

► NEWS BRIEF

GOVERNMENT VEHICLE PROCUREMENT STREAMLINED

Muscat - Tender Board, represented by the Directorate General of Government Procurement, signed framework agreements on Sunday for the purchase of government vehicles.

The contracts were inked with various Omani vehicle suppliers for efficient procurement.

On the sidelines of the contract signing event, Tender Board also launched an order management system designed to streamline vehicle purchase services via the Amana platform.

Badr al Ma'amari, Secretary-General of Tender Board, said the new system will reduce vehicle delivery time by 50% to 60%.



Morocco king appeals for 'normality' with Algeria



Morocco beat South Korea for first Women's WC win

Burden of global warming on Oman

Building climate resilience key to sultanate's energy transition: IEA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A new research from the International Energy Agency (IEA) presents a bleak picture of climate change in Oman necessitating introduction of policy measures to achieve climate-resilient energy transition in the sultanate.

Climate projections indicate that Oman will experience higher temperatures in the coming decades, with more frequent heat waves. Furthermore, low rainfall, combined with limited natural freshwater resources, has made Oman one of the most water-stressed countries. Oman has less than 1,000m³ of freshwater per capita per year, which is significantly less than the world average of around 5,500m³.

Low-lying coastal areas are vulnerable to sea level rise. This could trigger saltwater intrusion and lead to a decrease in freshwater availability in coastal areas, where the majority of irrigated land (56%) is located.

'Indeed, by the middle of the 21st century, 64% of cultivated land in the southern Batinah region will be unfit for groundwater irrigation owing to seawater intrusion into the Jamma aquifer from sea level rise,' stated the IEA report titled *Climate Resilience for Energy Transition in Oman*.

Under a high-emissions scenario, the mean annual temperature is projected to rise by about 5°C on average from 1990 to 2100, and the number of days experiencing a warm spell (heat wave) is projected to increase from fewer than 15 in 1990 to about 280 days on average in 2100. Under a low-emissions



scenario, the mean temperature rise could be limited to about 1.5°C and the number of days of heat wave to about 85 on average in 2100, IEA stated.

In recent years, Oman has experienced significant heat waves. In June 2018, the minimum temperature did not drop below 41.9°C for 24 hours in Quriyat. In June 2021, a heat wave continued for almost a month in some locations, reaching the country's highest recorded temperatures at over 50°C.

Shifting precipitation patterns also pose challenges, with a decrease in rainfall affecting freshwater availability and an increase in energy demand for desalination plants. In response, Oman has directed its efforts towards climate change mitigation and resilience, focusing on clean energy transition and the need for energy infrastructure resilience, said IEA.

Continued on Page 02

Climate change poses challenges for financial stability: CBO report

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has warned that climate change risks pose significant challenges to the country's financial system, giving rise to both micro and macroprudential risks.

'The impacts of climate change, such as weather events, can have profound implications for individual financial institutions (microprudential risk) as well as the stability of the entire financial system (macroprudential risk),' CBO said in its *Financial Stability Report 2023*.

These risks, as per the central bank, include physical risks (direct impacts from climate-related

'The shift towards reducing carbon footprints requires significant changes in the structure of the economy, which can have profound implications'

events), transition risk (risks associated with the transition to a low-carbon or green economy), and liability risks (legal or financial consequences arising from climate-related damages).

Moreover, financial institutions, especially in hydrocarbon-

dependent countries like Oman, face an additional challenge in addressing the implications of transitioning to a greener and low-carbon economy, it said.

'The shift towards reducing carbon footprints requires significant changes in the structure of the economy, which can have profound implications for the operations, investments and overall business strategies of these institutions.'

This transition, CBO said, 'may involve a fundamental restructuring of industries, diversification of revenues for the government and businesses, and adoption of sustainable practices'.

The central bank added that financial institutions need to ac-

tively assess and manage the risks and opportunities associated with this transition to ensure long-term viability and resilience in a changing economic landscape.

'It is crucial for financial regulators, policymakers and institutions to proactively consider, manage and mitigate these risks to safeguard the stability and resilience of the financial system in the face of ongoing climate change.'

It has advised banks and financial leasing companies to enhance their risk management policies and practices in accordance with the international best practices on climate-related financial risks.



Saudi plans to host talks on Ukraine war

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia plans to host talks next weekend to discuss a path towards peace in Ukraine, convening representatives from Kyiv, Western powers and developing countries, officials told AFP on Saturday.

Russia will not attend the meeting in Jeddah, just as it did not participate in a similar gathering last month in Copenhagen, said three officials based in the Gulf who have been briefed on the plans. A full list of participants was not available, although countries including Britain and Japan were expected to attend, the officials said.

The *Wall Street Journal* first reported the Saudi-hosted talks and said developing countries such as Brazil that attended the Copenhagen meeting were also expected to be in Jeddah.

The move represents the latest effort by Saudi Arabia to assert itself in diplomacy related to the Ukraine war.

In May, the kingdom hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at an Arab League sum-

mit in Jeddah, where he accused some Arab leaders of turning "a blind eye" to the horrors of Russia's invasion.

Riyadh has backed UN Security Council resolutions denouncing Russia's invasion as well as Russia's declared annexation of territory in eastern Ukraine.

At the same time, it has continued to coordinate closely with Russia on energy policy, including oil production cuts approved last October that Washington said at the time amounted to "aligning with Russia" in the war.

Last September, Riyadh played an unexpected role in brokering the release of foreign fighters detained in Ukraine, including two from the United States and five from Britain.

Earlier this year, a Saudi official told journalists that Riyadh remained open to contributing to mediation to end the conflict, especially "on important minor issues that may help cumulatively in the end to have a political solution of the whole issue".

AFP

MoCIIP clamps down on hidden trade

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has issued Ministerial Decision No 412/2023 aimed at curbing hidden trade in the sultanate. The new rules impose stringent penalties, with fines reaching up to RO15,000 for individuals engaged in hidden trade.

The decision aims to mitigate hidden trade and its economic and social impacts on business owners and the wider Omani society. The move is in response to appeals from citizens in recent years calling for an end to this phenomenon.

The decision provides definitions for clarity. 'Hidden trade' refers to any activity undertaken by an individual, independently or

The decision aims to mitigate hidden trade and its economic and social impacts on business owners and the wider Omani society

collaboratively, that is not permitted by current laws and Royal Decrees within the sultanate.

'Activity' encompasses commercial, industrial, professional, crafts, tourism or any other economic engagement. A 'hidden person' refers to an individual engaged in hidden trade.

The new regulation states that no person may engage, directly



or indirectly, in any activity that is not permitted under the prevailing laws. Hidden trade, carried out under the name of the hidden person, using their commercial registration or licence, or by any other means, is strictly prohibited.

The decision empowers MoCIIP to take any measure it deems necessary to enforce

these regulations. Furthermore, any individual who becomes aware of any hidden trade activity must promptly report this to the ministry.

MoCIIP can task its specialised staff to monitor businesses, permitting them to enter at any time to ensure compliance with these new rules and deal with any violations accordingly.

Upon violation of these new rules, the ministry may impose several penalties: Removal of the activity from the commercial register, and impose an administrative fine of RO5,000, or even higher RO10,000 for a second violation, along with a three-month activity suspension. A third violation will result in a fine of RO15,000, removal from the commercial register, and a one-year suspension before re-registration is possible.

The decision holds legal entities accountable for penalties if an employee commits a violation in its name or for its benefit.

The incidence of commercial fraud has escalated in recent times, posing significant challenges to the labour market. These introduce unfair competition, especially detrimental to small and medium enterprises.

Double treat for stargazers in August, on 1st and 30th

Muscat -In August, stargazers will have the rare opportunity to witness two supermoons.

The first, on Tuesday, will appear slightly brighter and bigger than normal, as it will be closer than usual, just 357,530km away, thus the supermoon label.

But the moon will be even closer on the night of August 30 - just 357,344km away. Owing to the fact that it is the second full moon in the same month, it will be what's called a blue

moon.

"Warm summer nights are the ideal time to watch the full moon rise in the eastern sky within minutes of sunset. And it happens twice in August," said retired NASA astrophysicist Fred Espenak, dubbed Eclipse for his eclipse-chasing expertise.

The last time two full supermoons graced the sky in the same month was in 2018. It won't happen again until 2037,



according to Italian astronomer Gianluca Masi, founder of the Virtual Telescope Project.

This year's first supermoon was in July. The fourth and last will be in September. The two in August will be closer than either of those.

Provided skies are clear, binoculars or backyard telescopes can enhance the experience, revealing such features as lunar maria - the dark plains formed

by ancient volcanic lava flows - and rays emanating from lunar craters.

Astronomy enthusiast Abdullah al Abri said, "This rare occurrence of two supermoons in a month is a noteworthy event, deserving of attention from seasoned astronomers and casual stargazer. Supermoons, although not an uncommon occurrence, are always worth celebrating due to the striking visual beauty."



OMAN, SAFE HAVEN

In a world where safety and security are paramount concerns, even more so for expatriates seeking a new home away from home, Oman has emerged as a shining example of comfort and assurance. Recently ranked as the fourth safest country for expatriates, Oman's reputation for offering a high standard of living and safety has been firmly established since years. With an unparalleled commitment to safety, Oman warmly embraces its diverse expatriate community, providing them with a sanctuary of comfort and peace. What makes Oman different from other countries? What else can be done to make it more attractive? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said -



Reema Bhatia
Teacher

Oman is a safe and beautiful country. The reason behind this is its kind and courteous people. The country shares good relations with most countries around the world. Despite being an Islamic country, it respects all other cultures and religions.

Jayatee Choudhury
Student

In Oman, the best thing is the friendly and co-operative nature of the nationals. To make Oman more attractive, there should be more easily accessible tourist attractions. Tourism representatives should emphasise on the rich heritage of Oman thereby encouraging people to visit the country. Cheap hotels and tour guides should be easily available.

Mahmud Khan
Physician

Oman is the second largest country in the Gulf, with a population of about 5mn. The country is safe, thanks to the rule of law enforced by Royal Oman Police. To attract more tourists, investing in public transportation, like a metro rail system, will be beneficial. Oman is blessed with serene beaches, hills and diverse terrain, making it a truly beautiful destination.

Tanushree
(Visited Oman in 2018)

Oman is an incredibly beautiful and secure destination, but it could benefit from further advancements in education opportunities and the development of tourist attractions.

Raghavendra Singh
Accountant

In this country, rules apply equally to all citizens, and the remarkable aspect is that everyone wholeheartedly adheres to these regulations, contributing to its enhanced beauty.

Jaseela KA
Urban planner

Being an expat and new to the country, I perceive safety in Oman by observing how women were treated in the country. They can walk alone on the streets late at night and visit beaches before dawn and at night without any worries, thanks to the respect they receive from others. People treat each other with consideration and make everyone feel comfortable. To make the country even safer, providing more working women's hostels for expatriates will be helpful. Moreover, having cheaper and more frequent public transportation options like buses, along with the upcoming metro and rail projects, will be beneficial improvements.

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

A first in the region, the new Social Protection Law promises end-of-service benefits for expatriate workers. How can this system be streamlined for the maximum benefit of expats?

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

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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Burden of global warming on Oman

Continued from Page 01
Oman Vision 2040 and its National Energy Strategy set a target of scaling up renewables and improving energy efficiency, while the National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change and the second nationally determined contribution (NDC) recognise the need for energy infrastructure resilience against climate change impacts. 'The planned increase in the

share of renewables in power generation (0% in 2015 to 20% by 2030 and 35-39% by 2040) would require more attention being given to climate impacts.' Completion of the National Adaptation Plan and the government's support for climate risk and impact assessment in the energy sector can act as a starting point to achieve climate-resilient energy transition in Oman, the IEA report added.



Wilson Souza paints Nakhl Fort onsite (Supplied photos)

Indian artist enthralled by Oman's diverse offerings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Indian artist Wilson Souza found his muse in Oman on his maiden visit to the sultanate earlier this month. Drawing inspiration from the country's diverse landscapes, he has completed 12 paintings and plans to create more.

Passionate about painting landscapes and semi-abstracts using oil on canvas, Wilson spoke highly of his experience in Oman. "I'm enthralled by nature. Many dream of exploring the length and breadth of Oman, a wish I've had the privilege to fulfil," he said. Invited by friends to Oman, this is Souza's first visit abroad.

Oman's unique beauty and



the warmth of its people captivated him. "Palaces, mosques, forts, mountains, villages, aflaj... I found inspiration everywhere," he claimed. The diverse geographical features and the inherent beauty of each location triggered his creativity.

A native of the state of Karnataka, Souza plans to hold an art exhibition in Oman. "As an artist, my work should reach art

enthusiasts. I want to inspire the younger generation to explore and hone their artistic skills," Souza said.

He believes exhibitions are a vital platform for artists to connect with global art lovers and he's keen to participate if given the opportunity.

Having cherished his experience in Oman, he anticipates returning.

Arab tech leaders in Muscat for strategic meet



Muscat - The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is hosting the 51st meeting of the Permanent Committee of the Arab Parliament for Communications and Information. The three-day meeting, taking place in Muscat, will tackle an array of subjects pertinent to Arab collaboration in communications and information.

Cybersecurity and the Arab strategy for communications and information are among the key topics on the agenda. These discussions aim to promote and fortify mutual Arab interests in the field of communications and information.

Dr Saud bin Humaid al Shuaili, Director General of Policy and Governance at the ministry, emphasised the meeting's focus on critical aspects of the communications and IT sector, including digital

Cybersecurity and the Arab strategy for communications and information are among the key topics on the agenda

economy, data and cybersecurity. He anticipates that the meeting will generate several pertinent recommendations. Dr Khaled Wali, Director of Arab Leagues' Communications and Information Technology Development Department, underlined the meeting's significance in aligning Arab countries' policies to international standards and platforms. He also pointed out the importance of these global gatherings for coordination between Arab technical teams on matters such as artificial intelligence.

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Dancers from Oman shine at global championship in Spain

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A dance group from Oman triumphed at the Global Dance Open championship in Avila, Spain, making the sultanate proud.

