ties with the Islamic republic.

In 2020, the UAE established diplomatic relations with Israel, a move which Tehran condemned.



Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian (right) welcoming UAE ambassador Saif Mohammed al-Zaabi in Tehran on Tuesday (AFP)

But Abu Dhabi has been pursuing a policy of rapprochement with former regional rivals including Qatar, Turkey and Iran.

Amir-Abdollahian ‘also stressed the need for the region’s countries to cooperate for the sake of regional stability’, according to the ministry’s statement.

In July, the UAE said it was considering sending an ambassador back to Tehran with the

aim of ‘boosting bilateral ties’, state media reported at the time.

Iran said last month that Kuwait had sent its first ambassador to Tehran since 2016.

Two Middle Eastern powerhouses, Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia have both expressed willingness to overcome their disputes and were engaged in bilateral talks, which were first made public in April 2021.

AFP

Philippines to lift ban on deploying domestic workers to Saudi Arabia

Manila, Philippines - The Philippines will lift a ban on deploying domestic workers to Saudi Arabia and resume it in November after Riyadh agreed to boost protective measures for Filipino migrants, officials said.

Manila had halted the sending of household workers last November to Saudi Arabia - a popular destination for Filipinos working abroad - after reports emerged of abuse and unpaid wages.

Deployment will resume on November 7, a decision that comes after talks between the Philippines’ migrant workers department and Saudi’s human resource ministry.

The agencies vowed to ‘work closely together to fa-

cilitate the decent and productive employment’ of Filipino workers and ensure ‘protection of their rights’, a joint statement issued late on Tuesday said.

Among other things, workers will be allowed to quit before the end of their contracts if their employer is abusive, and insurance coverage will be provided for unpaid wages.

“Any acts of violence, any acts of immorality, those are grounds for pre-termination,” Philippine migrant workers secretary Susan Ople said in a briefing.

The Saudi government did not respond to a request for comment.

AFP

Zelensky vows ‘victory’ on frontline visit to Kharkiv

Kharkiv region, Ukraine - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday promised ‘victory’ on a visit to the strategic city of Izyum that was recently recaptured from Russia by Kyiv’s army in a lightning counter-offensive.

The visit comes at a decisive moment in Russia’s six-month invasion, with Ukraine routing Moscow’s forces from swathes of the east and seriously undermining the Kremlin’s ambitions to capture the entire Donbas region of Ukraine.

“Our blue-yellow flag is already flying in deoccupied Izyum. And it will be so in every Ukrainian city and village,” Zelensky said in a statement on social media. “We are moving in only one direction - forward and towards victory.”

Pictures distributed by his office showed the Ukrainian leader wearing dark-green and flanked by guards as he took selfies with



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (centre) walking during his visit to the de-occupied city of Izyum, Kharkiv region on Wednesday (AFP)

soldiers and thanked troops at a flag-rising ceremony.

Ukraine has claimed sweeping successes in the northeastern Kharkiv region that borders Russia in recent days and also says it has clawed back territory along a

southern front near the Kherson region on the Black Sea.

Zelensky said on Wednesday that Russia’s occupation of Crimea - annexed by Russia in 2014 - was a ‘tragedy’ and promised that his forces would even-

tually recapture the peninsula.

Kyiv says that since the beginning of September its forces have retaken hundreds of villages, towns and cities that were captured by Russian forces that invaded Ukraine on February 24.

‘They killed my son’

In the recaptured eastern Ukrainian village of Bogorodychne, 58-year-old Mykola told AFP he had ‘barely survived’ the Russian occupation during which his brother was killed.

“How can I describe it in words? It was difficult. I was afraid,” he said.

Wiping tears from her eyes with a veil, Mykola’s mother Nina said: “I cry every day. They killed my son.”

Moscow said its forces were hitting back on areas recaptured in Kharkiv with ‘massive strikes,’ claiming - without providing evidence - to have inflicted losses on Ukrainian military hardware and servicemen.

In a battlefield update on Wednesday, Russia also claimed to have captured dozens of Ukrainian servicemen in the southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions.

AFP

Armenia, Azerbaijan peace process in peril

Both the countries accused each other of violating a truce, after fierce border fighting

Yerevan, Armenia - Armenia and Azerbaijan on Wednesday accused each other of violating a truce, after the worst clashes since a 2020 war put in doubt a halting peace process between the arch foes.

Russia announced on Tuesday that it had negotiated a ceasefire following fighting that killed at least 100 Azerbaijani and Armenian troops.

But on Wednesday, Armenia's defence ministry said 'the enemy re-launched its attack by using artillery, mortar, large-calibre firearms in the directions of Jermuk, Verin Shorzha' on the border.

"Despite a clear reaction from the international community over the situation, in fact Azerbaijan's military-political leadership continues its acts of aggression against the sovereign territory of Armenia, targeting both military and civilian infrastructure," Wednesday's statement said.

The Azerbaijani defence ministry said Armenian forces 'violated the ceasefire... and shelled Azerbaijani positions near Kelbajar and Lachin with mortars and artillery'.

Tuesday's escalation came as Yerevan's closest ally Moscow is distracted by its six-month-old



Relatives of servicemen, who were wounded in night border clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, gather outside a military hospital in Yerevan on Tuesday (AFP)

war against Ukraine.

Peace efforts 'undone'

The Ukraine conflict changed the balance of force in the region as Russia - which deployed thousands of peacekeepers in the region after the 2020 war - is increasingly isolated.

The European Union has since

led the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalisation process, which involves peace talks, border delimitation and the reopening of transport links.

Analyst Gela Vasadze of the Georgian Strategic Analysis Centre said the latest escalation 'has undone EU-led efforts to bring Baku and Yerevan closer to a peace deal'.

"Brussels agreements are now practically nullified," he said, adding that the clashes 'have further radicalised public opinion in both countries'.

During EU-mediated talks in Brussels in May and April, Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev and Armenia's Nikol Pashinyan agreed to 'advance discussions' on a future peace treaty.

Despite a clear reaction from the international community over the situation, Azerbaijan continues its acts of aggression against Armenia, targeting both military and civilian infrastructure

ARMENIA'S DEFENCE MINISTRY

In Yerevan, emotions ran high among relatives of wounded Armenian servicemen, as they gathered outside a military hospital on Tuesday night. "We must fight for our lands, for our homeland and for our country. Victory will be ours, if not today, then tomorrow. We are unbreakable," one of the relatives, Sokrat Khachatryan, 65, told AFP.

Economist Arman Mkhitaryan said that 'a new war was to be expected of course, seeing the accumulation of the Azerbaijani (military at the border)'.

"The capabilities and the potential of the current (Armenian)

government are not enough to take on today's challenges."

'Neither war, nor peace'

On Tuesday, Armenia appealed to world leaders for help over the latest fighting.

The European Union, United States, France, Russia, Iran, and Turkey all expressed concern over the escalation and called for an end to fighting.

The neighbours fought two wars - in the 1990s and in 2020 - over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan's Armenian-populated enclave.

The six weeks of fighting in autumn 2020 claimed the lives of more than 6,500 troops from both sides and ended with a Russian-brokered ceasefire.

Under the deal, Armenia ceded swathes of territory it had controlled for decades and Moscow deployed about 2,000 Russian peacekeepers to oversee the fragile truce, which analyst Vasadze called 'neither war, nor peace'.

Ethnic Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh broke away from Azerbaijan when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. The ensuing conflict claimed around 30,000 lives.

AFP

Shooting at Thai military facility: Two dead

Bangkok, Thailand - A Thai soldier killed two people and wounded one other in a shooting at a military facility in Bangkok on Wednesday, police and army officials said.

Sergeant Major Yongyuth Mungkornkim, a clerk at the Royal Thai Army War College, shot three other soldiers around 8:45am (0145 GMT), the military said in a statement.

The 59-year-old tried to flee the scene but surrendered himself around 10 am, deputy national police spokesman Kissana Phathanacharoen told reporters.

"The army would like to offer condolences to the families of the deceased soldiers and the wounded. This incident was a loss for both the families and organisation. It is something that wasn't expected to happen," deputy army spokesperson Senior Colonel Sirichan Nga-thong said in a statement.

"The cause and motivation for the incident is under investigation."

In the aftermath of the shooting, police officers and soldiers guarded the gates of the facility, part of a large complex of military buildings in the north of the capital. The military statement named the victims as Sergeant Major Nopparat Inthasunthorn and Sergeant Major Prakarn Sinsong.

The third soldier, Sergeant Major Yongyuth Panyanuwat, was taken to hospital for treatment, the statement said.

Acting Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan told reporters that police were investigating but it was too early to be sure of the shooter's motives. The suspect's mental health is being assessed as part of the probe, police said.

AFP



Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (AFP)

Health groups call for non-proliferation treaty on fossil fuel

Paris, France - Around 200 health organisations and more than 1,400 health professionals on Wednesday called for governments to establish a binding international treaty on phasing out fossil fuels, which they said pose 'a grave and escalating threat to human health'.

A letter proposing the 'fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty' said it could work similarly to the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control - except this time the harmful controlled substances would be coal, oil and gas. The WHO was among the health organisations from around the world who signed the letter.

"The modern addiction to fossil fuels is not just an act of environmental vandalism. From the health perspective, it is an act of self-sabotage," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement.

The letter called on national governments to develop and implement a legally binding mechanism that would immediately stop all future fossil fuel expansion, as well as phasing out existing production.

It emphasised that the transition should be carried out in 'a fair and equitable manner', and that high-income countries should support lower-income nations to ensure the change 'reduces poverty rather than exacerbating it'. Air pollution, mostly

from burning fossil fuels, has been linked to the deaths of seven million people a year.

Climate change has also spurred more frequent and severe extreme weather events, which can have a lasting impact on health even beyond those initially affected by the disasters, including smoke from wildfires and diseases spread after floods.

The letter also pointed to the heightened health risks faced by the workers who extract, refine, transport and distribute fossil fuels and related products.

Phasing out fossil fuels would prevent 3.6mn deaths a year from air pollution alone, the letter said, adding that 'the same cannot be said for proposed false solutions, such as carbon capture and storage'.

Either fossil fuels or health

Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, the head of the WHO's climate change unit, said that 'from a health point of view, you can't fix a disease without calling out what is causing it'. The call for a treaty was important because it did not 'try to use false accounting or imaginary solutions to continue to prop up the burning of fossil fuels', he told AFP.

"We can either have fossil fuels or we can have health - we can't have both."

AFP

Thai court to decide PM's fate in two weeks

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand's Constitutional Court said on Wednesday it will rule on September 30 whether suspended prime minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha should be thrown out of office permanently.

The former army chief, who came to power in a 2014 military coup, was suspended last month while the court examined a legal challenge arguing he has reached his term limit as premier.

Under the 2017 Thai constitution, a prime minister cannot serve more than eight years in office, but there are question marks over when Prayut's term began.

The court said in a statement that it will issue its verdict on



Prayut Chan-O-Cha (AFP)

September 30 at 3pm (0800 GMT).

"The Constitutional Court

deliberates that the case is a legal issue and there is sufficient evidence to rule," the statement said.

Prayut's deputy Prawit Wongsuwan has taken over as caretaker prime minister, while Prayut continues to serve as defence minister.

Prayut launched the coup that ousted Yingluck Shinawatra's democratically elected government, and led a junta regime before retaining the prime ministerial post after elections in 2019.

Supporters of the 68-year-old leader argue the clock on his term began when the 2017 constitution came into law, or even after the 2019 general election.

If the court agrees, Prayut

could technically continue to serve until 2025 or 2027 - if he wins a general election due by March.

But Prayut is increasingly out of favour with voters and under his watch the kingdom registered its worst economic performance in three decades.

Student-led pro-democracy protests in Bangkok in 2020 attracted tens of thousands of people at their peak and a key demand of the movement was for Prayut to resign.

Thailand is under pressure to end the uncertainty over its leadership before world leaders arrive in Bangkok for an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in November.

AFP

Taiwan beauty queen barred from waving flag in Malaysia

Taipei, Taiwan - Taipei accused China on Wednesday of pressuring organisers of a Malaysian trade event into barring a Taiwanese beauty queen waving the island's flag on stage.

Miss Taiwan Kao Man-jung was photographed crying as other contestants in a beauty pageant appeared on stage during Tuesday's opening ceremony of the 2022 World Congress on Innovation and Technology (WCIT), according to Taiwanese authorities.

"China pressured the Malaysian organisers to ban Miss Kao from holding our national flag on stage," Taiwan's foreign ministry said, adding that it had instructed its representative office in Malaysia to lodge a formal complaint with the organisers. Beijing regards the self-ruled democratic island as part of its territory.

It bristles at any international recognition of Taiwan and often reacts with anger over the display of its flag at international events or by foreign celebrities.

AFP

Do not use religion as prop for power: Pope

Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan - Religion should not be used as a prop for power, Pope Francis told an inter-faith meeting in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan on Wednesday.

"May we never justify violence. May we never allow the sacred to be exploited by the profane. The sacred must never be a prop for power, nor power a prop for the sacred," he said.

Francis spoke a day after appealing for peace and an end to the 'senseless and tragic war' in Ukraine.

A simultaneous visit to the country by Chinese leader Xi Jinping has led to speculation of a possible historic meeting.

"Mindful of the wrongs and errors of the past, let us unite our efforts to ensure that the Almighty will never again be held hostage to the human thirst for power," Francis said.

"Let us free ourselves of those reductive and destructive notions that offend the name of God by harshness, extremism and forms of fundamentalism, and profane it through hatred, fanaticism, and terrorism," he said.

"Let us commit ourselves, then, even more to insisting on the need for resolving conflicts not by the inconclusive means of power, with arms and threats, but by the only means blessed by heaven and worthy of man: en-



Pope Francis, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and religious leaders participating in the VII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Nur-Sultan on Wednesday (AFP)

May we never justify violence. May we never allow the sacred to be exploited by the profane

POPE FRANCIS

counter, dialogue and patient negotiations," he said.

The 85-year-old Argentine

pope, who is forced by knee pain to use a wheelchair and has admitted he must slow down or consider retirement, is on his 38th trip abroad since becoming pontiff in 2013.

Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, was initially expected but has pulled out of the September 14-15 event, dashing hopes of a meeting with Francis over the Ukraine conflict.

While the pope has called for peace and denounced a 'cruel

and senseless war', Kirill has defended Putin's 'military operation' and the fight against Russia's 'external and internal enemies'.

About 100 delegations from 50 countries are expected to take part in the event in Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic that gained independence in 1991.

Francis is the second pope to visit Kazakhstan after John Paul II's trip in September 2001.

AFP

INDIA

'Congress chhodo yatra': 8 Goa MLAs join BJP

Panaji, India - In a huge embarrassment to the Congress in the middle of 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' being led by Rahul Gandhi, eight of the party's 11 MLAs in the Goa legislative assembly have joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), leaving the opposition Congress with just three members in the House of 40.

The eight MLAs - who cannot be disqualified under the anti-defection law due to their required majority - included former chief minister Digambar Kamat and Leader of Opposition Michael Lobo, who met with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant at the Assembly Complex on Wednesday.

"Today, Congress MLAs have merged with the BJP. The process will be completed. The MLAs, including Digambar Kamat, Micheal Lobo and those who have come with them, have come keeping in mind the vision of PM Narendra Modi to create a new India and for the development of Goa," Sawant told reporters after the meeting. "They have joined the gov-



Goa CM Pramod Sawant meets up with eight Congress MLAs including Digambar Kamat, Michael Lobo, Delilah Lobo, Rajesh Phaladesai, Kedar Naik, Sankalp Amonkar, Aleixo Sequeira and Rudolf Fernandes, who are joining Bharatiya Janata Party, in Panaji on Wednesday (ANI)

ernment and supported us. I welcome them. This will prove to be a historic decision in the development of Goa," he added.

Other legislators who joined BJP included Lobo's wife Delilah

Lobo, Rajesh Phaladesai, Kedar Naik, Sankalp Amonkar, Aleixo Sequeira and Rudolf Fernandes.

"It is Congress chhodo (quit Congress), BJP ko jodo (Join BJP)," said Michael Lobo as the

MLAs announced their defection to the BJP which is seen as yet another 'Operation Lotus', named after the BJP's poll symbol.

Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Min-

ister and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal put the blame on Congress for not being able to prevent such defections by the party legislators. "BJP is buying MLAs, spending crores of ru-

pees, across the country in the name of Operation Lotus, which is wrong. But the fault is also that of Congress," he said.