The troupe from the popular dance academy DDA represented the sultanate in the four-day competition from July 19 to 22. It claimed two gold medals - Senior (Zero Degree) and Junior (Sizzlers) - and a bronze in the Solo senior (Shivika Bhatt) categories.

Expressing pride in the group's performance, DDA official Deepthi S said, "Zero Degree received cash prizes and secured the second top scorer position



(Supplied photo)

among more than 1,000 competitors from 35 countries, including the USA, Canada, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Gibraltar, Canary Islands, New Zealand, UAE, Qatar, Japan and Germany."

The competition saw participation of contestants from around the world in all three categories. "We had anticipated being category winners, but being crowned second overall champions surpassed our expectations. We are proud to put Oman on the global dance map. Our preparations over four months paid off," Deepthi added. Earlier in May, DDA participated in the qualifying round of the competition in Qatar and emerged victorious with an impressive score of 96.6.



Jabal Akhdar beckons trail running enthusiasts

Muscat - Trail running and adventure enthusiasts can look forward to a weekend full of adrenaline rush and also witness the celebrations of the Jabal Akhdar Festival next month.

Organisers of the popular Himam Trail Run Race are calling for entries to the Himam Taster Run race in Jabal Akhdar on August 18.

'Join us for a thrilling taste of Jabal Akhdar's beauty on August 18 - a fun-filled day of running, before the main event in November,' the organisers stated.

With trails designed to wind through heritage villages, the Taster Run offers two distances - 10km for adults and 4km for children.

The 10km race will start at 4pm from the Castle of Emir of Qatar and finish at Jabal Akhdar Park 2.

The children's race will start at 5.30pm from Hayl al Yiman and end at Jabal Akhdar Park 2.

With the Jabal Akhdar Festival set to take place from August 3 to 19, participants will have an opportunity to be part of and witness a variety of activities and events, featuring a range of cul-

With trails designed to wind through heritage villages, the Taster Run on August 18 offers two distances - 10km for adults and 4km for children

tural, heritage, entertainment and adventure programmes.

The Himam Trail Run Race will be held on November 23 offering runners the chance to push their limits and test their endurance on some of the most breathtaking trails in Oman.

Building on the success of last year's race, organisers have revealed three distances that suit all levels of ability, including the classic and challenging Al Hajar Ultra 110km, starting in the picturesque town of Al Hamra.

Trail runners can also take part in the 55km or 20km races, both starting on November 24 in Birkat al Mouz.

MoSD green lights formation of four new entities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, has approved the establishment of four non-profit organisations - Ishraqa Charitable Foundation, Al Yusr Charitable Foundation, Positive Vision (Al Roya Al Ejabya) Association, and the Omani Design Association.

H E Laila issued four Minister of Social Development (MoSD) decisions on Sunday to this effect. The Ishraqa Charitable Foundation will focus on the up-



(Image for illustrative purpose)

liftment of Omani society. Its objectives include offering financial aid for education-related activities, providing support for children with disabilities, and

catering to the needs of the elderly and women.

Al Yusr Charitable Foundation is geared towards improving the living conditions of impoverished

families, while the Positive Vision Association's mission is to develop and implement awareness programmes in the field of preventive healthcare.

The association will primarily target groups at high risk of HIV/AIDS and substance addiction. Additionally, it aims to equip its members and volunteers with the necessary skills to engage in its various programmes and activities. By coordinating with other health institutions, both government and private, Positive Vision Association seeks to encourage youth participation in

voluntary health check-ups and counseling programmes.

The Omani Design Association is set to advance activities and understanding of design as a sustainable industry, and create connections among design professionals and related sectors.

It also aims to equip institutions - both government and private - and individuals with contemporary design experiences that align with global developments. In addition, Omani Design Association will provide advisory support through its various branches.

Al Kawthar Islamic Shariah Compliant Fund			
"Value added exposure to GCC Markets"			
Board of Director Report For the Quarter ended June 30th, 2023.			
Dear Unitholders, On behalf of the board, I am pleased to present the results of Al Kawthar Fund (Shariah Compliant) for the quarter ended June 30th, 2023.			
During the quarter ended June 30th, 2023., the Fund gained 5.0% and outperformed the benchmark by 1.6%. Furthermore, the Fund has given an annualized 5-year return of 7.25%. The Fund value at the end of the period was RO. 6.17mn and the Net Asset Value per unit stood at RO 1.122. During the quarter, the fund distributed OMR 0.030 per unit to its shareholders.			
Market Performance			
Particulars	Al Kawthar performance	Benchmark performance	
Last 3 Months	5.00%	3.43%	
YTD 2023	6.79%	3.25%	
Full Year 2022	-7.10%	-6.78%	
Full Year 2021	27.32%	30.02%	
Full Year 2020	5.49%	2.48%	
Last 5 Years Annualized	7.25%	6.09%	
Global equity markets performed well in the 1H-2023, owing primarily to the resilient economic data and expectations of peaking policy rates with on-going declines in the headline inflation. It was strengthened further by the easing of concerns about the global banking crisis and the resolution of the US debt ceiling.			
GCC equity markets also remained buoyant, in line with the global financial market's performance and an upbeat regional outlook. During 1H-2023, the MSCI GCC index performed well, with Dubai's market leading the way with a double-digit return of 13.7%, followed by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain with gains of 9.4% and 3.3%, respectively. On the other hand, Abu Dhabi saw the biggest drop of 6.5%, followed by Qatar and Kuwait, which declined by 5.7% and 3.6%, respectively. Oman's market also fell 1.8% during the same time period.			
Brief Summary of Accounts			
Particulars	30th Jun 2023 RO	30th Jun 2022 RO	
Revenues	519,516	327,067	
Total Comprehensive Income	400,036	180,375	
Net Asset Value	6,166,474	6,558,173	
Fund Capital	5,493,866	5,513,311	
NAV per unit	1.122	1.190	
Outlook Current global macro-conditions continue to indicate an elevated level of uncertainty. While the risks remain, alternative data suggests that inflation may fall faster than expected as the major economies remain relatively healthy. In our view, the second half of the year will be pivotal in defining the course of Fed policy, which will have an impact on broader markets. On the GCC markets, OPEC's continuous and timely support to the oil market, solid pipeline of mega-projects across the region, and the new public offerings will continue to boost the investor's confidence. Moreover, we maintain our view that despite the global economic challenges the outlook for GCC markets remains encouraging. The region stands to benefit from its relative stability, in terms of strong economies, fiscal buffers to sustain any downturns, and firm leadership in contrast to uncertainties elsewhere. Therefore, we maintain a cautiously optimistic view of the markets and believe our approach to stock selection and portfolio management shall ensure steady and positive returns over the medium to long term.			
We pay our tributes to His Majesty, Haitham Bin Tarik, for his inspiring leadership and vision that will continue to lead us further on the path to greater prosperity.			
On behalf of the members of the Board of Directors, I would like to acknowledge and thank His Majesty government and our valued unit holders for their continued support.			
Rawan Ahmed Al Said Chairperson			

INTERIM UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2023			
	30 June 2023 Unaudited	31 December 2022 Audited	30 June 2022 Unaudited
ASSETS			
Current assets			
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	5,372,137	5,150,405	5,138,440
Receivables	271,469	428,028	577,415
Cash and cash equivalents	610,919	485,742	934,171
Total assets	6,254,525	6,064,175	6,650,026
UNITHOLDERS' FUNDS			
Fund capital	5,493,866	5,537,963	5,513,311
Retained earnings	672,608	442,724	1,044,862
Total Unitholders' funds	6,166,474	5,980,687	6,558,173
LIABILITIES			
Current liabilities			
Accruals and other payables	45,974	39,622	46,362
Due to a related party	42,077	43,866	45,491
Total liabilities	88,051	83,488	91,853
Total unitholders' funds and liabilities	6,254,525	6,064,175	6,650,026
Net asset value per unit	1.122	1.080	1.190
PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX-MONTH PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2023			
	Six-month period from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2023 Unaudited	Six-month period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2022 Unaudited	
INCOME			
Dividend income from financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	158,245	136,447	
Realised gain on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	206,039	433,586	
Unrealised gain/(loss) on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	156,357	(242,461)	
Foreign exchange loss	(1,125)	(505)	
	519,516	327,067	
EXPENSES			
Management, performance, custodian and fund administration fees	(63,815)	(73,459)	
General and administrative expenses	(55,665)	(73,233)	
	(119,480)	(146,692)	
Net profit/(loss) for the period	400,036	180,375	
Earnings/(loss) per unit	0.073	0.033	

TATHMEER صندوق تنمية المتنوع للأسهم الخليجية TANMIA GCC Diversified Fund			
BOARD OF DIRECTOR REPORT FOR THE QUARTER ENDED JUNE 30TH, 2023.			
Dear Unitholders, On behalf of the board, I am pleased to present the results of TANMIA GCC Diversified Equity Fund (TATHMEER) for the quarter ended June 30th, 2023.			
During the quarter ended 30th June 2023, the fund gained 6.49% and outperformed the benchmark by 3.81%. Furthermore, the fund has given an annualized 3-year return of 17.06%. The fund value at the end of the period was RO. 22.65mn and the Net Asset Value per unit stood at RO 1.224. During the quarter, the fund distributed a cash dividend of 3.0%.			
Performance			
Period	Fund Performance	Benchmark Performance	
Last 3 Months	6.49%	4.76%	
YTD 2023	6.69%	2.87%	
Full Year 2022	-4.73%	-6.84%	
Full Year 2021	32.90%	31.45%	
Full Year 2020	2.56%	-2.46%	
Last 3 Years Annualized	17.06%	13.71%	
Global equity markets performed well in the 1H-2023, owing primarily to the resilient economic data and expectations of peaking policy rates with on-going declines in the headline inflation. It was strengthened further by the easing of concerns about the global banking crisis and the resolution of the US debt ceiling.			
GCC equity markets also remained buoyant, in line with the global financial market's performance and an upbeat regional outlook. During 1H-2023, the MSCI GCC index performed well, with Dubai's market leading the way with a double-digit return of 13.7%, followed by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain with gains of 9.4% and 3.3%, respectively. On the other hand, Abu Dhabi saw the biggest drop of 6.5%, followed by Qatar and Kuwait, which declined by 5.7% and 3.6%, respectively. Oman's market also fell 1.8% during the same time period.			
Brief Summary of Accounts			
Particulars	30th Jun 2023 USD	30th Jun 2022 USD	
Revenues	1,758,614	1,201,269	
Total Comprehensive Income	1,435,932	863,387	
Net Asset Value	22,650,887	23,296,077	
Fund Capital	18,508,452	18,282,882	
NAV per unit	1.22	1.27	
Outlook Current global macro-conditions continue to indicate an elevated level of uncertainty. While the risks remain, alternative data suggests that inflation may fall faster than expected as the major economies remain relatively healthy. In our view, the second half of the year will be pivotal in defining the course of Fed policy, which will have an impact on broader markets. On the GCC markets, OPEC's continuous and timely support to the oil market, solid pipeline of mega-projects across the region, and the new public offerings will continue to boost the investor's confidence. Moreover, we maintain our view that despite the global economic challenges the outlook for GCC markets remains encouraging. The region stands to benefit from its relative stability, in terms of strong economies, fiscal buffers to sustain any downturns, and firm leadership in contrast to uncertainties elsewhere. Therefore, we maintain a cautiously optimistic view of the markets and believe our approach to stock selection and portfolio management shall ensure steady and positive returns over the medium to long term.			
We pay our tributes to His Majesty, Haitham Bin Tarik, for his inspiring leadership and vision that will continue to lead us further on the path to greater prosperity.			
On behalf of the members of the Board of Directors, I would like to acknowledge and thank His Majesty government and our valued unit holders for their continued support.			
Rawan Ahmed Al Said Chairperson			

INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2023					
30 June 2022 RO	31 December 2022 RO	30 June 2023 RO	30 June 2022 US\$	31 December 2022	30 June 2022 US\$
ASSETS					
Current assets					
Investments at fair value					
6,924,196	7,077,886	8,034,831	through profit or loss	20,869,691	18,384,118
1,578,770	861,052	482,248	Receivables	1,253,111	2,236,499
			Cash and cash		4,100,701
566,419	564,084	246,606	equivalents	640,534	1,465,154
9,069,385	8,503,022	8,763,885	Total assets	22,763,336	22,085,771
UNIT HOLDERS' FUNDS					
7,038,910	7,189,850	7,125,754	Fund capital	18,508,452	18,674,935
1,930,255	1,266,214	1,594,837	Retained earnings	4,142,435	3,288,868
8,969,165	8,456,064	8,720,591	Total Unit holders' funds	22,650,887	21,963,803
LIABILITIES					
Current liabilities					
Accruals and other					
56,386	8,169	5,288	payables	13,735	21,217
			Amount due to		146,457
43,834	38,789	38,006	a related party	98,714	100,751
100,220	46,958	43,294	Total liabilities	112,449	121,968
			Total unit holders'		260,311
9,069,385	8,503,022	8,763,885	Funds and liabilities	22,763,336	22,085,771
0.491	0.453	0.471	Net asset value per unit	1.224	1.176
				1.274	
INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2023					
Six-month period ended 30 June 2023 RO	Six-month period ended 30 June 2022 RO	Six-month period ended 30 June 2023 US\$	Six-month period ended 30 June 2022 US\$		
INCOME					
203,561	202,049			Dividend income on financial assets	
				at fair value through profit or loss	524,802
				Realised gain on sale of financial	528,731
392,831	295,828			assets at fair value through profit or loss	768,385
(124,747)	172,008			Unrealised (loss)/gain on financial assets at	1,020,339
(9,699)	(6,635)			fair value through profit or loss	446,773
543	13,817			Foreign exchange loss	(324,019)
				Finance income	(17,235)
					(25,192)
					35,889
					1,410
					1,758,614
					1,201,269
EXPENSES					
462,489	677,067			Management and custodian fees	(195,178)
				General and administrative expenses	(225,315)
(86,746)	(75,144)				(127,504)
					(112,567)
					(322,682)
					(337,882)
(43,338)	(49,089)			Net profit for the period	1,435,932
(130,084)	(124,233)			Other comprehensive income	(901,993)
				Redemption gain/(loss)	
332,405	552,834			Total comprehensive income	
0.018	0.030			for the period	0.077
				Earnings per unit	0.047



The Directors' Report to the Shareholders on condensed consolidated interim financial information

Dear Shareholders,

On Behalf of the Board of Directors and myself, I am pleased to present the financial results of Takaful Oman Insurance Company SAOG for its six months period ended June 30, 2023. The company has continued its journey towards profitable growth and I am happy to inform you that the participants' fund has reported a surplus of RO 0.32 million (IH22: surplus of RO 0.24 million). Furthermore, the company has also reported a profit before tax and OCI of RO 0.05 million (IH22: Loss of RO 0.16 million) in the shareholders' fund. The Company has established a business strategy that continues in implementing to improve & carry the company into growth.