"They could not woo our MLAs in Delhi or Punjab because we expose them, but the Congress has failed to save its MLAs," he added.

The latest development came amid the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi-led 'Bharat Jodo Yatra', which is being held to combat the BJP-led Centre and to awaken the country's people to 'the dangers of economic inequalities, social polarisation, and political centralisation'.

Earlier this month, Gujarat Youth Congress President Vishwanathsinh Vaghela resigned from his post, which was considered to be a major jolt to the party, which was preceded by the resignation by party leader Rajinder Prasad from all posts and from the primary membership of the party.

The exit of veteran leader Ghulam Nabi Azad from the Congress, months before the upcoming Gujarat and Hi-

machal Pradesh Assembly polls, as well as the general elections in two years' time, also dealt a huge blow to the party.

On August 24, Jaiveer Shergill, who is a lawyer by profession and one of the prominent among young Congress leaders, tendered his resignation claiming that the vision of the decision-makers no longer was in sync with the aspirations of the youth.

Earlier this year in May, senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal, a prominent face of the G-23 group of dissenting leaders, resigned from the party and filed nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha elections as an independent candidate backed by the Samajwadi Party (SP).

Former Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar too parted ways with the Congress in May this year, while former Union Law Minister Ashwani Kumar, in February, also resigned from Congress after a long association of 46 years with the party. ANI

'India, France to work for Indo-Pacific cooperation'

New Delhi, India - External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday said that India and France agreed to work towards the establishment of Indo-Pacific trilateral development cooperation.

Addressing a press conference along with his French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna in New Delhi, Jaishankar said that the Indo-Pacific trilateral is expected to provide a platform for Indian innovations and startups to demonstrate their relevance to the requirements of other societies. "The French have a long-standing presence on either extremity of the Indo-Pacific. Hearing Minister Colonna's views and assessments of those regions was truly of great value. We agreed to establish Indo-Pacific trilateral development cooperation that would facilitate development projects, especially in the framework of the International Solar Alliance," Jaishankar said.

"One reflection of the expanding comfort between India and France is the interest in cre-



French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna meets External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

ating a trilateral format with other partners. I referred earlier to our cooperation on development issues in the Indo-Pacific. We also look forward to the meeting of India, France, Australia, trilateral in New York later in the month with our colleague Penny Wong. Another trilateral with the UAE will also be upgraded to the ministerial level, given the positive feedback," he added.

Jaishankar spoke about the collaboration between India and France on joint projects in the International Solar Alliance in three countries namely Bhutan,

Papua New Guinea and Senegal.

Colonna, while talking about France and India relations said: "In 75 years of diplomatic relations, France and India have always supported each other. Even in the toughest of times, we have never failed each other. In today's world, such a level of solidarity and trust is rare and precious."

"In the field of defence, of course. No other country is ready to share its most advanced defence technologies with India as much as France," she added.

ANI

West Bengal CM accuses BJP workers of violence; vows stringent action

Kolkata, India - West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday accused Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers in the state of indulging in violence during protests against her government and said action will be taken against those creating nuisance.

"People were harassed and public properties vandalised and destroyed. You can't have goons and bombs brought in, in the name of protests. Remember, police and fringe elements cannot go together.

"No anti-social activity will get any cover under the garb of politics, the police will take action if that happens," Banerjee said.

Her remarks came after clashes broke out in several parts of the state as workers left for Kolkata to take part in Nabanna Abhiyan on Tuesday.

Banerjee also claimed that BJP had brought workers from other states for the protests. She also defended the police action against the protestors.

"The police officers could



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee (ANI)

have fired in the air, but they were very measured in their response. This cannot happen, you cannot book trains and bring people from other states to create a nuisance in Bengal," she added.

Banerjee said she was not against democratic protests.

"Since they don't have numbers, they resorted to bombs and goondaism to create violence. I have never stopped

democratic protests, you work in a democratic way, and no one will stop you. But in the name of andolan (agitation), you can't get bombs and break heads. I pray for those who were injured, and hope they get well soon."

Banerjee made the comments after addressing an administrative review meeting of Purba Medinipur.

Earlier on Tuesday, Kolkata Police detained Leader of Oppo-

sition in West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari and MP Locket Chatterjee ahead of BJP's protest march to state secretariat 'Nabanna'.

The BJP leaders were detained from Hastings in Kolkata when they were leading the Nabanna Chalo Abhiyan. Adhikari, Chatterjee and BJP leader Rahul Sinha were taken to Kolkata Police headquarters in Lalbazar.

Before the detention, Adhikari said Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had lost the support of people and turned West Bengal into North Korea.

"Chief Minister Mamata does not have the support of her people and so she is enforcing dictatorship, similar to North Korea in Bengal. Police will have to pay for what it is doing since Monday. BJP is coming," Adhikari told ANI.

Kolkata Police had put up heavy barricading at Hastings near the state government's new Secretariat in Kolkata ahead of BJP's Nabanna Chalo march.

ANI

Xi vows backing for Kazakhstan in first trip since pandemic

Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan - China's President Xi Jinping was in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan on Wednesday on his first trip abroad since the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, ahead of a meeting with Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Their highly-anticipated meeting comes as Russia suffers serious setbacks in Ukraine, but China has stood firm in its support of Putin and their 'no limits' friendship.

During a meeting with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Xi vowed full support for Kazakhstan's sovereignty at a time when the ex-Soviet Central Asian region has been spooked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"No matter how the international situation changes, we will continue to resolutely support Kazakhstan in protecting its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity," Xi said, according to a Kazakh government statement.

Beijing 'firmly supports the re-



Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev awards Xi Jinping with country's highest honour, 'Golden Eagle Medal', in Nur-Sultan on Wednesday (AFP)

form measures President (Tokayev) has taken to maintain national stability and development, and firmly opposes any forces that interfere in Kazakhstan's internal affairs', Xi said.

Tokayev hailed Xi's visit as a reunion of 'historic importance', saying the Chinese leader's decision to visit Nur-Sultan first since the start of the pandemic was a sign of 'high-level... mutual trust

and cooperation'. The ex-Soviet Central Asian region, which Russia sees as in its sphere of influence, is key to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a trillion-dollar push to improve trade links across the globe by building landmark infrastructure.

Tokayev said Beijing and Nur-Sultan had 'set an example' for cooperation within the huge BRI initiative and praised prospects

for further cooperation.

Xi, during his three-day visit to Central Asia, is scheduled to attend a summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) leaders in Uzbekistan, where he is expected to meet with Putin.

'Mutual respect, fairness'

The SCO was established in 2001 as a political, economic and security organisation to rival Western institutions and the summit will bring together Xi, Putin, Tokayev, leaders from India, Pakistan and three more ex-Soviet Central Asian countries. Xi wrote ahead of the visit that the group had 'set a fine example of a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation, and proved itself an important and constructive force'.

Those were comments echoed by the Kremlin's foreign policy advisor Yuri Ushakov who told reporters in Moscow that

the SCO members 'stand for a just world order'.

"The SCO offers a real alternative to Western-centric organisations," he added.

Ushakov said that among Putin's meeting in Samarkand this week, his talks with Xi would be 'of particular importance', focusing on the conflict in Ukraine and Russia's growing economic ties with China.

Xi, in an article for Chinese state media ahead of the trip, said Beijing was prepared to work with Kazakhstan to 'deepen cooperation in law enforcement, security and defence'.

He said also China wanted to work with Kazakhstan on drug trafficking and transnational organised crime as well as what China calls the 'three evils'.

China's government has previously used the term - referring to terrorism, separatism and religious extremism - to talk about its crackdown Xinjiang, which borders Kazakhstan.

AFP

Typhoon Muifa hits China's east coast

Shanghai, China - All passenger flights at Shanghai's two international airports were cancelled on Wednesday, the airport operator said, as Typhoon Muifa made landfall on China's densely populated east coast.

The storm hit the city of Zhoushan in Zhejiang province at around 8:30pm (1330 GMT), state news agency Xinhua said, bringing strong winds and threatening flooding along the coast around Shanghai - an area home to Asia's largest commercial port. The highest wind speed recorded on landfall was 42 metres per second, making it the strongest typhoon to make landfall in China this year, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

China's Central Meteorological Administration issued its highest-level typhoon alert

for the first time this year, saying Muifa would increase in intensity as it approaches the coast. Gale force winds and heavy rains are forecast along China's eastern seaboard until Thursday morning, the weather agency said.