Macro Economics Outlook

Global economic activity is experiencing a broad based and sharper than expected slowdown, with inflation higher than seen in several decades. The cost-of-living crisis tightened financial conditions in most regions. In contrast, in Oman, the economy is projected to continue its recovery and strengthen over the medium term, driven by robust energy prices, expansion of oil and gas production, and wide-ranging structural reforms. The higher oil prices and the government's fiscal reforms have paid back, and the country's fiscal position has improved. The Sultanate reported a budget surplus of RO1.146bn for 2022. The Sultanate's sovereign credit ratings were upgraded twice by S&P to BB in 2022. The outlook for Oman's economy for the year 2023 is promising with an expected growth of real GDP by 4.3 percent.

Performance in Brief

Participants Funds

The participant funds have reported a surplus of RO 0.32 million (IH22: surplus of RO 0.24 million) for six months ended June 30, 2023. Furthermore, the Company's top line has increased by 6% YoY and reported Gross written contributions of RO 18.7 million (IH22: 17.7 million). General & Family Takaful was the main contributor to the top line by 33% & 47% respectively. The health takaful portfolio shrank by 28% in line with the business strategy of repricing the loss-making portfolios. The Company has recorded a growth of 26% in the Net written contributions while retention ratios have increased to 52% (IH22: 44%) during the period.

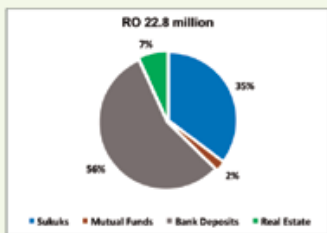
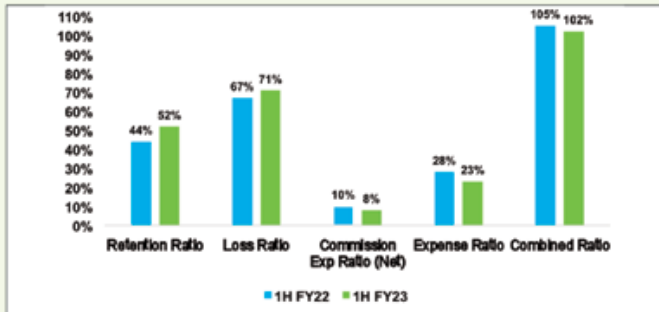
Shareholders' Fund

The Shareholders' fund top line is driven by the Wakala fees. During the six months period ended June 30, 2023, the shareholders' fund recorded Wakala fees of RO 2.41 million (IH22: 2.23 million), registering an increase of 5% YoY on the backdrop of increased business underwritten.

Although, the General & Admin expenses on an absolute basis increased by 4% YoY, however the Expense Ratios improved to 23% from 28% as compared to same period last year on account of higher Net Earned Contribution which posted a YoY growth of 27%.

The Shareholders' fund has reported a profit before finance cost, tax & OCI of RO 0.24 million (IH22: RO 0.04 million) registering an impressive growth of 425% on account of higher Wakala fees and investment income.

Key financial ratios are given below:



Investment Position & Performance:

The Company has a sound and stable investment portfolio of RO 22.8 million. 56% of the total combined investment portfolio is placed as Bank deposits with reputed, dedicated Islamic banks and Islamic windows of commercial banks. The Company has generated an investment income of RO 0.43 million from the Shareholders' fund and 0.18 million from the Participants' fund in 2023. The total investment income increased to RO 0.61 million in 2023 compared to RO 0.47 million in same period last year, thereby registering an increase of 30% YoY. There has been an increase in the Sukuk portfolio allocation over the periods, which reflects the Company's strategy to add high-quality Sukuk to the investment portfolio, which will help augment the investment income.

Shariah Compliance is the topmost priority

Takaful Oman Insurance has shown a commitment to being transparent and accountable in enhancing its portfolio while adhering to the Shariah law.

The Shariah Supervisory Committee (SSC) perform the supervisory role to make sure that the company operation is in compliance with Islamic Shariah rule and principle. The Financial statements for the period ended June 30, 2023, are reviewed and approved by Shariah Supervisory Committee.

High Performing Leadership Team with Excellent Omisionation Ratio

Employees are the backbone of any organization. To achieve sustainable & profitable growth an experienced and motivated team is imperative. The company has continued its journey, which was started in 2021, to develop a leadership team having the capability to turn around the company.

Transparency, high ethical and moral standards, diversity, and equal opportunity are the fundamental pillars of HR policy. The company provides a healthy working environment, to utilize the best potential of the employees. In line with government policy, the company provides training and learning opportunities in the insurance sector to the youth.

Takaful Oman is proud to achieve the overall Omisionation ratio of 82% as against the required ratio of 75%. The company staff is the main source of achievement. In order for the company to stay competitive in the industry, It continues to invest in the training and development of its human resources.

Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG)

At Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG, we are committed to conducting our business in a socially responsible and sustainable manner. Our ESG charter outlines our commitment to ethical and responsible business practices, community development, environmental protection, employee engagement, stakeholder engagement, and ESG integration. The Company believes that our CSR activities and ESG considerations will not only benefit society and the environment but will also contribute to long-term success as a responsible business.

Acknowledgement:

The Board wishes to sincerely thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said for his exceptional leadership and vision.

The Board would like to express their deep appreciation to the shareholders who have shown continued confidence in the Company and its management team. They also like to thank the Capital Market Authority (CMA) and Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) for their continued guidance and support.

In addition, The Board wishes to record their sincere appreciation and gratitude for the commitment, dedication, and innovative thinking put in by every member of our Takaful Oman family, with complete confidence that they will continue to do so.

On behalf of the Board of Directors
Mr. Sulaiman Hamed Hamood Al Harthi
Chairman

Condensed consolidated interim statement of shareholders' income for the period ended 30 June 2023 (Unaudited)

	2023 RO	2022 RO
Wakala fees income	2,411,463	2,290,051
Investment income	428,070	383,835
Mudarabah Share	89,115	-
	2,928,648	2,673,886
General and administrative expenses	(1,846,831)	(1,782,618)
Ijarah financing expenses	(32,984)	(28,340)
Wakala financing expenses	(161,417)	(176,699)
Policy Acquisition costs	(837,016)	(844,834)
Profit / (Loss) before taxation	50,400	(158,605)
Taxation	(55,112)	-
Loss after taxation	(4,712)	(158,605)

Note: The complete accounts will be delivered or sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English as requested, within seven days of receipt of the request. Requests to be sent to the following address:

Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG,
P.O. BOX 207, Postal Code 134, Bareeq Al Shatti, Sultanate of Oman
Tel.: 00968 22303000, Fax: 00968 24699511

Condensed consolidated interim statement of financial position as at 30 June 2023 (Unaudited)				
	Shareholders RO	Participants		
		General Takaful RO	Family Takaful RO	Total RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	69,492	1,139,790	1,557,813	2,697,603
Financial asset at fair value through equity	468,421	-	-	-
Receivable from participants' fund	4,093,018	-	-	-
Takaful balance receivables	-	6,559,907	4,707,808	11,267,715
Retakaful balance receivables	-	6,553,963	1,120,261	7,674,224
Other receivables and prepayments	1,756,120	887,885	261,548	1,149,433
Retakaful contract assets	-	4,497,010	11,839,885	16,336,895
Deferred policy acquisition costs	813,658	-	-	-
Wakala bank deposits	9,769,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	3,000,000
Investment carried at amortised cost	3,351,374	-	4,696,361	4,696,361
Property and equipment	529,684	-	-	-
Right of use assets	1,554,507	-	-	-
Intangible assets	380,971	-	-	-
Deferred tax assets	1,250,060	-	-	-
Total assets	24,036,305	21,138,555	25,683,676	46,822,231
LIABILITIES, PARTICIPANTS' FUND AND EQUITY				
Liabilities				
Takaful contract liabilities	-	18,201,730	15,285,429	33,487,159
Payable to shareholders' fund	-	567,788	3,525,230	4,093,018
Payable to Retakaful	-	3,921,774	9,466,211	13,387,985
Accounts and other payables	627,446	3,620,116	698,398	4,318,515
Wakala financing	4,341,321	-	-	-
Deferred income from retakaful contracts	-	188,741	-	188,741
Employees' end of service benefits	81,848	-	-	-
Ijarah liabilities	950,551	-	-	-
Total liabilities	6,001,166	26,500,148	28,975,269	55,475,418
Participants' fund				
Deficit in participant's fund	-	(5,361,593)	(3,291,594)	(8,653,187)
Equity				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	16,000,000	-	-	-
Legal reserve	1,436,739	-	-	-
Investment fair value reserve	36,789	-	-	-
Retained earnings	(5,438,390)	-	-	-
Total equity attributable to Shareholders	12,035,138	-	-	-
Perpetual Sukuk eligible as additional capital	6,000,000	-	-	-
Shareholders' equity	18,035,138	-	-	-
Total liabilities, participants' fund and equity	24,036,305	21,138,555	25,683,676	46,822,231
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders	0.0481	-	-	-

Condensed consolidated interim statement of financial position as at 30 June 2022 (Unaudited)				
	Shareholders RO	Participants		
		General Takaful RO	Family Takaful RO	Total RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	440,756	1,861,088	1,288,383	3,149,471
Financial asset at fair value through equity	450,835	-	-	-
Receivable from participants' fund	4,638,835	-	-	-
Takaful balance receivables	-	4,584,655	3,106,698	7,691,353
Retakaful balance receivables	-	5,858,014	1,202,434	7,060,448
Other receivables and prepayments	1,656,233	514,842	140,282	655,124
Retakaful contract assets	-	9,859,987	9,834,967	19,694,954
Deferred policy acquisition costs	455,328	-	-	-
Wakala bank deposits	10,769,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	3,000,000
Investment carried at amortised cost	3,500,000	-	2,464,107	2,464,107
Property and equipment	582,599	-	-	-
Right of use assets	1,621,737	-	-	-
Intangible assets	372,081	-	-	-
Deferred tax asset	1,305,172	-	-	-
Total assets	25,792,576	24,178,586	19,536,871	43,715,457
LIABILITIES, PARTICIPANTS' FUND AND EQUITY				
Liabilities				
Takaful contract liabilities	-	21,018,773	12,415,272	33,434,045
Payable to shareholders' fund	-	1,043,154	3,595,681	4,638,835
Payable to Retakaful	-	2,496,234	5,853,105	8,349,339
Accounts and other payables	743,444	4,564,894	1,656,478	6,221,372
Wakala financing	5,644,746	-	-	-
Deferred income from retakaful contracts	-	41,727	340	42,067
Employees' end of service benefits	49,749	-	-	-
Ijarah liabilities	1,077,373	-	-	-
Total liabilities	7,515,312	29,164,782	23,520,876	52,685,658
Participants' fund				
Deficit in participant's fund	-	(4,986,196)	(3,984,005)	(8,970,201)
Equity				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	16,000,000	-	-	-
Legal reserve	1,436,739	-	-	-
Investment fair value reserve	19,203	-	-	-
Retained earnings	(5,178,678)	-	-	-
Total equity attributable to Shareholders	12,277,264	-	-	-
Perpetual Sukuk eligible as additional capital	6,000,000	-	-	-
Shareholders' equity	18,277,264	-	-	-
Total liabilities, participants' fund and equity	25,792,576	24,178,586	19,536,871	43,715,457
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders	0.049	-	-	-

Condensed consolidated interim statement of participants' revenues and expenses for the period ended 30 June 2023 (Unaudited)			
	General Takaful RO	2023	
		Family Takaful RO	Total RO
Takaful revenue			
Gross contributions	9,968,568	8,769,498	18,738,066
Contributions ceded to retakaful	(3,147,004)	(5,860,676)	(9,007,680)
Net retained contributions	6,821,564	2,908,822	9,730,386
Movement in unearned contribution reserve - net	(1,403,023)	(361,197)	(1,764,220)
Income from retakaful contracts	131,405	76,744	208,149
Total takaful revenue	5,549,946	2,624,369	8,174,315
Takaful expenses			
Gross claims settled	(10,222,231)	(1,856,724)	(12,078,955)
Retakaful share in claim settled	6,633,571	1,450,695	8,084,266
Net claims settled	(3,588,660)	(406,029)	(3,994,689)
Movement in outstanding claims reserve - net	(1,191,229)	(474,489)	(1,665,718)
Movement in other reserves	48,321	(29,556)	18,765
Net claims incurred	(4,731,568)	(910,074)	(5,641,642)
Other takaful expenses	(171,342)	(16,602)	(187,944)
Wakala fee expense	(1,295,929)	(1,115,534)	(2,411,463)
Total takaful expenses	(6,198,839)	(2,042,210)	(8,241,049)
Other income	225,635	68,997	294,632
Profit on wakala deposit	95,721	82,510	178,231
Mudarab Share	(47,860)	(41,255)	(89,115)
Surplus / (Deficit) from takaful operations	(375,397)	692,411	317,014
2022			
Takaful revenue			
Gross contributions	9,873,914	7,786,980	17,660,894
Contributions ceded to retakaful	(3,847,251)	(6,087,729)	(9,935,030)
Net retained contributions	6,026,663	1,699,201	7,725,864
Movement in unearned contribution reserve - net	(1,437,179)	(18,586)	(1,455,765)
Income from retakaful contracts	118,656	78,233	196,889
Total takaful revenue	4,708,140	1,758,847	6,466,987
Takaful expenses			
Gross claims settled	(10,824,311)	(3,672,877)	(14,497,188)
Retakaful share in claim settled	5,925,236	3,195,320	9,120,556
Net claims settled	(4,899,075)	(477,557)	(5,376,632)
Movement in outstanding claims reserve - net	1,010,398	(167,306)	843,092
Movement in other reserves	439,450	(128,079)	311,371
Net claims incurred	(3,449,228)	(772,941)	(4,222,169)
Other takaful expenses	123,450	(2,025)	121,425
Wakala fees expense	(1,390,546)	(899,505)	(2,290,051)
Total takaful expenses	(4,716,323)	(1,674,471)	(6,390,795)
Profit on wakala deposit	46,577	36,733	83,310
Other income	56,224	26,106	82,330
Surplus from takaful operations	94,618	147,215	241,833

Inflation increases by 2.8% in 2022



Muscat - The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 2.8% in 2022 as the Consumers Price Index (CPI) registered 109.7 points compared to 106.7 points in 2021, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicated a rise in the prices of main groups in 2022 in varying rates. A rise was recorded in the main groups of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels by 1.1%; transport by 3.9%; food and non-alcoholic beverages by 5.2%; clothing and footwear by 1.3%; restaurants and hotels by 2.1%; furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 1.3%; recreation and culture by 1.6%; education by 3.8%; miscellaneous goods and services by 2.1%; health by 3.1% and tobacco by 0.6%.

Meanwhile, prices of the communications group stabilised without change.

As far as products are concerned, oils and fats recorded the highest contribution rate to the rise in the CPI by 16%, followed by fuels and oils for personal transport equipment by 9.2%, kindergarten by 6.4% and

spending on hotels by 5.5%.

The Governorate of Buraimi recorded the highest inflation rate of 3.6%, while the Governorate of Muscat recorded the lowest rate of 2.4%.

Producers Price Index (PPI) in Oman recorded a 36.4% increase during 2022, touching 167.8 points compared to 123 points in 2021.

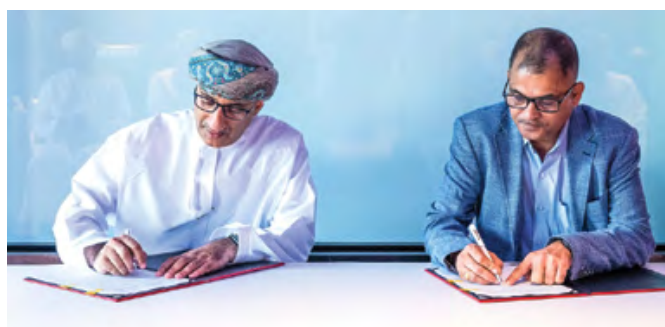
Prices of oil and gas products lead the rise by registering a 44.1% growth, while non-oil products recorded an increase of 3.8%

Prices of oil and gas products lead the rise by registering a 44.1% growth. Non-oil products recorded an increase of 3.8%.

Moreover, prices of crude oil and natural gas went up by 47% and the prices of refined oil increased by 28.2%.

A rise was also recorded in the prices of products of mining, electricity and water by 1.3% and converting industries by 4.5%.

ONA



SOHAR Freezone signs SCME for steel fabrication unit

Sohar - SOHAR Port and Freezone have signed a land lease agreement with SCME Projects Pvt Ltd (FZC) LLC, to establish a steel fabrication unit within SOHAR Freezone.

With a total investment of US\$1.3mn on an area of 5,000sqm, the investment from SCME Projects Pvt Ltd (FZC) LLC highlights the attractiveness of SOHAR Freezone for foreign investors, setting the stage for future foreign direct investment in the region.

This deal is geared towards fostering seamless integration in the mining sector's business ecosystem and providing comprehensive industrial services like project development to operational support and mechanical maintenance of FAP, effectively reducing construction costs.

Barjesh Kumar Singh, authorised manager of SCME Projects Pvt Ltd (FZC) LLC, said that the company was upbeat about this partnership with SOHAR Free-

zone and the promising opportunities it offers to investors.

By leveraging the strategic advantages provided by SOHAR Freezone and its continued growth, Singh assured that their comprehensive service platform would offer businesses a streamlined approach to accessing essential services, ultimately enabling them to focus on their core operations and maximise productivity.

"This signing with SCME Projects Pvt Ltd (FZC) LLC signifies our unwavering

Iran to ‘pursue rights’ over disputed gas field: Ministry

Tehran, Iran - Iran’s Oil Minister on Sunday said Tehran would ‘pursue its rights’ to a disputed gas field also claimed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait if negotiations fail, the ministry’s news agency reported.

The offshore zone of the resource-rich Gulf, known as Arash in Iran and Dorra in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, has long been a focal point of contention between the three countries.

“Iran will pursue its rights and interests regarding exploitation and exploration” of the field “if there is no desire for understanding and cooperation”, Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji was quoted as saying by the official Shana news agency.

He said Tehran has sought “the path of negotiation and understanding with our neighbours”, according to Shana.

“Iran will not tolerate any violation of its rights,” Owji added.

Earlier this month, Kuwait had invited Iran for another round of maritime border talks after Tehran said it was ready to start drilling in the field.

On Thursday, Sky News Ara-



bia quoted Kuwait’s Oil Minister Saad al Barrak as saying his country would begin ‘drilling and production’ at the gas field without waiting for a demarcation deal with Iran.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, who share some maritime gas and oil resources, last year signed an agreement to jointly develop the field despite objections from Iran, which branded the deal as ‘illegal’.

The row over the field

stretches back to the 1960s, when Iran and Kuwait each awarded an offshore concession, one to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the forerunner to BP, and one to Royal Dutch Shell.

The two concessions overlapped in the northern part of the field, whose recoverable reserves are estimated at some 220bn cubic metres (nearly eight trillion cubic feet).

Iran and Kuwait have held unsuccessful talks for many years

over their disputed maritime border area, which is rich in natural gas.

Iranian drilling of the field in 2001 spurred Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to agree on joint offshore projects.

Saudi Arabia and Iran ended in March a seven-year rift with a surprise Chinese-brokered rapprochement deal, raising hopes for reduced tensions between the Middle East heavyweights.

AFP

Decoupling from China illusion: French minister

Beijing, China - France’s Finance Minister said during a visit to Beijing on Sunday that cutting all economic ties with China was ‘an illusion’, as some Western countries question their reliance on the Asian giant.

“We are totally opposed to the idea of decoupling. Decoupling is an illusion,” Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told reporters at the French Embassy.

“There is no possibility of having any kind of decoupling between the American, European and Chinese economies.”

Le Maire nonetheless defended France’s ambition to become more economically independent in certain sectors. But, he added, the concept of de-risking, which has become a byword in the West in recent months, ‘does not mean that China is a risk’.

“De-risking means that we want to be more independent... We don’t want to realise, as we realised during the COVID-19 crisis, that we have too much dependence on some very specific components,” he added, citing microchips as one example.

Le Maire’s remarks come as some Western countries seek to reduce their economic depend-



Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng (right) with French Minister of Economy and Finances Bruno Le Maire at a meeting in Beijing on Saturday (AFP)

There is no possibility of having any kind of decoupling between the American, European and Chinese economies. We are opposed to the idea

BRUNO LE MAIRE

ence on China, particularly Germany, which counts the Asian country as its top trading partner and an important market for its automotive industry.

The United States has also advocated de-risking from China, though US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said during a visit to Beijing earlier this month that a decoupling of the US and Chinese economies would be ‘virtually impossible’.

China, meanwhile, has lashed out at Western efforts to de-risk, with Premier Li Qiang last month calling the concept a ‘false proposition’.

Le Maire is in China for high-level economic talks, and will travel on Monday to the southern tech hub of Shenzhen to meet with business leaders.

AFP

Rejuvenated Chinese economy stimulate oil prices: Experts

Kuwait City, Kuwait - A couple of Kuwaiti oil experts attributed the rise in oil prices last week to the highest point since last April to improving global oil demands and the stimulation of Chinese economy.

In separate remarks to KUNA on Sunday, the two mentioned that Brent crude rose by 4.8% whereas West Texas by 4.6%, for fifth week in a row, the longest series of weekly gains in about a year.

Professor of petroleum engineering at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training Dr Ahmad al Kouh stated that the global economy remains relatively warm due to interest rate hikes by US Federal Reserve and other central banks.

Kouh urged OPEC+ to stay alert and monitor rapid market developments as oil demand in second half of this current year is expected to drop.

He ruled out the possibility of



OPEC+ lowering production yet again but called previous decreases a correct decision as they managed to keep prices above the US\$70 threshold.

As for Expert Jamal al Gharabally, he stated that oil prices remain aloft due to increasing demand in China accompanied by decreasing global oil reserves.

Gharabally expects oil prices to remain at US\$85 to US\$90 until the end of the year. He credited the improved demand on oil due to growth of the American economy surpassing second quarter forecast, as well as the mounting hopes of central banks ending interest rate increases.

KUNA

PM backs UK’s oil exploration plan

London, UK - UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has backed plans for new fossil fuel drilling off Britain’s coast, saying in a Sunday newspaper interview he would be ‘pragmatic and proportionate’ about reaching net zero.

His government is expected to approve the development of Rosebank, near Scotland’s Shetland Isles - believed to be the UK’s largest undeveloped oil and gas field - as well as other sites in the nearby North Sea imminently.

The prospect has infuriated environmental campaigners, who argue that stopping all new fossil fuel exploitation is essential if Britain is to decarbonise by mid-century. They accuse the British leader of lacking conviction on climate policies and playing politics with the issue, as he eyes a general election due next year amid a cost-of-living crisis.

The main opposition Labour party, well ahead in the polls, said earlier this year it will not issue any new North Sea drilling licences if it regains power after more than a decade in opposition.

“I think it makes absolutely no



Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (AFP)

sense, as the Labour Party is suggesting, to ban North Sea oil and gas,” Sunak told the *Sunday Telegraph*. “That is just going to weaken our energy security and strengthen the hands of dictators like (Russian) President (Vladimir) Putin,” he said, arguing it jeopardised 200,000 jobs and threatened £80bn worth of tax revenue.

Sunak, who became leader last October, said his approach was “to support the UK’s energy industry” and appeared to suggest that not exploiting new UK oil and gas reserves risked “the lights going out” in Britain.

“Everybody sensible recognises that we will need those fossil fuels as part of the transition

to net zero,” he argued.

‘Out of touch’

The comments follow the Conservatives defying dismal national polling to retain former prime minister Boris Johnson’s vacated northwest London seat in a July 20 parliamentary by-election.

The narrow victory came amid voter unease at Labour mayor Sadiq Khan expanding a scheme taxing the use of the most polluting vehicles, and appears to have emboldened Tory net zero opponents.

In the *Telegraph* interview, Sunak insisted he was on the side of motorists and said he had ordered a review of so-called low traffic neighbourhoods, contentious local authority-led tools to limit vehicle use in designated areas by blocking roads. His government has riled climate campaigners since the surprise by-election win by suggesting some UK environmental targets could be eased, while offering lukewarm support for the country’s ambitious net zero agenda.

AFP

Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

P.O. Box 38, Mina Al Fahal, Postal Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: 24570100 • Fax: 24570121 • www.shelloman.com.om

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30TH JUNE 2023

In its meeting held on 26th July 2023, the Board of Directors approved the Company's unaudited financial results for the period ended 30th June 2023.

SUMMARY FINANCIALS

In OMR'000	Quarter		6 Months	
	Q2/23	Q2/22	2023	2022
Revenue	127,159	124,525	249,950	236,593
Gross profit	8,907	9,568	17,141	17,946
Add: Other income	1,063	1,045	2,123	1,958
Less: Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(8,134)	(7,466)	(15,546)	(14,597)
Less: Financing and taxation	(861)	(851)	(1,750)	(1,575)
Profit and comprehensive income	975	2,296	1,968	3,732

- Six Months Revenue was OMR 249,950 million, 6% higher than the same period last year supported by volume growth across all the segments.
- Six Months Gross Profit was OMR 17,140 million, 4% lower than the same period last year mainly due to movement in aviation fuel prices compared to the same period last year.
- Six Months Profit and Comprehensive Income was OMR 1,967 million 47% lower than the same period in 2022 due to lower gross profit and overall increase in direct and indirect costs.

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Mobility Business continued its commitment towards offering world class customer experience through its operational excellence and enhanced value proposition for the motorists. This quarter, the business renewed its commitment towards 'GOAL ZERO' during the 'Shell Safety Day' whilst ensuring safety of our customers, our frontline employees, and our people. The business continued its focus on growing the Non-Fuel segment and expanded the Shell Select brand footprint to 45 shops in total, while adding four more Shell Car Wash and Shell Petrol Oil Change+ with more to come in the upcoming months. To provide motorists with more convenient options, the business further strengthened its presence in the Sultanate by adding four new service stations in prime locations across the Sultanate to bring our total number of sites to 239 service stations.

To continue promoting Shell V-Power, our Best Performance Fuel, the business launched an exclusive 'Formal Collectible Toy Car' promotion in collaboration with social media influencers to promote our differentiated fuel Shell V-Power for motorists. Shell GO, our new loyalty application continued to grow with a steady increase in active users. The business continued to leverage its partnerships with leading banks in Oman to launch exciting offers for the customers.

Fleet Solutions Business continued to grow in volumes compared to last year with steady contribution to the Mobility business. The business continued to focus on signing new customers, mainly in the construction and oil & gas industries due to increased activities, while addressing evolving customer needs through acceleration of its digitalization journey. The business remains committed to delivery promises, operational excellence and leveraging the Cents Management System to provide better security and transactional control.

Commercial Fuels Business demonstrated a growth trajectory, marked by an increase in volume and driven by strategic acquisitions and successful execution of commercial projects. However, this commendable progress has not been without its share of challenges, predominantly linked to limited infrastructure projects within the competitive business-to-business (B2B) market. Nevertheless, the Company remained focused on ensuring uninterrupted continuity of its customers' businesses through efficient cost flow management practices, focus on operational excellence, and the introduction of state-of-the-art mobility solutions.