"Relevant areas should pay attention to the prevention of flash floods and geological disasters that may be caused by heavy rainfall," it added.

The typhoon is expected to move from Zhoushan, home to the busiest port in the world in terms of cargo tonnage, through the coastal provinces of Jiangsu and Fujian carrying gusts of up to 172km per hour.

Shanghai Airport Group said it 'will announce flight adjustments at both airports to the public in a timely manner, in line with the typhoon's impact'.

AFP

Kubler, De Minaur lift Australia past Belgium in Davis Cup opener

Paris, France - Australia were in a rush on the opening day of the Davis Cup finals group phase on Tuesday with Jason Kubler and Alex de Minaur paving the way for a 3-0 win over Belgium.

Newcomer Jason Kubler battled past 134th-ranked Zizou Bergs 6-4, 1-6, 6-3 in the opening Group C tie in Hamburg, Germany.

Trailing 1-3 in the third set after dropping the second, 97th-ranked Kubler reeled of five consecutive games to earn the first point for Australia.

"I'm over the moon that I was able to deliver today but we may not have been in this position if it were not for Jason Kubler who came out on his debut and pulled a rabbit out of the hat," said de Minaur. "He played with passion and pride and showed everything that Davis Cup is about. He got the win which gave us a 1-0 lead which I thought was huge."

De Minaur got the winning point for the 28-time Davis Cup champions after beating David Goffin 6-2, 6-2 in one hour and six minutes.

Goffin, ranked 62, a Davis Cup finalist in 2015 and 2017, has never beaten 22nd-ranked Minaur in their four meetings.

Matthew Ebden and Max Purcell teamed up in the doubles to



Alex De Minaur got the better of David Goffin 6-2, 6-2 in one hour and six minutes

see off Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen 6-1, 6-3.

The Germans open their Group C campaign against France before also facing Belgium and Australia.

In Group A, Sweden's Ymer brothers Elias and Mikael got off to a good start and led their nation to victory over Argentina.

Elias defeated Sebastián Báez 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (4), while his younger brother Mikael beat No. 17 Diego Schwartzman 6-2, 6-2 in Bologna. The Argentines scored their lone point with Maximo Gonzalez and Horacio Zeballos defeating Andre Goransson and Elias Ymer 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 in the doubles.

In the last-16 group phase, nations play two singles matches and then a doubles in a best of three format.

He (Jason Kubler) played with passion and pride and showed everything that Davis Cup is about

ALEX DE MINAUR



Alex Albon

Williams driver Albon out of hospital after respiratory failure

London, United Kingdom - Alex Albon has been released from hospital after the Williams driver suffered respiratory failure following complications from appendix surgery.

Albon missed the Italian Grand Prix in Monza with appendicitis on Saturday and was transferred to nearby San Gerardo Hospital for treatment.

The 26-year-old underwent surgery, but then ended up in intensive care and required assistance with breathing.

London-born Albon, who races under the Thai flag because of his mother Kankamol's nationality, was removed from a ventilator on Sunday before being allowed to leave hospital and travel home in Monaco on Tuesday.

"We are happy to confirm that Alex Albon has now returned home," a Williams spokesperson said.

He initially felt unwell on Saturday and was replaced by the team's reserve driver and Formula E champion Nyck de Vries in the Grand Prix.

Albon will hope to return to the track in the next race in Singapore on October 2.

He spent last year on the sidelines after he was dropped by Red Bull.

But he has steadily impressed since his transfer to Williams, scoring his first point for the British team at the Australian Grand Prix in April, with two further top-10 finishes in Miami and Belgium.

AFP

Injured Starc, Marsh, Stoinis out of India tour

Melbourne, Australia - Pace spearhead Mitchell Starc and all-rounders Marcus Stoinis and Mitchell Marsh were on Wednesday ruled out of Australia's Twenty20 tour to India with low-level injuries.

Team bosses opted not to risk aggravating niggles in the three-game series beginning on September 21 with Australia's defence of the T20 World Cup on home soil fast approaching.

"Selectors felt with three games in six days across three cities, including travel to India and internally, Marsh, Stoinis and Starc are best served remaining in



Mitchell Starc

Australia," Cricket Australia said.

The injuries are all minor with Starc (knee), Marsh (ankle) and Stoinis (side) replaced by Nathan Ellis, Daniel Sams and Sean Abbott.

AFP

Bangladesh axe Mahmudullah from T20 World Cup squad

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh on Wednesday axed former cricket captain Mahmudullah Riyad and recalled batsman Najmul Hossain in a shake-up to its struggling Twenty20 squad ahead of next month's World Cup in Australia.

This month's disappointing Asia Cup campaign highlighted the team's 20-over woes, with Bangladesh turfed out in the group stage after losing to Afghanistan and eventual winners Sri Lanka.

Mahmudullah's inclusion was under a cloud after a lacklustre 151 runs across his eight match appearances in 2022.

Indian cricketer Sridharan Sri-



Mahmudullah Riyad

ram, appointed last month as the team's T20 consultant, said it was time to think of its future beyond the 36-year-old.

"I think this was the right time for all of us to come together and

think of... who can fill in the big shoes of Mahmudullah," he said.

Chief selector Minhajul Abedin hailed Mahmudullah's record but added that the decision to omit the all-rounder from the squad was unanimous.

"We have respect for Mahmudullah who has played well for the national team," he said.

"We haven't been doing well in this format," Minhajul added. "Our T20 consultant has given us a one-year plan, which will take us in a different direction. We have gone with this plan."

Najmul returns while Liton Das, Nurul Hasan and Yasir Ali have recovered from injury.

The World Cup gets underway in Australia on October 16 and Bangladesh are in Group 2 alongside India, Pakistan, South Africa and two qualifiers.

The squad named Wednesday will travel to New Zealand beforehand to take part in next month's tri-nation tournament alongside Pakistan.

Bangladesh Squad: Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Sabbir Rahman, Mehidy Hasan, Afif Hossain, Mosaddek Hossain, Liton Das, Yasir Ali, Nurul Hasan, Mustafizur Rahman, Mohammad Saifuddin, Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Hasan Mahmud, Nasum Ahmed, Najmul Hossain

AFP

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STRIKING IRONY

Star striker Robert Lewandowski misses guilt-edged chances on his return to Munich as Bayern beat wasteful Barcelona in the UEFA Champions League

Munich, Germany- Two second-half goals in three minutes, including a superb chip from Leroy Sane, helped Bayern Munich defeat a wasteful Barcelona 2-0 on Robert Lewandowski's return to Bavaria in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Bayern's France defender Lucas Hernandez headed in a corner to open the scoring, but it was Sane who put the game beyond doubt for the home side.

Lewandowski, who came back to the club he left in the summer after eight prolific seasons in Bavaria, was greeted by warm applause from the home fans during the pre-game warm up.

He had scored a hat-trick hat-trick on his Champions League debut for Barca as the Catalans beat Viktoria Plzen 5-1 last week, and in Munich also he had several chances to score.

"I think for Lewy it was really an emotional game to come back - a little bit like coming home, because he was so successful here," Bayern captain Manuel Neuer told Amazon Prime.

"The luck in the decisive moments wasn't on his side - and that became our luck.

"With his volley (in the 19th minute) we had a little bit of luck that it went over the crossbar... but I think we showed a really good defensive performance."

Lewandowski latched onto a dipping pass from Pedri in the 19th minute, but shot too high, just tickling the top of the crossbar.

Just one minute later the Poland forward again received the ball just metres from Bayern's goal, but his header was saved from close range by Manuel Neuer.

Raphinha, starting his first Champions League game after making the move from Leeds in the summer, drilled in a low shot past a stranded Neuer after 27



Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski misses a chance to score as Bayern Munich's Dayot Upamecano struggles to keep up (AFP)

The luck in the decisive moments wasn't on his (Lewandowski) side - and that became our luck. With his volley we had a little bit of luck that it went over the crossbar

MANUEL NEUER

minutes, but the Brazilian missed the goal by inches.

But it was Bayern who went in front five minutes into the second half when Hernandez headed in from a corner.

Sane burst through the middle four minutes later to make it 2-0 as Julian Nagelsmann's Bayern made it two wins out of two in the group.