Marine Business continued to serve its customers of key ports leveraging its global expertise to ensure successful delivery of bunkering solutions to its marine customers. The Company's focus remains on strengthening its position and exploring new business opportunities to expand its footprint across all major ports in the Sultanate, whilst remaining fully committed to the highest HSE, Ethics & Compliance and operational excellence standards.

Lubricants Business continued to lead the industry locally with strong operations across Business-to-Business (B2B) and Business-to-Customer (B2C) segments. The business considerably focused on growing the premium lubricants volume mix and creating demand for the newly introduced Carbon Neutral Helix Ultra and the low emissions product range. Export business continued navigating demand challenges, which it was able to mitigate by winning new businesses across the region, local customers, and upscaling to higher product tiers. Our Lubricants blending plant located in Mina Al Fahal in Muscat, has been re-certified for ISO 14001 & 45001 and successfully passed multiple audits in Q1 & Q2 respectively in 2023. Currently the blending plant operates to fulfill the demand of Shell Lubricants products both locally and internationally offering a wide range of locally blended products.

Aviation Business continued its focus on retaining and winning new key contracts in Muscat International Airport and Salalah International Airport. The business continued to apply efficiency and cost optimization solutions to its operations to improve profitability and to continue serving its customers safely and reliably. The business celebrated winning additional volumes through Binan Bangladesh Airlines, Turkish Airlines and Saudi Airlines tenders while retaining Air India, Emirates, Fly Dubai and Complex contracts.

HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENT (HSSE)

The Company ended the quarter with Zero Recordable Incidents and Zero Loss of Primary Containment (LOPCs), a testament to its commitment to Health, Safety, Security, and the Environment.

Continuing its Goal Zero journey of "No Harm, No Loss" focus on care for people and the environment, as well as in pursuit of its commitment to sustain and develop a safety culture internally and with its stakeholders, the Company organized numerous safety activities for its staff, partners, and frontline employees in the first quarter including a Safety Day, basic life and awareness, fatigue management during summer period, defensive driving training, food accreditation program for the staff working at Shell Select shops, medical drills at the terminals, Shell safety passport, and joint emergency response trainings at Shell service stations in collaboration with Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority, Royal Oman Police and spill response team.

The Company achieved a commendable HSSE milestone by delivering four new sites, one Knock Down and Rebuild (KDR) site within a period of six months while maintaining a record goal zero target with no recordable incidents or LOPC. Additionally, the Company continued the workers welfare journey through several initiatives including contract assessment, face to face engagements with frontline employees and site inspections to their accommodations with an aim to ensure staff wellbeing.

STRATEGY & ENERGY TRANSITION

Powering Progress sets out our strategy to accelerate the transition of our business to net-zero emissions. During this quarter, the company commissioned a project to identify, track, and benchmark corporate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across its value chains and operated portfolios to assess its carbon footprint. This first step is part of a plan to develop a comprehensive approach to emission-reduction roadmaps and initiatives for its major operated facilities and assets. In addition, several agreements were signed with various stakeholders like the Oman Automobile Association (OAA), Oman and Outward-Bound Oman (OBO) to collaborate on energy transition related initiatives like Electric vehicles (EV) charging points and smart solutions.

In mobility, the Company continues to support decarbonization, energy efficiency and electrification of the mobility sector in Oman leveraging its global expertise to play a leading role in the Sultanate's progress towards a cleaner and more sustainable mobility. In collaboration with key stakeholders, the Company is continuing to develop a reliable network expansion strategy for EV charging. In Q2, the Company increased its number of EV charging points by 8. These charging points are strategically located in Shell service stations on Batainah Expressway, key route for domestic and international commuters between main cities in Oman with more EV chargers planned in the second half of the year. The Company deployed and commissioned a pilot project for installation of "Vapor Recovery System" at two service stations in Muscat. This system is meant to mitigate the impact of our sites operations on the environment by capturing fuel vapor from the air and creating added value for the Company.

Recently, the Company has also reviewed its hazardous waste management strategy in collaboration with a local Oman SME in an aim to reduce and recycle waste from our operations across all classes of businesses. This highlights the Company's consistent endeavour for continuous business development as well as create local content and in-country value agenda across its classes of businesses.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As a responsible corporate citizen, The Company continued to build on its strategic corporate social responsibility themes

which are Environment & Energy Transition, Community Skills & Enterprise Development and People Well-being. This is done through the delivery of its planned initiatives as well as regularly addressing requests from local entities and charitable organizations.

In line with our believes in creating sustainable impact and lasting benefits, the Company signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Outward Bound Oman (OBO) to renew this strategic partnership that aims to power OBO's journeys through providing quality beds and services to the OBO fleet, in addition to embarking on different collaboration opportunities between the two parties in multiple areas including EV and quality beds and lubricants. This partnership will help spread the impact that OBO is creating within the local community across Oman, especially among the youth, in line with Shell Oman's focus on youth empowerment and community upskilling and as part of its CSR strategy. The Company will be the official journey partner of OBO for a period of three years.

In collaboration with our partners in Shell Development Oman, the Company provided on-job training for a number of high-performing graduates who have undergone the Shell Nouradhi program, which is designed to provide young Omanis with the opportunity to explore the future energy market through a structured and integrated technical and life skills curriculum. Ending the program with these on-job training opportunities aims to enable the graduates to put the knowledge and expertise gained throughout the program into real-life work experience.

Moreover, the Company has signed an MoU with Oman Automobile Association according to which the two parties will be collaborating in different corporate social responsibility areas, sponsorship opportunities as well as new sustainable business development projects.

We will continue playing our role and contributing to Powering Lives, in line with Shell's Powering Progress strategy, Oman Vision 2040 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Shabib Al Darmaki
Deputy Chairman, Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

Muscat, July 26, 2023

Unaudited Financial Statements for the 6 months ended 30 June 2023

	STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE 6 MONTHS ENDED 30 JUNE 2023		
	Unaudited 6 months ended 30 June 2023	Unaudited 6 months ended 30 June 2022	Audited 12 months ended 31 Dec 2022
Revenue	249,950	236,593	499,912
Cost of sales	(232,809)	(218,647)	(464,545)
Gross profit	17,141	17,946	35,367
Other income	2,123	1,958	4,146
Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(15,546)	(14,597)	(30,432)
Operating profit	3,718	5,307	9,081
Interest expense	(1,402)	(934)	(2,366)
Interest income	6	10	22
Profit before income tax	2,322	4,383	6,737
Income tax expense	(354)	(651)	(1,031)
Profit and comprehensive income for the period	1,968	3,732	5,706
Basic and diluted earnings per share (OMR)	0.020	0.037	0.057

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 30 JUNE 2023

	Unaudited At 30 June 2023	Unaudited At 30 June 2022	Audited At 31 Dec 2022
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	60,503	58,728	60,527
Right-of-use assets	37,797	28,233	38,849
Intangible assets	160	109	186
Deferred tax assets	279	39	101
Total non-current assets	98,739	87,109	99,663
Current assets			
Inventories	8,931	9,512	10,695
Receivables and prepayments	51,812	43,625	47,207
Cash at bank and in hand	16,965	22,069	6,928
Total current assets	77,708	75,206	64,830
Total assets	176,447	162,315	164,493
EQUITY			
Share capital	10,000	10,000	10,000
Legal reserve	3,587	3,587	3,587
Retained earnings	38,287	40,045	42,019
Total equity	51,874	53,632	55,606
LIABILITIES			
Non-current liabilities			
Long-term lease liabilities	35,486	25,536	35,975
Employee terminal benefits	205	197	187
Total non-current liabilities	35,691	25,733	36,162
Current liabilities			
Short-term loans	30,000	18,333	8,334
Short-term lease liabilities	3,206	2,576	2,773
Payables and accruals	55,126	61,301	60,430
Income tax payable	524	734	1,176
Provisions	26	6	12
Total current liabilities	88,882	82,950	72,725
Total liabilities	124,573	108,683	108,887
Total equity and liabilities	176,447	162,315	164,493
Net assets per share (OMR)	0.519	0.536	0.556

* The complete financial statements are available from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

* The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of the request. The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer at the address shown above.

Shell Oman with MoSD to support NGOs

In line with its commitment to powering lives, Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) is reinforcing its dedication to social development in the sultanate through a partnership with the Ministry of Social Development.

The objective of this partnership is to provide vigorous support to several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) registered under the ministry.

The signing ceremony was held at the ministry's office in the presence of key officials from the ministry and Shell Oman's management.

As part of its collaboration, Shell Oman will provide support in the form of fuel cards and laptop devices to NGOs, enabling them to carry out their day-to-day activities efficiently and effectively.

The fuel support will benefit a number of non-governmental organizations and charity groups including Dar Al Atta, Al Noor Association - Muscat, Ihsan Association - Muscat, Ihsan Association - Batinah, and Al Rahma Association.



By alleviating their commuting and transportation costs, Shell Oman aims to ensure that these organisations can reach and assist a broader spectrum of beneficiaries across Oman.

Furthermore, Shell Oman's dedication to making a positive impact extends to children as well. Specifically, laptops will be

provided to the Child Care Center in Al Khoudh and Al Wafa Rehabilitation Center in Nizwa.

These devices will serve as catalysts in boosting the digital literacy of young individuals, exposing them to a diverse array of tools and programs that are vital to their academic performance and personal development. By

ensuring access to technology, Shell Oman is committed to equipping these children with the essential skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the digital era.

In alignment with its dedication to In-Country Value (ICV), Shell Oman has thoughtfully chosen to procure the laptops and electronic tablets from the

Omani SME 'Onsor'. This decision not only supports the NGOs and children but also contributes to the growth and development of local businesses, fostering economic empowerment within the community.

Commenting on this impactful collaboration, Mahmoud al Abri, General Manager of Corpo-

rate Relations (interim) at Shell Oman Marketing Company, said that his company firmly believes that a country's greatest asset lies in the progress of its people, adding that their partnership with the Ministry of Social Development "reflects our deep-rooted commitment to empowering the Omani community and creating lasting social change while collaborating with key stakeholders who enable it".

"Through providing essential resources to NGOs and supporting young minds, we aim to uplift lives and contribute significantly to Oman's sustainable development. It is with such meaningful partnerships, Shell Oman will continue to demonstrate its dedication to the Shell Powering Progress strategy, actively contributing to the realization of Oman Vision 2040 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals," Abri added.

Shamsa al Hosni, Director General of Planning and Studies at the Ministry of Social Development, said, "This initiative comes within a series of initia-

tives presented in partnership with Shell Oman Marketing Company, which aims to empower a number of charitable associations and charity teams, as well as children in the Child Care Center, and improve the quality of services provided at the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Children in Nizwa."

Shell Oman's unique stance on leading CSR activities has helped it establish long-term relationships with stakeholders across various sectors and reiterated its position as a company that has been pioneering transformational change and aiding in the socio-economic growth of the nation.

Through the years, Shell Oman has run several innovative and industry-first social campaigns that have identified and addressed the needs of the community and continue to Power Progress through sharing benefits with the local society and exemplifying its commitment to being a responsible corporate citizen.

Madayn launches online training for employees

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn' has taken a significant step towards employee development and performance enhancement by introducing an online training platform named 'Durbah'.

This platform, which was launched on Sunday under the auspices of Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, aims at enhancing practical and scientific skills of employees in the industrial cities, while also fostering organisational performance by facilitating knowledge transfer and promoting continuous learning.

During the initial stage, the platform targets all Madayn's employees, and in the second stage, the outreach will expand to include the workers in the companies and factories investing in the industrial cities.

Haneen al Balushi, Durbah Project Manager, stated that the platform, which aligns with the sultanate's digital transformation initiatives, streamlines the entire training experience and offers the latest curricula and training methods through a unified training portfolio.

"Durbah focuses on training a larger number of trainees, providing both synchronous and



asynchronous learning environments to overcome any obstacles that may hinder training events, ensuring their continuity according to the annual plan, even amidst changing local and global conditions," Balushi pointed out.

He highlighted Durbah's comprehensive training approach, consisting of two types of training: Synchronous and asynchronous. "Synchronous training utilises video conferencing with the platform's visual communication software, facilitating live visual communication and session recordings for future reference. On the other hand, asynchronous training relies on specialised courses and an electronic library with a vast array of 2,615 educational resources. These materials cover 1,570 topics on leadership and manage-

ment and 1,045 subjects related to technology. This diverse range of resources allows participants to learn at their own pace, ensuring a flexible and effective learning experience," she added.

This innovative platform comes with several features that reduce logistical expenses associated with physical training courses, as it provides electronic courses within the platform itself, facilitates the issuance of electronic training certificates, creates personalised training plans for the employees and departments based on training tracks, and customises courses and training materials according to the trainee's specific needs.

Looking ahead, Durbah plans to offer courses in general and specialised skills, as well as launch applications for tablets and mobile phones.

Bank Nizwa hosts exclusive event in Salalah; showcases expertise

Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading and most trusted Islamic bank organized a special event dedicated to its customers in Salalah.

This exclusive gathering brought together clients, industry experts, and renowned financial advisors, and provided a holistic experience for attendees by offering networking and communications opportunities.

Moreover, it proved to be a unique platform that promoted the exchange of valuable insights and contributed to further strengthening relationships with the local community in Dhofar region.

The event commenced with a welcome address by Sheikh Khalid al Khalili, Chairman of Bank Nizwa, in which he expressed gratitude to the bank's clientele for their unwavering trust and loyalty.



"This exclusive event not only reaffirms our steadfast commitment to providing exceptional services but also exemplifies our strategic focus on cultivating enduring relationships with our customers," the bank chairman asserted.

"It serves as a platform for the exchange of ideas and insights amongst thought leaders in the community, furthering collaboration and propelling industry growth. We are proud to have facilitated such valuable interac-

tions that will undoubtedly contribute to the continued success of our customers and the industry as a whole."