They have now won their last

five meetings with Barcelona, including two in last season's group stage and their 8-2 victory in the 2020 quarter-finals.

Barcelona next face Inter Milan, who got their first points in the 2020 quarter-finals.

Edin Dzeko and Denzel Dumfries got the goals for Inter while the home side had Pavel Bucha sent off in the second half.

Spurs shocked

Meanwhile Antonio Conte's Tottenham Hotspur slumped to a 2-0 defeat against Sporting in Portugal in Group D, with the home side scoring both goals late on at the Jose Alvalade stadium.

It looked like the English side would escape with a point after Hugo Lloris produced a stunning late save to deny Pedro Porro.

But Paulinho headed in from the resulting 90th-minute corner, and Brazilian Arthur Gomes came off the bench to make it 2-0 with a superb solo strike in injury time.

"It was a difficult result. When you lose the game you are not happy," admitted Conte.

Sporting top the group with

six points, while Eintracht Frankfurt joined Spurs on three points thanks to a 1-0 win in Marseille, with Jesper Lindstrom scoring in the first half.

Leverkusen claimed their first points in Group B as they beat Atletico 2-0 with two late goals, Robert Andrich and Moussa Diaby both finding the net.

Belgian champions Club Brugge top the section with six points after a stunning 4-0 win at FC Porto. Former Barcelona striker Ferran Jutgla opened the scoring with a penalty before Kamal Sowah, Andreas Skov Olsen and Norwegian teenager Antonio Nusa all netted in the second half.

AFP



Barcelona's Pedri tries to chip the ball over Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer during their Champions League match on Tuesday (AFP)

Barca show positive signs in defeat

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona showed against Bayern Munich on Tuesday that the worst may be behind for them but have not yet managed to pull level with football's elite in the quest for the Champions League glory.

Julian Nagelsmann's Bundesliga champions rode their luck at the Allianz Arena in the first half but improved after the break to dispatch a spirited, but ultimately frustrated, Barcelona 2-0 with goals from Lucas Hernandez and Leroy Sane.

The Catalans last won the Champions League in 2015, beating Bayern in the semi-finals on the way to their triumph in Berlin, but have now suffered five consecutive defeats against the Bavarians. Last season Barca, reeling from the departure of Lionel Messi, were twice defeated comprehensively by Bayern, contributing to a humiliating group stage exit.

In Munich on Tuesday Barcelona had the better of the first half, with former Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski spurning a handful of opportuni-

ties on his return to Germany, but two goals in a five-minute second-half salvo whisked the game away from them.

"We will take the positives and even though it was a negative result, we can learn from the errors," said Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez.

"It's a step back. We did enough to draw, if not to win. A defeat is not deserved, but we made mistakes in the two boxes."

"When we talk about competing, we're talking about doing it at a corner, or in a transition," said Xavi, referring to defensive errors for Bayern's two goals.

"It's also about efficiency. You get in front of the goalkeeper and you should score.

"We did not score despite having seven clear chances, we have to put them away. I am angry but proud."

Barcelona midfielder Pedri, who had a great first half, was also denied by the impeccable Neuer when well placed and hit the post with another good opportunity.

AFP

Porto coach Conceicao's family car 'savagely' attacked after Club Brugge defeat

Lisbon, Portugal - Porto coach Sergio Conceicao's family car was "savagely" attacked after this week's Champions League hammering by Club Brugge, the Portuguese side said on Wednesday.

According to local media the vehicle, carrying Conceicao's wife and two sons was targeted following Tuesday's 4-0 defeat.

Supporters threw stones and insulted the trio but they were not injured during the incident.

"Porto totally repudiate the attack on coach Sergio Conceicao's family car, last night, outside the Estadio do Dragao," the two-time European Cup winners said.

"Porto also regret the lack of protection from the authorities, and calls for the author or authors of this savage act to be quickly identified and held ac-



Sergio Conceicao

countable," they added.

Conceicao's side remain winless in Europe this season and are third in the Primeira Liga, three points behind leaders Benfica. The 47-year-old was appointed boss in 2017 and has won eight trophies.

AFP

Right-back Hernandez injury adds to France World Cup worries

Munich, Germany - Bayern Munich right-back Lucas Hernandez will be absent for "several weeks" with a groin injury, the club said on Wednesday, adding to French concerns with the World Cup two months away.

Hernandez suffered the injury in Bayern's 2-0 win against Barcelona on Tuesday.

"A scan has revealed that the 26-year-old Frenchman suffered a muscle tear in his left adductor," Bayern said in a statement.

It means France coach Didier Deschamps must juggle his defensive options for the Nations League games this month as Paris Saint-Germain centre-back Presnel Kimpembe was ruled out for around six weeks earlier this week with a hamstring problem.

Midfielder Paul Pogba is recovering from knee surgery while



Bayern Munich's Lucas Hernandez celebrates after scoring against Barcelona during their Champions League match on Tuesday (AFP)

both N'Golo Kante and Karim Benzema are also currently sidelined. France play Austria on September 22 and then Denmark three days later in the Nations

League games, which act as key warm-ups for the World Cup which kicks off in Qatar on November 20.

AFP

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BOUNDLESS JOEL!

Joel Matip rises above Ajax defence and head home a late winner to give Liverpool Champions League lift off

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Joel Matip's 89th minute header kickstarted Liverpool's season as a 2-1 win over Ajax at Anfield put the Reds back in the running to reach the last 16 of the Champions League.

Jürgen Klopp's men had won just two of their opening seven games of the season, and suffered a 4-1 thrashing at the hands of Napoli on matchday one.

Last season's Champions League finalists were much more like their old selves but still needed a late winner from an unlikely source after Mohammed Kudus had cancelled out Mohamed Salah's opener. Victory takes Liverpool level on three points with Ajax and Napoli.

"If you put the two games next to each other, I don't think you recognise the same squad," Klopp said of his side's improvement from six days ago in southern Italy.

The match was preceded with a minute's silence to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

Liverpool fans had booed the national anthem before winning both domestic cup finals last season, but any fears of a mass political protest were dispelled with only small band of individuals interrupting the moment of reflection.

On the field, Liverpool have had enough bad headlines to cope with so far this season.

Klopp described their demolition by Napoli last week as the worst performance of his nearly seven years in charge.



Liverpool's Joel Matip scores the winner against Ajax in their UEFA Champions League Group A match at Anfield on Tuesday (AFP)

A record-equalling defeat in the Champions League for Liverpool compounded an already poor start to the Premier League season. But with Matip, Thiago Alcantara and Diogo Jota restored to the starting line-up after injuries, Liverpool were a far

closer reflection of the side that came to within two games of a historic quadruple last season.

"It's the first step but nothing more," added Klopp, whose side are not in action again for another two-and-a-half weeks with Sunday's match against Chelsea

postponed due to policing pressures around the Queen's funeral.

Nunez fails to fire

Jota's inclusion came at the expense of Darwin Nunez as Liverpool's new 80 million euro (\$81

million) signing had to settle for a place on the bench for the second consecutive game.

The Portuguese international more than justified his inclusion, though, as he latched onto Luis Diaz's header and teed up Salah to score his first goal in four

games.

But the defensive deficiencies that have dogged Klopp's men in the early months of the season were exposed for Ajax's equaliser.

Trent Alexander-Arnold was again guilty of not tracking a run-

ner as Steven Berghuis broke down Ajax's left and Kudus spun onto his cross before crashing in a shot off the underside of the bar.

Liverpool responded positively from that setback, but failed to make their dominance count for over an hour.

Remko Pasveer in the Ajax goal blocked efforts from Alexander-Arnold, Virgil van Dijk and Jota either side of half-time, but was not required to perform miracles.

Nunez was introduced along with Roberto Firmino for the final half hour as Klopp threw caution to the wind with a front four also featuring Salah and Diaz.

That decision nearly backfired as Ajax were inches away from picking off the hosts on the counter-attack when Daley Blind's header drifted just wide.

Nunez has endured a far from stellar start to his Liverpool career after being sent off on his home debut for a headbutt on Crystal Palace's Joachim Andersen.

The Uruguayan blew his big chance to silence the critics when he skewed wide with just Pasveer to beat eight minutes from time.

Salah's deflected shot then hit the woodwork, but just when it appeared Liverpool's luck was out, they struck from the resulting corner. Matip rose highest to meet Kostas Tsimikas' corner and the ball had crossed the line before Dusan Tadic cleared.

AFP

Serie A to introduce semi-automated offside before World Cup: Source

Milan, Italy - Semi-automated offside technology is set to be introduced to Serie A before the coming World Cup, a source told AFP on Tuesday, after VAR controversy swept Italian football at the weekend.

The source said the technology, developed by global governing body FIFA, would be ready for use in the Italian league "within a few weeks" after testing at recent matches. Juventus will host the new technology when they take on Benfica in the Champions League in Turin on Wednesday.



Arkadiusz Milik of Juventus was denied a goal after a VAR review

The optical tracking system was trialled at February's FIFA Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi and last year's Arab Cup.

It utilises both dedicated and broadcast cameras around the stadium to give the exact position of players on the pitch, offering match officials precise information within seconds.

Specialised cameras enable the system to generate 29 body points per player. The technology, which has the aim of making offside calls faster and more accurate, was approved for used at

the Qatar World Cup which starts in November and is being used in the group stage of this season's Champions League.

Confirmation from the source comes after Juve were denied a stoppage-time win against Salernitana on Sunday with an offside decision that baffled supporters.

A VAR review led to Arkadiusz Milik's header deep in stoppage time, which would have given Juve a 3-2 win, being ruled out for Leonardo Bonucci being offside and interfering with play.

AFP

Klopp mocks Boehly plan for Premier League all-star game

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Jürgen Klopp has poured scorn on the idea of a US-style all-star Premier League game floated by new Chelsea chairman Todd Boehly, asking whether the Harlem Globetrotters will be also be involved.

Blues' new co-owner Boehly, who also has stakes in the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team and LA Lakers basketball team, told a New York conference he has already floated the idea with Premier League counterparts.

Both Major League Baseball and basketball's NBA have all-star exhibition games featuring the best players from the different leagues and conferences.

Boehly, speaking at a SALT "thought leadership" conference, suggested that money raised could be used to fund lower levels of the game.

"People are talking about more money for the pyramid -- in the MLB All-Star Game this year we made \$200 million (£173 million) from a Monday and a Tuesday," Boehly said. "So we're thinking we could do a north versus south all-star game for the Premier League, for whatever the pyramid



Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp is visibly relieved after their Champions League match against Ajax at Anfield on Tuesday (AFP)

needed quite easily."

But Klopp strongly criticised Boehly's proposal, pointing to the already congested English football calendar.

"He doesn't wait long," said the Liverpool manager. "When he finds a date for that he can call me.

"In American sports these players have four-month breaks. Does he want to bring the Harlem Globetrotters (exhibition basketball team) as well?

"Maybe he can explain that. I'm not sure people want to see

that - (Man) United players, Liverpool players, City players, Everton players all together. It is not the national team. Did he really say it?"

Boehly, whose consortium completed its takeover of Chelsea in May, also hinted at a deterioration in his relationship with Thomas Tuchel. The German was sacked last week after an embarrassing 1-0 defeat to Dinamo Zagreb, with Graham Potter installed as his successor.

AFP

Queiroz returns 'home' to take up Iran post

Tehran, Iran - Carlos Queiroz said he feels "at home" after he returned to Tehran on Wednesday to take charge of Iran for a third successive World Cup finals campaign.

The 69-year-old Portuguese coach was appointed to the post last Wednesday having previously been in charge of Iran for eight years, the longest stint in the national team's history.

That included appearances at



Carlos Queiroz

the 2014 and 2018 World Cup finals where Iran exited in the group stage, although in the latter they beat Morocco for only their second win in football's global showpiece.

"As I said yesterday I feel (at) home, that's the best feeling that you can have," he said on arriving at the airport where he was surrounded by media and Iran supporters.

"I just hope that our work to-

gether can drive the dreams of Iran in the near future."

The appointment of the former Real Madrid coach followed a campaign pledge by the new head of Iran's football federation, Mehdi Taj.

Taj was elected president of the Iranian football federation last week, after previously occupying the role from 2016 to 2019.

AFP

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COOK-UP

There are two sides to a plate (no pun intended) Fnd out how to do it



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IN TOWN

Brazil celebrates its 200th Independence Day on September 7



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ENTERTAINMENT

A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

MEMORIES



Meeting The Queen

and other stories



Like many baby girls born in the 1950's, following Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's coronation on June 2, 1953, I was given the name Elizabeth as one of my Christian names.

As a young girl growing up in the 60's in London, we would often see black and white footage on television of the young Queen visiting hospitals or opening new centres around England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. In 1972, Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, was still very active. The royal matriarch was the last empress consort of India and a link to a bygone age.

Tea with Queen Mother

Many people remember her visiting bomb sites in London during the Second World War. I remember, one day, the Queen Mother, came to visit our school. As I was acting Head Girl, I had the task of showing the Queen Mother around the school and having afternoon tea with her.

The Queen Mother was very soft spoken. I offered her a plate of scones which had been made by girls in the house craft lesson. She eyed the currants suspiciously, and graciously declined! That memory remains etched on my mind forever.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had a wonderful relationship with His Majesty Sultan Qaboos over the past decades. She first visited Oman in 1979, as part of a Gulf Tour, the year before I arrived in Oman in 1980. We were delighted when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos went on a state visit to the UK in March 1982 but, as we didn't have satellite television or the internet in those days, we weren't able to watch the proceedings live, but in the newspaper days later.

Privilege to see the Princess

I remember, the great excitement we all felt when we heard the news that HRH Prince Charles and Princess Diana were coming to visit Oman in 1986. The children from my nursery school lined the street hoping for a glimpse of the royal couple but, for security reasons, the tinted windows of their car remained firmly shut.

I did, however, attend a polo match at the Royal Stables in which Prince Charles and Major Ferguson (Fergie's father) were playing. Princess Diana had sat coyly watching the match and later presented her husband

Jane Bickmore Jaffer, MBE, the UK's most affable author in Oman and pioneer of the *Let's Read* initiative, calls to mind her meetings with the Queen of England and different members of the Royal family

with a trophy for the winning team.

Present through Prince of Wales

Years later, HRH Prince Charles paid a visit to Oman in 2003. He stayed with the British Ambassador, H E Stuart Laing and his wife, Sibella, on that occasion. They knew each other very well as they had all studied at Cambridge University together.

On that occasion, I was privileged to give Prince Charles a copy of my poetry book - *Women on the Edge* - to present to Queen Elizabeth II. I have no idea if she received it!

Meeting The Queen

In 2010, my husband and I were honoured to be invited to the Morning Garden Party in honour of Queen Elizabeth II at the British Ambassador's Residence in Al Rowdah, Muscat, on November 27. It was hosted by the late British ambassador, Noel Guckian, and his wife Lorna.

Hundreds of children from the British School Muscat and the cub scouts lined the entrance, waving flags and cheering as Her Majesty arrived with HRH Prince Philip. The Queen looked as cool as a cucumber, dressed in a lemon-yellow dress and matching hat. She must have been sweltering in the heat but she didn't show it. Years of dutiful standing and chatting to strangers, had really given her enormous stamina.

The Queen showed great interest in everyone she was introduced to. It really is quite amazing that a woman of 96 years of age was still carrying out her duties until the very end.

Up, close with Camilla

In 2016, the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, Charles and Camilla, visited Oman. As Camilla, who is now the Queen Consort to King Charles III, is an avid reader and indeed has started The Reading Room, a hub for literary communities around the world, which celebrates literature in all its forms, the British Embassy suggested the Duchess may like to visit the



In 2018, the British Embassy informed me that I would be granted the MBE for services to education in Oman. I visited Buckingham Palace on Oct 31, 2018, after *Let's Read* opened

JANE BICKMORE JAFFER

Let's Read Bookshop and the Children's Library in Oman.

It was an absolute honour for me, members of Dar Al Atta'a, (our parent organisation) and our team of Let's Read volunteers to welcome Camilla. We founded Let's Read in 2007 with the aim to promote the love of reading to children in Oman.

I remember, we stood next to the Maktabati mobile library, ready to welcome Camilla to our small charity bookshop which was, at that time, in the Qurum Commercial Complex (CCC). I was surprised the complex had not been closed for the occasion. It was quite funny to see shoppers exiting Al Fair with their trolleys, looking completely stunned to see Camilla coming down the escalator.

We had set up a tent in the atrium and invited children from MIS to meet the Duchess, to sing to her, and to show her the mobile library. Camilla then visited the new Children's Public Library and met many dignitaries. It was such an amazing visit.