He added saying, "At Bank Nizwa, we are committed to the financial success of our clients. We remain dedicated to helping them navigate their financial journeys and achieve long-term goals by investing in Sharia-compliant products and services that are ethical, sustainable, and have the potential to contribute to the creation of a more resilient economy."

Bank Nizwa offers a range of Islamic financial solutions that cater to the varying demands of its clients, both individual and corporate. A pioneer in Islamic banking, the bank remains dedicated to providing its clients with innovative financial solutions and unrivaled service quality.

شركة صناعة مواد البناء (ش.م.ع.)

Construction Materials Industries (S.A.O.G)

P.O. Box: 36, PC 327,Sohar Industrial Estate,Sohar Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 26752247/26752287, Fax: 26750867

MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Management of Construction Materials Industries SAOG has the honour of submitting the report on the performance of the Company for the six months ended on 30th June 2023.

Key Performance Indicators

Particulars	30 - Jun 2023 RO	30 - Jun 2022 RO	Increase / (Decrease)	% of Increase / (Decrease)
Sales	1,296,165	1,603,216	(307,051)	(19.15) %
Gross Profit	202,550	363,622	(161,072)	(44.30) %
Profit/(Loss) before Tax	(30,049)	149,395	(179,444)	(120.11) %
Net Profit/(Net Loss) after Tax	(30,049)	149,395	(179,444)	(120.11) %
Earnings Per Share	(0.0005)	0.0023	(0.0028)	(121.74) %

Particulars

2023 30-Jun RO	2022 31-Dec RO	Increase / (Decrease)	% of Increase / (Decrease)	
Total Assets	9,140,887	8,058,992	1,081,895	13.42 %
Total Liabilities	2,549,156	1,280,963	1,268,193	99.00 %
Net Assets	6,591,731	6,778,029	(186,298)	(2.75) %
Total Number of Shares	62,500,000	62,500,000	---	---
Net Assets Per Share	0.1055	0.1084	(0.0029)	(2.68) %

Operating Performance

Production:

Production of Quick Lime from our Plant has been decreased by 6.03% (1,803 MT.) during the second quarter 2023 compared to the same period last year (2023 - 28,123MT, 2022 - 29,926MT). There was no production of dolomite in 2023 compared to 4,704MT produced during the same period 2022.

Sales

Sales has been decreased by 19.15% (RO.307,051/-) until the end of second quarter of this year 2023, compared to the same period in the previous year, due to several reasons. The most important of which is the decrease in demand in the iron industry sector, the main user of quicklime and dolomite products. As a result of the decision the Ministry of Transport, to prevent the entry of (empty) land transport vehicles into the Sultanate, had a significant impact on the company's inability to abide by its commitments to export Hydrated Lime to desalination plants in the neighboring country as was decided, which had a significant impact on the company's inability to achieve the volume of sales of lime despite the continuous follow-up with all concerned government agencies, allowing us to enter lime tanks to transport materials from the plant to the desalination plants, unfortunately we were unable to obtain the necessary permits, which had a great impact on the company's failure to achieve the planned sales.

Comparative sales statement until the end of the second quarter of the current year (2023: RO.1,296,165/-, 2022: RO.1,603,216/-)

Net Profit/Loss:

The results of the first half of 2023 were affected by the occurrence of some obstacles beyond the control, the most important of which is the decrease in demand for the dolomite product within the Sultanate due to the cessation of operations by the main major consumers of the company's products (Dolomite and Quicklime), as well as the decision of the Ministry of Transport to prevent the entry of (empty) tankers from neighboring countries that were transporting the company's products to desalination plants in the United Arab Emirates, which had a significant impact on the decline in the company's sales of the hydrated lime product.

In addition to the increase in the cost of transportation and the increase in direct production costs (electricity, natural gas, water), customs duties on byroad deliveries to outside Sultanate of Oman have been increased by RO.15/- per trip in addition to the existing fee per load, but the administration is striving to find possible solutions to reduce the impact on the workflow and achieve the best possible results under these difficult circumstances, and by comparing net profits with the same period of the previous year. 2023: (RO.30,049/-), 2022: RO.149,395/-.

In contrast the company still faces some obstacles of which the most important are mentioned below:

1.The recent decisions of Ministry of Transport to prevent the entry of (empty) land transportation tankers to the Sultanate of Oman to transport hydrate lime, had a negative impact on the company and led to a decline in our sales.

2.The high cost of direct and indirect production, and as a result of intense competition in neighboring countries, the company is unable to charge this increased cost to selling prices, including the increase in tariffs for electricity, water, natural gas and other components used in operating the lime kilns, which negatively affected the company's ability to compete in the markets, domestic and foreign.

3.Increase in customs duties imposed by neighboring countries on importing raw materials and exporting our products, the most important of which is the increase and introduction of road tolls, which negatively affect significantly in the cost of the product.

4.The fierce competition that we face in the local market from competitors from neighboring countries is very difficult, as we are unable to pass those additional expenses to our customers.

5.Follow-up with the concerned government agencies to obtain the necessary licenses to operate the company's quarries (Wadi Al-Jizzi and Dhank) to provide the raw materials needed in the production process in order to reduce the cost of production, as the company is now procuring the necessary raw materials from other suppliers inside and outside the Sultanate, which led to a high production cost compared with when it was provided through the company's quarries.

Prospects:

The company's management and all the company's employees are actively and continuously seeking to find new markets and new customers for the company's products quick lime, dolo lime and hydrated lime to compensate for the negative effects that affected the company's sales as a result of the reasons mentioned above, and as a result of the continuous effort and endeavor is underway with some customers in foreign markets to find new markets for the company's products such as quick lime, dolo lime and hydrated lime, which promise promising results, God willing.

The company's management also strives to solve the important problems facing the company by developing new production methods, reducing expenses and costs, and maintaining the level of product quality through maintenance and continuous improvement of the performance of production machines and the development of the technical staff in factory.

To improve the company's performance level, work is underway to obtain the completion of the necessary licenses to operate the company's suspended quarries through continuous follow-up with the concerned government agencies. A mining license has been obtained for the company's quarry located in the state of Sohar - Wadi Al-Jazi and the environmental permit for the quarry has also been obtained. Work is currently under way to obtain the remaining permits from the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Housing for the crusher site to produce raw materials for our factory at a lower cost than it is now.

"Un Audited" Statement of Financial Position As At June 30, 2023

ASSETS	2023 June RO	2022 December RO
Current Assets:		
Cash and bank balances	106,044	564,008
Term deposit	507,562	500,000
Trade and other receivables	1,091,644	866,492
Inventories	1,674,666	1,505,353
Total Current Assets	3,379,916	3,435,853
Non-current Assets:		
Property, plant and equipment	3,997,552	4,088,896
Right of use of Assets	1,763,418	534,243
Total Non-current Assets	5,760,970	4,623,139
TOTAL ASSETS	9,140,886	8,058,992

LIABILITIES AND SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY

Current Liabilities:		
Trade and other payables	383,469	390,073
Tax provision	1,320	2,363
Amount due to related parties	---	378
Current Portion of Lease Liability	96,000	72,000
Total Current Liabilities	480,789	464,814
Non-current Liabilities:		
Employees service benefits	148,202	136,808
Non-Current portion of Lease Liability	1,753,070	512,246
Provision for decommissioning	16,112	16,112
Deferred Tax Liability	150,983	150,983
Total Non-current Liabilities	2,068,367	816,149
Total Liabilities	2,549,156	1,280,963
Shareholders' Equity:		
Share capital	6,250,000	6,250,000
Legal reserve	370,788	370,788
Accumulated profit/(loss)	(28,348)	157,951
Total Shareholders' Equity	6,591,730	6,778,029
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY	9,140,886	8,058,992

Net Assets Per Share [face value RO.0.100 each]

0.1050.108

"Un Audited" Statement of Comprehensive Income for the Second Quarter Ended on June 30, 2023

	June 2023 RO.	June 2022 RO.
Sales	1,296,165	1,603,216
Cost of sales	(1,093,615)	(1,239,594)
Gross Profit	202,550	363,622
Other income	48,758	37,075
General and administrative expenses	(187,881)	(197,278)
Selling and distribution expenses	(49,414)	(46,086)
Interest - bank facilities (net)	7,521	5,419
Interest - on lease liability (IFRS16)	(51,583)	(13,356)
Profit/(Loss) for the period before taxation	(30,049)	149,395
Taxation provision	(---)	(---)
Profit/(Loss) for the Period	(30,049)	149,395
Earnings/(Loss) per share [basic and diluted]	(0.0005)	0.0024

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt of request

At least 39 killed by bomb blast at political gathering in Pakistan

Peshawar, Pakistan - At least 39 people were killed and dozens more wounded on Sunday by a bomb blast at a political gathering of a radical Islamic party in northwest Pakistan, officials said.

The blast targeted the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) party when more than 400 members and supporters gathered under a tent in the town of Khar, near the border with Afghanistan.

"I can confirm that in the hospital we have 39 dead bodies, with 123 wounded that includes 17 patients in a serious condition," Riaz Anwar, the health minister for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, told AFP.

Provincial governor Haji Ghulam Ali confirmed the death toll to AFP.

Images from the blast site circulating on social media showed bodies strewn around the scene, and volunteers helping blood-soaked victims to ambulances.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but the local chapter of the Islamic State (IS) group has recently carried out attacks against JUI-F.

Last year, IS said it was behind violent attacks against religious scholars affiliated with the party, which has a huge network of mosques and madrassas in the north and west of the country.

The militant group accuses JUI-F of hypocrisy for being a re-



Men gather at the site of a bomb blast in Bajaur district on Sunday (AFP)

ligious Islamic group that has supported successive governments and the military.

Pakistan has seen a sharp rise in attacks since the Afghan Tal-

iban surged back to power in neighbouring Afghanistan in 2021. Pakistan's home-grown Taliban group, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, has directed its

campaign against security officials, including police officers.

In January, a suicide bomber linked to Pakistan's Taliban blew himself up in a mosque inside a police compound in the north-western city of Peshawar, killing more than 80 officers.

The militant assaults have been focused on regions abutting Afghanistan, and Islamabad alleges some are being planned on Afghan soil - a charge Kabul denies.

Bajaur is one of seven remote districts bordering Afghanistan in a region that was once a focal point in the global war on terror.

Pakistan was once plagued by almost daily bombings, but a major military clearance operation which started in 2014 largely restored order. Security has since improved with the northwest brought under the control of Pakistani authorities after the passage of legislation in 2018.

Analysts say militants in the former tribal areas adjacent to Peshawar and bordering Afghanistan have become emboldened since the return of the Afghan Taliban.

Pakistan's government is due to dissolve in the next few weeks ahead of elections expected in October or November and political parties are preparing to campaign.

AFP



Rafale jet performs during an air show at Yelahanka Airbase, in Bengaluru on February 17 this year (ANI)

India to maintain common weapon systems, platforms

New Delhi, India - The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) is working towards creating a system where maintenance of common weapon systems and platforms are done jointly by forces.

Working towards creating joint fighting formations under the Theatre Commands, the DMA has already started joint procurement of weapon systems and is now looking at joint maintenance of weapon platforms, defence officials told ANI. A number of discussions have been held between the stakeholders from the three services and integrated defence staff on the matter, officials said.

"Even if we look around today, the light helicopters including the Cheetah/ Chetak fleet are operated by the three services and if they are maintained jointly, they can lead to savings," they said.

"The Dornier aircraft is another example which is operated by the Indian Air Force, Navy and the Coast Guard and if they are maintained jointly, we can even improve serviceability along with savings."

The relatively new aircraft fleet would also be now maintained jointly as the Apache attack helicopters coming from the United States for the Indian Army would be maintained along with the existing fleet of the Indian Air Force, officials added.

The Army has already posted its personnel to the Indian Air Force units operating these attack choppers for training on operations of these choppers.

Officials said the Indian Navy decision to go for the Rafale, which is common fighter aircraft also flying with the Indian Air Force, will help in joint maintenance of the fleet and can

help in improving the management of their spares and other equipment.

The joint acquisition case of buying 31 Predator drones from the US for all the three services caters for a common maintenance, repair and overhaul facility within the country.

The Defence forces have also now started working in combined acquisitions and major programmes like the ones to buy light helicopters, Indian Multirole Helicopters, Medium Altitude Long Endurance drones, which would all have common maintenance facilities.

The weapon systems acquired by the defence forces are maintained using their revenue funds and commonality of platforms and maintenance facilities can help in savings, officials pointed out.

ANI

Iraq and Kuwait seek to reach pact on demarcating borders

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq and Kuwait will work towards reaching a definitive agreement on demarcating their borders, including a contested maritime area of the Gulf, their foreign ministers said on Sunday.

The de facto land and maritime borders between the neighbouring states were established by the United Nations in 1993, three years after Iraq under Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

While Iraqi officials have previously expressed a readiness to recognise Kuwait's land border, the maritime border remains a point of contention. Baghdad insists that the delineation should provide it unhindered access to Gulf waters, a lifeline for its economy and oil exports.

Because of the long-standing dispute, Kuwaiti coastguards regularly detain Iraqi fishermen and seize their vessels for entering



Iraq's FM Fuad Hussein and his counterpart from Kuwait Salem Abdullah al-Jaber al-Sabah attend a press conference in Baghdad on Sunday (AFP)

Kuwaiti territorial waters 'illegally'. After meeting his Kuwaiti counterpart Salem Al-Sabah in Baghdad on Sunday, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said that during their talks 'the emphasis was placed on resolving the border issues'.

He told reporters the border talks would 'continue through

various technical committees'. Baghdad will host a meeting of a legal committee relating to the talks on August 14.

Sabah said there was 'complete consensus' between Kuwait and Iraq to 'resolve outstanding problems between the two countries.

AFP

Taliban create bonfire of music equipment

Herat, Afghanistan - Authorities from Afghanistan's vice ministry created a bonfire of confiscated musical instruments and equipment in Herat province at the weekend, deeming music immoral.