At Buckingham Palace

In 2018, the British Embassy informed me that I would be granted the MBE for services to education in Oman. I was completely stunned by the news and so honoured. I visited Buckingham Palace on October 31, 2018, just days after *Let's Read* had opened a new Let's Read Charity Bookshop and children's library bus on the third floor in Oman Avenues Mall.

I had written to the authorities requesting tickets for my family. Only three tickets could be granted. But, with three sons and my husband, I needed four tickets. How could I choose who would stay behind? I devised a royalty quiz and told my sons the one who got the worst score would have to stay behind.

Fortunately, I told the palace about my plan and they kindly granted me an extra ticket. It was a wonderful day full of pomp and ceremony. Our car drove through the gates of the palace and into the inner courtyard. It was so grand.



CHAT WITH PRINCE WILLIAM

An orchestra played on the balcony above the Ballroom in Buckingham Palace as our guests filed in and sat down. HRH Prince William was standing on a podium for the investitures. I was shaking like a leaf as I walked forward and curtsied.

HRH Prince William immediately put me at ease, questioning me about Let's Read. He said that he loved Oman and hoped to visit again. He then pinned the medal onto my lapel and I walked over to join the other wonderfully inspiring people who had been honoured that day. It was so thrilling! I will never forget that day.

As we mourn the demise of the Queen, I think, it is important to say that the monarchy has given incredible continuity to the UK. Political leaders come and go, but the Queen had been a constant on the throne for 70 years.

cook-up

MAIN COURSE ACCOMPANIMENTS

SIDE EFFECTS

The possibilities of adding sides to your main course are endless. Sides are a good way of adding vegetables/fruits to balance flavours and textures of proteins and carbs to make a meal dynamic. A good thumb rule allocates one-third space on a plate to vegetables, one-third to carbs, and two-thirds to protein. So, now you know, there are two sides to a plate!



Sweet Potato Mash

Ingredients
4 large sweet potatoes, 2tbsp butter, ¼ cup heavy cream
1tsp vanilla extract, ½tsp pepper, ½tsp sea salt, a pinch of nutmeg

Method
Peel and slice sweet potatoes into chunks. Place them in a large pot with cold water and let it come to a boil. Once the water is boiling, reduce the heat to medium. Cook for 20-30 minutes, or until the sweet potatoes are fork-tender.
Drain the water and return the potatoes back the pot. Add the butter, heavy cream, salt, pepper, vanilla, and nutmeg. Whip the mixture with a food processor or hand blender. Serve and enjoy. Drizzle a dash of olive oil or butter, if desired.

Mashed potatoes are conventionally made with russet potatoes, with a garnish of pepper or chopped dill

Tomato Panzanella Salad

Ingredients
For the salad
150g crusty bread - cut into cubes, 2tbsp extra virgin olive oil, A pinch of sea salt, 600g ripe tomatoes - cut into wedges (or cherry tomatoes halved), 250g mozzarella – cubed or halved mozzarella pearls, ½ red onion - thinly sliced
½ cup basil leaves - coarsely chopped

For the vinaigrette
½ cup extra virgin olive oil, ¼ cup red vinegar
2 garlic cloves - grated, ½tsp salt, A pinch of black pepper powder

Method
Preheat oven to 200°C. Place bread in a mixing bowl, drizzle with 2tbsp olive oil and a pinch of salt. Bake for 10-12 minutes until toasted, then set aside to cool. Edges should be golden brown and crisp.
In a small bowl, combine vinaigrette dressing ingredients and whisk to combine. Set it aside for the flavours to blend while you prepare the rest of your salad ingredients.
Place remaining Panzanella salad ingredients into the same mixing bowl you used for the bread. Add the cooled bread. About 10-15 minutes before serving, drizzle on the dressing, adding it to taste. Toss the salad gently to combine.



Roasted vegetables

Ingredients
For balsamic marinade
3tbsp olive oil, 3tbsp balsamic vinegar, 2tbsp brown sugar
2tbsp soy sauce, ½tbsp Dijon mustard
½tsp dried basil, freshly cracked black pepper

Vegetables
250g button mushrooms, 1 red onion, 200g carrots
200g parsnips, 1 bunch baby radishes
¼ bunch parsley - for garnish
Add other vegetables, if desired

Method
Preheat the oven to 200°C. In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, balsamic vinegar, brown sugar, soy sauce, Dijon mustard, dried basil, and pepper. Set the marinade aside.
Scrub or peel the carrots and parsnips, then slice them into 2-3cm pieces. Wash the mushrooms and cut them in half. Peel the onion and slice it into 2cm wedges. Wash the radishes, cut off their stems and roots, then slice each one in half. Spread the prepared vegetables out over a large baking sheet, making sure they're in a single layer. Pour the balsamic marinade over top, then toss the vegetables until they're all well coated.
Transfer the baking sheet to the oven and roast for 20 minutes. Carefully remove the baking sheet from the oven, stir the vegetables, then return them to the oven and roast for an additional 15-20 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender and have browned on the edges. Transfer the roasted vegetables to a bowl or serving platter and sprinkle the chopped parsley before serving.



Mushroom Risotto

Ingredients
5 cups vegetable broth, 1½ cups water
8tbsp butter, divided, 400g mushrooms - sliced
1 small onion - diced, 2-3 cloves garlic - minced
2 cups Arborio rice, 1 cup thin coconut milk
1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
½ cup heavy cream - optional, 1tbsp minced fresh parsley

Method
Bring the broth and water to a boil in a large saucepan. Reduce heat to a low simmer and cover. In a dutch oven or large heavy pot, melt 4tbsp butter over medium heat. Add mushrooms and onion and cook until soft and golden. Season with salt and pepper and stir in the garlic. Cook for 30 seconds. Remove mixture from the pan and set aside.
Add remaining butter to the pot and the rice. Cook, stirring constantly, until the rice is translucent around the edges. Add the coconut milk and cook, stirring constantly, until the liquid is almost fully absorbed. Stir in 5 cups of hot broth and reduce heat to medium low. Cover and simmer until almost all of the liquid has been absorbed, stirring at intervals.
Add 1 more cup of hot broth and stir gently until risotto becomes creamy. Remove from heat and stir in the mushrooms, cheese, cream (if using), and parsley.

take a break

IN TOWN

Brazil's Independence day celebrations



Embassy of Brazil celebrated the 200th anniversary of Brazil's Independence from Portugal on September 7



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What is the name for the open areas of country in South Africa?
A. Plains
B. Pampas
C. Steppes
D. Veldt

02. According to the Bible, who is the father of Ham, Shem and Japheth?
A. Noah
B. Abraham
C. Aaron
D. John the Baptist

03. How many volunteer hours were estimated to have supported the 2012 Summer Olympics?
A. 7 million
B. 12 million
C. 8 million
D. 1.7 million

Answers: 1.D 2.A 3.C

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

BOGGLER

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

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

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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Karma works on its own unpredictable schedule, so if you're wondering when you'll be paid back for all the points you've been racking up, you're wasting your time. Just like a watched pot never boils, a watched karma account never pays off. So, don't wait for paybacks.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Some controversy could pop up today. Stand up for what you believe even if your peers totally disagree. You will find that you and a big-time power broker have a common goal, which means that might will be on your side. Are you prepared for your plans to come to fruition? Let's hope so, because you just may make a very valuable friend today.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you've been dreaming about making a change, today is the day to make that dream come true. All you have to do is take the initial step. Don't make the mistake of expecting major transformations to happen overnight. If you need to end a relationship, you don't have to say goodbye today. Just set up a time to meet and talk.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your normal "roll with it" philosophy might not be enough to get you through the trials and tribulations that this active day has in store for you. Get a grip on a more aggressive philosophy in order to make your point and get yourself noticed today. You need to be careful not to step on anyone's toes, but you don't have to worry about hurting anyone's feelings.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Hopefully, you don't have any major shopping plans for today, because now is not a good day for financial dealings. This isn't a situation where you need to mistrust anyone. Rather, it's a time to be more considerate when it comes to how you handle your money. Your generosity is something you should value, but are you too focused on immediate gratification.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Getting involved in new projects or relationships isn't the best use of your time today, so say no to any invitations even if the opportunity seems promising. You just won't be able to devote the energy you need to ensure its success, and you won't end up making yourself proud. Stick to what is already on your plate, and what you know you can do well.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