"Promoting music causes moral corruption and playing it will cause the youth to go astray," said Aziz al-Rahman al-Muhajir, head of the Herat department of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

Since seizing power in August 2021, Taliban authorities have steadily imposed laws and regulations that reflect their austere vision of Islam - including banning playing



Members of Taliban stand guard after setting fire to a pile of musical instruments and equipment on the outskirts of Herat on Saturday (AFP)

music in public. Saturday's bonfire saw hundreds of dollars worth of musical gear go up in smoke - much of it collected from wedding halls in the city.

It included a guitar, two other stringed instruments, a harmonium and a tabla - a type

of drum - as well as amplifiers and speakers.

Women have borne the brunt of the new government regulations, and are not allowed in public unless wearing a hijab.

AFP

OMAN CHROMITE CO. (S.A.O.G.) P.O. Box: 346, PC 321, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman Tel: 26845115, Fax: 26845155		
UNAUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2023		
Charmain report	STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30, June, 2023	
In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.	ASSETS	Jun-23 RO Jun-22 RO
Dear, Shareholders,	Non-current Asset	
After compliments,	plant and equipment	698,811 618,809
	Intangible assets	498,497 469,923
	investment in associate company	390,171 0
	Deferred Tax Assets	0 38,192
	Bank Guarante	152000 92000
	Total Non-current Assets	1,739,479 1,218,924
	Current Assets	
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to present the unaudited financial statement for the second quarter ended on 30th June 2023.	Investments at fair value through profit or loss	5,121 2,873
	Inventories	971,446 693,683
	Trade and other receivables	887,609 925,701
	Cash and bank balance	765,115 150,146
	term deposits	2,550,000 2,050,000
	Total Current Assets	5,179,291 3,822,403
	TOTAL ASSETS	6,918,770 5,041,327
	EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	
	Capital and reserve	
	Share capital	3,000,000 3,000,000
	Legal reserve	1,000,000 877,948
	Optional reserves	104,751 0
	Retained earnings (loss)	1,729,279 288,058
	Total capital and reserve	5,834,030 4,166,006
	Non-current Liabilities	
	Employees benefits liabilities	36,135 21,644
	Deferred Tax Liability	39,087 0
	Total Non-current Liabilities	75,222 21,644
	Current Liabilities	
	Trade and other payables	687,312 627,364
	Income tax (estimate)	322,206 226,313
	Bank borrowings	0 0
	Paid dividend	0,000 0,000
	Total Current Liabilities	1,009,518 853,677
	total liabilities	1,084,740 875,321
	TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	6,918,770 5,041,327
	Net assets per share	1.945 1.389
	STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30-6-2023	
	30-6-2023 RO. 30-6-2022 RO.	
	Revenue	4,083,113 1,846,306
	Cost of Sales	(1,312,726) (701,982)
	Gross profit	2,770,387 1,144,324
	Other income	654 0
	Total operating profit	2,771,041 1,144,324
	Selling and distribution expenses	(501,171) (222,819)
	General and administrative expenses	(301,598) (200,530)
	Profit from operations	1,968,272 720,975
	profit/(losses) form investments	(210,829) 0
	Realised gains on sales of investment at fair value through profit or loss	1,827 (1,395)
	Interest income	49,913 49,705
	Net profit before tax for the period	1,809,183 769,285
	income tax expenses	(271,377) (115,393)
	Net Profit after tax and total comprehensive income for the period	1,537,806 653,892
	Basic earnings per share	0.513 0.218
Humaid bin Masoud Al Maqbali Chairman		

Russia ‘thwarts’ drone attacks on Moscow, Crimea by Ukraine

Moscow, Russia - Russia said on Sunday it had downed Ukrainian drones targeting Moscow and the Crimea peninsula, in attacks that damaged two office towers in the capital and briefly shut an international airport.

One drone targeting Moscow was shot down on the city’s outskirts and two others were ‘suppressed by electronic warfare’ and smashed into an office complex early on Sunday, the Russian defence ministry said, adding that there were no injuries.

Moscow and its environs, lying about 500km (310 miles) from the Ukrainian border, had rarely been targeted during the conflict in Ukraine until several drone attacks this year.

The attack reported on Sunday is the latest in a series of recent drone assaults - including on the Kremlin and Russian towns near the border with Ukraine - that Moscow has blamed on Kyiv.

The defence ministry called it an ‘attempted terrorist attack’.

“On the morning of July 30, the Kyiv regime’s attempted terrorist attack with unmanned aerial vehicles on objects in the city of Moscow was thwarted,” it said on Telegram. “One Ukrainian UAV was destroyed in the air by air defence systems over the territory of the Odintsovo district of Moscow region.

“Two more drones were suppressed by electronic warfare and, having lost control, crashed



Police officers block off an area around a damaged office block of the Moskva City following a reported drone attack in Moscow on Sunday (AFP)

on the territory of Moscow-City’s non-residential building complex.” Moscow-City is a commercial development in the west of the capital.

Its mayor Sergei Sobyanian posted on Telegram that the ‘facades of two city office towers were slightly damaged’.

He added that there were ‘no victims or injured’.

Several windows had been blown out on the corner of the

buildings, AFP photos showed, with mangled steel beams visible and documents strewn on the ground below.

Police officers had cordoned off the area.

Airport briefly closed

The TASS state news agency reported that the capital’s Vnukovo airport was ‘closed for departures and arrivals, flights are redirected to other airports’.

Within less than an hour, operations appeared to have returned to normal.

Earlier this month, a volley of drone attacks briefly disrupted air traffic at the same airport, to the city’s southwest.

The defence ministry also said on Sunday that 16 Ukrainian drones were destroyed by air defence fire in an overnight attack on Crimea, a peninsula Moscow annexed in 2014.

“Another nine Ukrainian drones were suppressed by means of electronic warfare and, without reaching the target, crashed into the Black Sea,” the ministry said, adding that there were no victims.

Crimea has been targeted by Kyiv throughout Moscow’s Ukraine offensive but has come under more intense, increased attacks in recent weeks.

AFP

Australian army grounds fleet of Taipan choppers

Sydney, Australia - Australia’s military will ground its fleet of MRH-90 Taipan helicopters after a crash during multinational military exercises that left four crew members missing, the army chief said on Sunday.

The helicopter crashed into waters near the Whitsunday Islands off Australia’s subtropical northeast late on Friday, sparking a search by the militaries of three nations, but hopes of finding the missing crew were fading.

Lieutenant General Simon Stuart, the chief of the Australian Army, said on Sunday that Australia would ground its fleet of about 45 Taipan helicopters. “We are not flying the MRH-90 today and won’t until we think it is safe to do so,” Stuart told reporters in Sydney.

Even before the incident, Canberra had announced it would replace its ageing Taipan helicopters with US-made Black Hawks.

Australian officials have complained about having to repeatedly ground the European-made Taipans, citing difficulties with maintenance and getting spare parts. Stuart said the current aim was to keep the Taipans in service until 2024 but ‘what happens between now and then, from

what we learn from this incident, is yet to be determined’.

Australia’s Taipan fleet was grounded for a month after one of the helicopters suffered engine failure during a nighttime training exercise in March, forcing the crew to ditch into the ocean. No one was seriously hurt.

The aircraft that crashed on Friday night was taking part in

The decision was made after a crash during a military exercises that left 4 crew members missing

the Talisman Sabre exercise, which brings together 30,000 military personnel from Australia, the United States and several other nations.

Specialist divers have joined the hundreds-strong search for the missing pilot and three other crew, officials said. Debris from the crash was recovered on Saturday, with Channel 9 television footage showing a section of the fuselage being lifted from the water.

AFP

BACK TO HOME WATERS



A humpback whale swims at Ipanema Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Saturday. From July to October, they reach the warm waters of Brazil’s Atlantic coast, where they were born, to start their mating ritual (AFP)

7 new charges announced against Senegal opposition politician Ousmane Sonko

Dakar, Senegal - Senegal’s public prosecutor on Saturday announced seven new charges, including fomenting insurrection, against opposition politician Ousmane Sonko, adding they were unrelated to a case that sparked deadly protests last month.

The firebrand politician, a thorn in the flesh of President Macky Sall, has faced a string of legal woes, which he claims are aimed at keeping him out of politics. His sentencing last month in a moral corruption case sparked clashes that left 16 dead according to the government, 24 according to Amnesty International, and 30 according to Sonko’s PASTEF party.

On Saturday, the public prosecutor read out a list of charges to be made against Sonko over comments he had made, rallies



Ousmane Sonko (AFP)

he had held, and other episodes since 2021, including an incident at his home a day earlier that led to his arrest.

In addition to calling for insurrection, the new charges include undermining state security, acts aimed at jeopardising public security and creating serious polit-

ical unrest, criminal association with a terrorist body and theft.

“This arrest has nothing to do with the (moral corruption) proceedings, for which he was tried in absentia,” prosecutor Abdoul Karim Diop said in Wolof.

Sonko was arrested on Friday for allegedly stealing the phone of a gendarme officer and issuing a subversive message on social media, according to the prosecutor. He is being held in custody.

He is scheduled to be interrogated by a judge on Monday, one of his lawyers told AFP. The judge will then decide whether or not to lay charges.

On Friday afternoon, Sonko said on social media that security forces stationed outside his home were filming him.

He said he had taken one of the phones and demanded the images be deleted.

“I ask the people to stand ready to face this endless abuse,” Sonko wrote.

Sonko was on June 1 sentenced in absentia to two years in prison for morally corrupting a young woman, which makes him ineligible to stand in next year’s presidential election.

He was blocked in his home by security forces at the time of the sentencing but was not jailed following his conviction.

His lawyers said in a statement on Friday evening that his arrest on new allegations cancelled the verdict and sentence issued in the moral corruption affair because he had been tried in absentia.

A former civil servant, Sonko rose to prominence in the 2019 presidential election, coming third.

AFP

Extinct birds on ballot for NZ’s avian beauty contest

Wellington, New Zealand - Five extinct species have been included on the ballot to find New Zealand’s most popular feathered friend as competition organisers hope to draw attention to endangered birds. New Zealand’s annual avian beauty contest has proven highly contentious over the years.

The kakapo, a chubby parrot resembling a green-feathered bowling ball which can’t fly, couldn’t run in last year’s Bird of the Year competition.

The twice former winner was dropped from the 2022 vote by organisers to help less popular species have a shot at the title. Feathers were also ruffled when a native bat was allowed to enter, then flew off

with the 2021 title.

This year, competition organisers Forest & Bird will celebrate their centenary by crowning New Zealand’s most popular feathered friend in the last 100 years - even if the potential winner no longer exists.

“We’re searching for the bird that has captured New Zealanders’ hearts over the last century,” said Forest & Bird chief executive Nicola Toki at Saturday’s launch.

The environmental group has put 75 species on the ticket for this year’s Bird of the Century contest.

Voting opens at the end of October, closing on November 12 with the winner announced the next day.

AFP

Death toll rises to 10 in Thai warehouse explosion

Bangkok, Thailand - The death toll from a powerful explosion that levelled an unlicensed fireworks warehouse in southern Thailand rose to at least 10 on Sunday, the local governor said, as police sought the owner on charges of negligence.

The blast on Saturday afternoon in the town of Sungai Kolok was believed to have been caused by welding during construction work on the building.

More than 100 people were injured in the blast, which left only twisted metal beams still standing as rescue workers picked over the debris, with local media reporting hundreds of homes were also seriously damaged. “We have identified 10 people and found parts of two bodies which we cannot identify yet,” Narathiwat provincial governor Sanan Pongaksorn told a press conference on Sunday.



Thai firefighters put out embers after an explosion ripped through a fireworks warehouse, in the southern Thai province of Narathiwat on Saturday (AFP)

“We are sending to forensics to do DNA tests but primary reports said they were different (people),” he added. Sanan had previously said the blast was believed to have been caused by a ‘technical error’ during welding.

Police on Sunday said they were still investigating the cause,

adding they believed the facility was not licensed to store fireworks. Provincial commander Police Major General Chalermporn Khamkhiew said firecrackers had been delivered shortly before the explosion.

“We are investigating if those firecrackers were transported

legally or illegally,” he said.

“As of now, we do not see any licence for possession of firecrackers or firecracker sales,” he said. “We assume the factory has no licence.”

The blast detonated roughly 1,000kg (2,200 pounds) of gunpowder, he said, leaving two holes roughly two metres deep and six metres (20 feet) wide.

“We have issued a summons to the owner of the factory with the charge of negligence, which caused the accident,” said Colonel Suthawet Thareethai, police chief in Muno district.

“We are waiting for him to come.”

Officials said a command centre had been established not far from the scene, and authorities had already received 365 complaints from those who had been injured or had their homes and property damaged.

Damage to government offices and private schools was also reported, they added.

‘Nothing left’

Police said that of the 115 people injured in the blast, 106 had been discharged. The condition of those remaining in hospital was not known.

A fire sparked by the explosion was brought under control late on Saturday.

On Sunday, residents surveyed the wreckage where their homes once stood as officers and emergency crews sifted through the rubble.

“I have nothing left,” said Samsueya Chuenchompoo, whose house was destroyed.

“I don’t even have a roof over my head now. When there was a flood, I still could survive but now I really have nothing left.”

AFP

Anti-militant efforts hampered in Sahel

Coup-hit Niger’s neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso have each undergone a military coup since 2020

Paris, France - The coup in Niger, the third in as many years to topple an elected leader in Africa's troubled Sahel, threatens to further hamper efforts against militant groups in the region, analysts say.

Niger’s neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso have each undergone a military coup since 2020, fuelled by anger at the failure to quash long-running insurgencies by militants linked to the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda.

In Niger, which faces a two-pronged militant insurgency, President Mohamed Bazoum was this week confined to his residence by his own presidential guard, with the head of the elite force, General Abdourahmane Tiani, declaring himself the new leader.

Like Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso are impoverished former French colonies that gained independence in 1960.

Following their coups, the juntas there forced out French troops, with Mali cooperating with forces from Russia, which has for years strived to increase its influence in Africa.



This file photo shows smoke billowing as supporters of the Nigerien defence and security forces attack the headquarters of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), the party of overthrown President Mohamed Bazoum, in Niamey on July 27 (AFP)

While it was not immediately clear if Niger’s new masters would follow suit, Tiani made clear there would be a change of strategy.