There could be a battle of wills today, so keep your head down and mind your own business. Getting caught up in a power struggle between two giant personalities would not be a good move for you. Even if you try to stay objective, it simply won't be possible. At some point you'll end up with your back against the wall.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The line between your real life and fantasy life will blur today when some amazing coincidences lead you to believe that the hands of fate are pushing you in a very particular direction. This will create a building sense of energy, and your job today is to give it someplace to go! Get involved in a project, the more artistic the better.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

There are many distractions around you right now, and they represent many tantalizing options for self-promotion. Let yourself explore these many ideas, but try not to let go of your grasp on reality! Harmless yet slightly annoying wrinkles could result, such as losing things or forgetting where you're going when you're halfway out.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Even if you don't finalize all the details you wanted to finish today, you are making headway toward a great goal. As you advance on this project, think of other people who either will benefit from what you are doing or can get involved and help you get to the finish line more quickly. Today is a day to rally the troops and remember what you're doing all of this for. Keep your eyes on the prize.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Don't assume that the money you think you have in your account is actually in your account. If you have any automatic payments set up, you're waiting for a transfer, or you share your account with someone else, there could be recent withdrawals or fee payments that you aren't aware of. Consequently, hold off on making any big (or even midsize) purchases today.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Right now, experimentation is the key to finding a new formula for happiness in your life, so put on your lab coat and dust off your mental microscope! You have to try out new ideas or projects and urge yourself to step a bit further outside your comfort zone than you usually do. Trial and error is a very effective way to learn, so don't get discouraged if things aren't too promising at first.

entertainment



JULIA GARNER DOES A HAT TRICK

US actress Julia Garner won the Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actress In A Drama Series for her role as Ruth in Netflix's *Ozark* during the 74th Emmy Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles earlier this week. This was Garner's third time winning the trophy, previously taking the accolade in 2019 and again in 2020. Surprised by her win, she said, "I want to thank everybody at Netflix and MRC, especially our show runner Chris Mundy and all the writers in the writer's room. Thank you for writing Ruth, she has changed my life."

BRITNEY 'WON'T PERFORM AGAIN'

Singer Britney Spears has claimed that she 'probably won't perform again' because she's pretty traumatised for life. The *Toxic* hitmaker went on about the worst experience ever working with 'offensive people' on her live shows in the past, and she suggested that she wouldn't return to the stage again because she's stubborn and wants to prove her point. In a since-deleted Instagram post, Britney Spears had said, "The most offensive SO CALLED professional pictures on every tour. I mean they could have at least cheated and retouched them for me."



Steven Spielberg's 'The Fabelmans' reflects his family history

Steven Spielberg has said that mining his family history to make *The Fabelmans* was a "very daunting experience" that was at times "very, very hard to get through". The iconic filmmaker's latest project world premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival on Saturday night to raves from critics and largely favourable reviews, reports *Variety*. The semi-autobiographical movie is already being tipped as an Oscar contender.



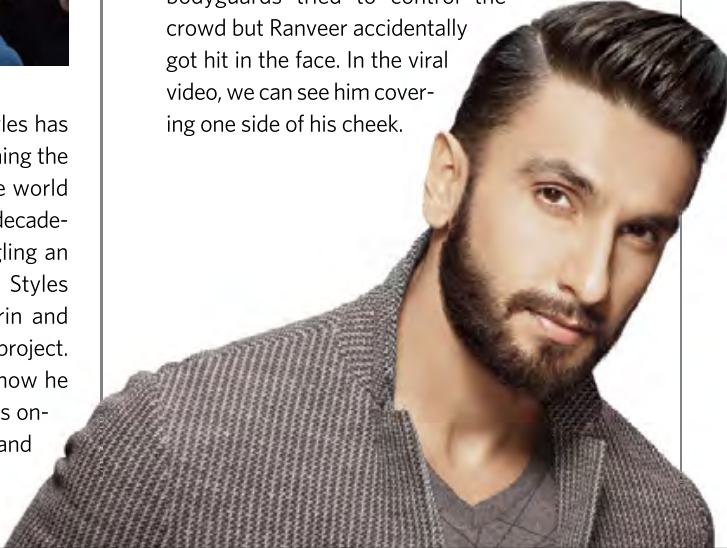
Harry Styles debuts in 'My Policeman'



Former One Direction member Harry Styles has finally debuted his dramatic chops, charming the Toronto International Film Festival at the world premiere of *My Policeman*. An emotional, decade-spanning drama about a 1950s cop juggling an idealistic wife and a secret male lover, Styles turned up with his co-stars Emma Corrin and David Dobson to unveil the long-awaited project. At a brief Q&A, Harry Styles discussed how he and his co-stars built an authentic bond as on-screen friends, and navigated some soul and body-baring love scenes with both.

Ranveer Singh slapped

Ranveer Singh is creating a heavy buzz on the Internet after a video of him went viral in which he gets slapped. The incident happened when Ranveer Singh, who attended SIIMA 2022, posed for selfies with fans. His surprise entry on the red carpet caused a mob-like situation as his fans rushed toward him to click a picture with the actor. His bodyguards tried to control the crowd but Ranveer accidentally got hit in the face. In the viral video, we can see him covering one side of his cheek.



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: SEE HOW THEY RUN

Genre: Mystery thriller
Starring: Sam Rockwell, Saoirse Ronan, Adrien Brody, Ruth Wilson

LIGHT-HEARTED MYSTERY

After a sort of lull, murder mysteries are now back in business. Movies like *See How They Run* affirms just that as international audiences of all ages have always been hooked onto mystery and fast-paced flicks. Filmmakers have, hence, always laid their stakes on murder mysteries with their own modern twist, even though the core content remains a formula.

Tom George's latest offering is fueled by the off-beat comedy of his previous directorial success, *This Country*, spawning the contemporary British icons of Charlie and Daisy May Cooper. Whilst the latter could not join the impressive ensemble cast of *See How They Run*, Charlie makes the exclusive cut but undoubtedly misses the razor-sharp scriptwriting of the show which made his name.

The story is set in West End of 1950s London where plans for a movie version of a smash-hit play come to an abrupt halt after a pivotal member of the crew is murdered. When world-weary Inspector Stoppard (Sam Rockwell) and eager rookie Constable Stalker (Saoirse Ronan) take on the case, the two find themselves thrown into a puzzling whodunit within the glamorously sordid theatre underground, investigating the mysterious sequence of events.

See How They Run is fashioned like Rian Johnson's *Knives Out*, using comedy to tell an altogether lighter tale. However, the film isn't funny enough to be an effective comedy, nor mysterious enough to be particularly gripping. See it, anyway, there's no other treat for the weekend.

Rating ★★★★★

NEW RELEASE



TICKET TO PARADISE

A divorced couple that teams up and travels to Bali to stop their daughter from making the same mistake they think they made 25 years ago.

Genre: Comedy
Starring: Julia Roberts, George Clooney, Kaitlyn Dever, Maxime Bouttier
Language: English

BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: SITA RAMAM

Genre: Romance **Starring:** Dulquer Salmaan, Mrunal Thakur, Rashmika Mandanna



EPICAL ROMANCE

Sita Ramam, in Telugu, is built around the premise that love transcends all barriers, including religion, politics and language. Director Hanu Raghavapudi's latest romantic saga is set against the volatile backdrop of modern-day geopolitics. It is said to be the director's new take on the essence of the Ramayana.

The story is about an orphan soldier, Lieutenant Ram, whose life changes, after he gets a letter from a girl named Sita. He meets

her and love blossoms between them. When he comes back to his camp in Kashmir, he sends a letter to Sita which, however, doesn't reach her.

Afreen (Rashmika Mandanna), a Pakistan national, who takes up the role of Hanuman from the epic, carries the message from Rama to Sita. Afreen is politically conditioned to respond negatively to anything Indian.

In a fit of anger, Afreen destroys the car of a rich Indian philanthropist in London and is left with two options - apologise or

pay up, to avoid prosecution.

The film could have done better had the director concentrated on building on the love story rather than focusing on giving Ram an unblemished, able stature.

The good looks and personalities of Dulquer and Mrunal, which could've been played up a little with more romance, helps in carrying the film to a certain extent though the narration seems lacking. Watch it for variety.

Rating ★★★★★