“The security approach today has not brought security to the

country despite heavy sacrifices,” he said after declaring himself leader. Specifically, he questioned ‘the sense and scope of a security approach to the fight against terrorism which excludes any real collaboration

with Burkina Faso and Mali’, a strategy taken after the coups in those countries.

Western aid at risk

Analysts say that while increasing cooperation with Mali and

Burkina Faso may bring benefits, the putschists risked losing financial and military support from the West, which has stood behind Bazoum.

Because of diplomatic tensions following the coup in Mali,

Niger and French troops could no longer operate freely against IS bases in the country, where attacks on Niger are thought to be organised.

If France and Washington withdraw their forces, it could leave a dangerous security void in a troubled region

“This crisis cannot be resolved without cooperation from Mali in one form or another,” said Tatyana Smirnova, a researcher at the FrancoPaix Centre for conflict resolution.

Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim, a researcher with the International Crisis Group, said that ‘we can expect better relations and cooperation between the neighbouring countries’.

But Niger’s new rulers risked losing support from the West.

Bazoum was one of a dwindling

group of pro-Western leaders in the Sahel, allowing 1,500 French troops and 1,000 US soldiers to be stationed in Niger.

The European Union has announced that it was suspending financial and security cooperation with the country, while the United States has warned that ‘hundreds of millions of dollars of assistance’ was at risk.

If France and Washington withdraw their forces, it could leave a dangerous security void in a troubled region, analysts said.

Nearly all of landlocked Niger’s neighbours have militant rebels that could take advantage of the void - in addition to Mali and Burkina Faso, there are insurgencies in Benin, Libya and Nigeria.

Impoverished populations often make for fertile breeding grounds for extremists and Niger is one of the world’s poorest nations - two-thirds desert, it often ranks last in the UN’s Human Development Index.

It already faces two insurgent campaigns - one which swept in from Mali in 2015 and the other involving militants from Nigeria.

AFP

Morocco king appeals for ‘normality’ with Algeria

Rabat, Morocco - Morocco's King Mohammed VI has expressed hope for a return to normality and reopening of borders with North African neighbour Algeria, which cut diplomatic ties nearly two years ago.

“We pray to the Almighty for a return to normality and a reopening of the borders between our two neighbouring countries and our brotherly peoples,” Mohammed VI, 59, said late on Saturday in a speech to mark the anniversary of his ascension to the throne in 1999.

The borders have been closed since 1994, leaving families divided after Morocco accused its neighbour of involvement in a militant attack on a Marrakesh hotel that killed two tourists. Algeria then sealed the frontiers.

Since then, tensions have persisted between the regional rivals, exacerbated by their dispute over Western Sahara, where the Algiers-backed Polisario Front is



Morocco's King Mohammed VI delivering a speech to the nation in the Royal Palace of Tetouan on Sunday (AFP)

seeking independence from Rabat’s rule and has declared the territory a ‘war zone’.

Algeria severed ties in August 2021, accusing Rabat of ‘hostile acts’, a move which Morocco said was ‘completely unjustified’.

Israel’s recognition earlier this month of ‘Morocco’s sovereignty’ over Western Sahara added to tensions between Morocco and Algeria, which called Israel’s

move a ‘flagrant violation of international law’.

In his nationally broadcast speech on Saturday, Mohammed VI expressed reassurance to ‘our brothers in Algeria, their leadership and their people that they will never have to fear malice from Morocco’.

The king calls annually for a rapprochement with Algeria.

AFP

CAR votes in referendum on constitution

Bangui, Central African Republic - The Central African Republic began voting on Sunday in a referendum on a new constitution that would allow President Faustin-Archange Touadera to seek a third term in a country which has endured several coups.

In 2020 Touadera won a second term through to 2025, after a vote interrupted by several incursions by armed rebel groups, while he also had to overcome allegations of fraud.

His rivals now charge that he wants to remain ‘president for life’ - under the increasingly visible protection of private Russian mercenary group Wagner, which first deployed to the CAR in 2018.

The country of 5.5mn people is one of the world’s poorest.

Voting was scheduled to begin at 6am (0500 GMT) but polling stations opened around one hour late.

The polls are due to close at 4pm, with some 1.9mn people called on to cast their ballots.



A voter casts his ballot at the Boganda high school in Bangui, on Sunday (AFP)

Provisional results are not expected for eight days, while the constitutional court is scheduled to publish the definitive outcome on August 27, according to the national electoral authority.

Boycott

The proposed new constitution would extend the presidential mandate from five to seven years and abolish the two-term limit.

Opinion polls suggest the ‘yes’ camp is likely to triumph.

“We know that the ‘yes’ camp

is going to win - but we shall put the emphasis on participation,” national assembly vice-president and presidential majority spokesman Evariste Ngamane told AFP.

The main opposition parties, civil groups and armed rebels have all called on voters to boycott the exercise.

The opposition has notably complained about the lack of an up-to-date electoral register and says institutions tasked with guaranteeing a free and fair vote

are not independent.

In the capital Bangui, between 2,000 and 3,000 ‘yes’ supporters turned out on Friday for a final meeting to drum up further backing for the proposal.

But observers said the vote might not inspire much interest among the general populace.

“The majority of the CAR population, who are struggling to survive in a difficult economic and security context, doubtless have other priorities aside from this referendum which mobilises few beyond those close to those in power,” said Charles Bouessel, analyst with the International Crisis Group.

Touadera has announced, meanwhile, that Russia and Rwanda, two states whose influence has been very much on the rise in the CAR in recent years, would be ‘supporting’ security forces during the vote.

A Wagner-linked source said earlier in July that several hundred of the Russian fighters would be in place for the poll.

AFP

Little love lost between Biden and Netanyahu

Washington, US - They have known each other for decades, rubbing shoulders at countless international events, but there is little love lost between US President Joe Biden and Benjamin Netanyahu as the Israeli prime minister faces a full-blown crisis over a contested judicial reform.

For the Democratic president, a fervent supporter of Israel for a half-century, the dilemma has become increasingly public as he seeks ways to work with the most far-right Israeli government in history. While Biden continues to insist on the ‘ironclad’ nature of America’s support for its Israeli ally, he describes that country’s government as the most ‘extremist’ he has known.

And while Biden has urged caution over the judicial reform, even denouncing it, the Israeli leader moves ahead unbudged, describing it as a ‘minor correction’ despite the massive protests it has spawned in his country and the sharp criticism from abroad. It is striking: while Biden has involved himself in an Israeli internal matter to a degree rare for a US president, his influence re-



This file photo shows the then US Vice President Joe Biden listening to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during joint statements in the prime minister’s office in Jerusalem on March 9, 2016 (AFP)

mains clearly limited.

‘Regrettable’

The White House on Monday described as ‘regrettable’ the approval by the Israeli Knesset of a key measure in the judicial reform plan, which backers insist provides a needed rebalancing of power between the branches of government.

In an unusual move, the US president invited to the White House a *New York Times* columnist,

Thomas Friedman, to underscore his opposition to a reform that Biden considers ‘a source of division’. Beyond the reform itself, the Biden administration has not hidden its frustration over Israel’s annexation of Palestinian territories, which has gone on despite repeated US calls for the two sides to de-escalate and avoid unilateral measures.

But while Washington continues its pro-forma advocacy of a two-state solution for Israel and

the Palestinians, it seems increasingly to be preaching in the wilderness.

The latest tensions are reminiscent of those between President Barack Obama and Netanyahu in 2015, when Biden was vice president and the United States was negotiating a nuclear agreement with Iran, to the manifest displeasure of Israel. That agreement has been moribund since then president Donald Trump, who was close to

Netanyahu, withdrew from the pact in 2018. Repeated efforts by Biden to revive it have been futile.

These tensions surfaced again in a squabble over whether Netanyahu would be invited to the White House for the first time since he returned to power late last year.

In a seeming snub to the prime minister, Biden last week hosted the Israeli president, Isaac Herzog, a political moderate.

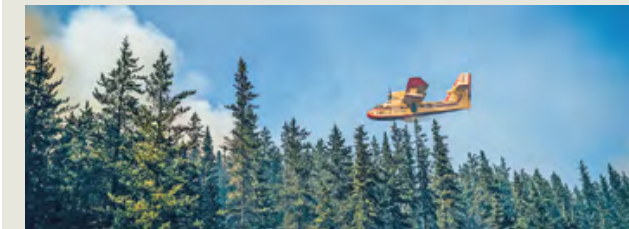
In an ABC interview, Netanyahu denied being snubbed, saying Biden had indeed invited him to the White House, a meeting he said would probably take place in September.

But the White House, clearly irritated, would confirm neither the venue nor the exact timing, saying only that the two men would ‘meet in the United States later this year’.

Despite everything, experts agree that American support for Israel is not about to weaken.

There have been calls, including from the left wing of the Democratic Party, for a reduction in US military aid to Israel.

AFP



This file photo shows a firefighting plane battling Fire 593 in central Quebec Province, Canada on July 21 (AFP)

Third firefighter dies battling blazes in Canada

Montreal, Canada - A firefighter has died battling one of the massive blazes devastating Canada’s forests this year, British Columbia’s premier announced on Saturday.

It marked the third death of a firefighter during this devastating wildfire season.

“I am devastated to learn that we have lost another wildfire fighter. My heart goes out to the family, friends and colleagues of this frontline hero,” Premier David Eby said in a statement.

Eby did not identify the contract firefighter, but authorities said the victim was at the Donnie Creek wildfire,

near Fort St John, in the north-east of the province.

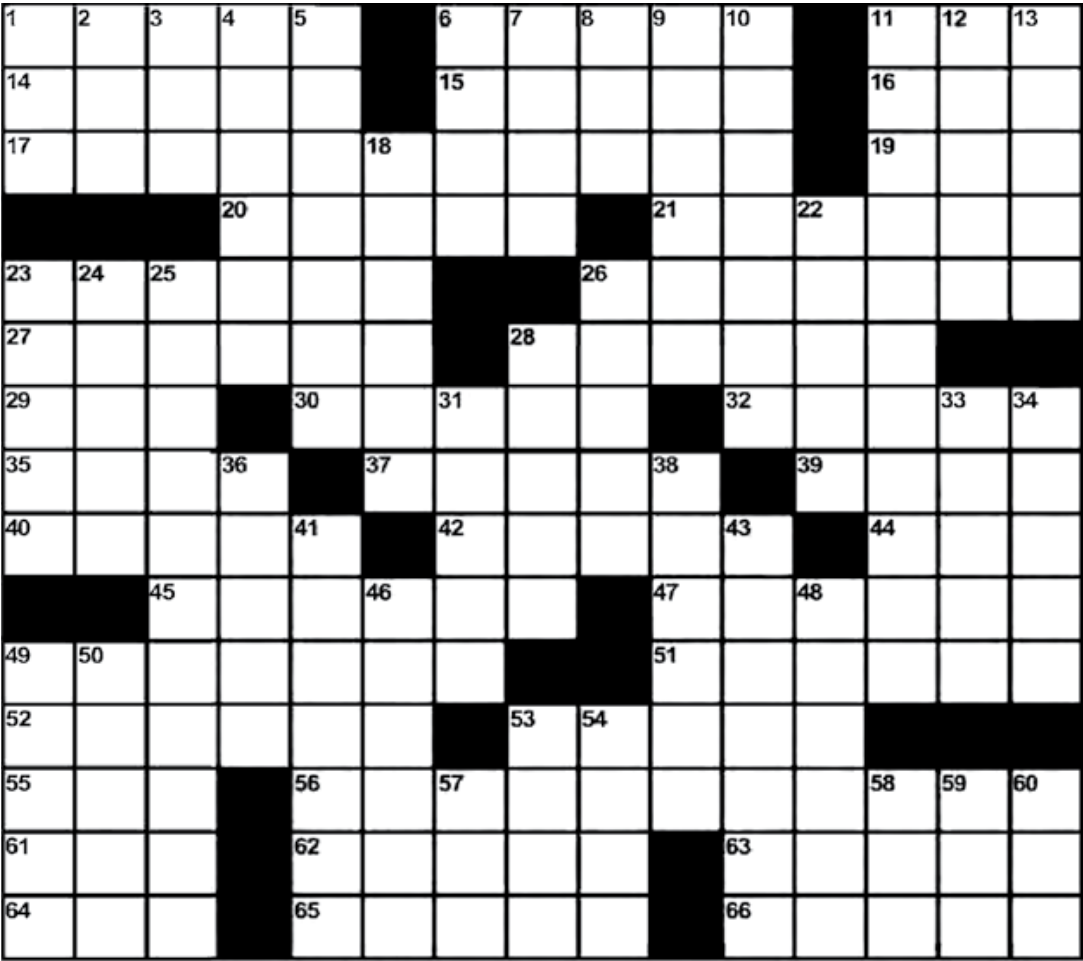
Two other firefighters have perished in separate operations this month, and a fourth person, a helicopter pilot, died on July 19 when his aircraft crashed in Alberta, in western Canada, while taking part in relief operations.

Canadian wildfires have burned some 30mn acres (12mn hectares) this year, scorching an area larger than the size of Cuba or South Korea.

“This wildfire season has been profoundly awful,” Eby said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Reviews and corrects
6) Old-time anesthetic
11) This puzzle's 15-Across
14) Run slower
15) Crossword puzzle feature
16) Get a little behind
17) The unfolding of blossoms
19) Joint owners' pronoun
20) Enjoy a hot tub
21) Stand the test of time
23) Prior to
26) Eye parts with cones
27) Mitty of fiction
28) Dispatch again
29) "It's..." (thumbs-up reply)
30) Lunch meat shops
32) Coral islands
35) Front-page stuff
37) Removed a squeak
39) "Dang!"
40) "There... enough hours in the day"
42) "Great Balls of Fire" singer Jerry Lee

44) Rage
45) Lots of business?
47) "King of Queens" character
49) Units of current
51) Nativity setting
52) Relatives of Tahitians
53) Raccoon's relative
55) Upscale auto
56) Theater illuminators
61) Make a polygraph go nuts
62) Shot, as a gun
63) Acid type
64) Always, poetically
65) Bird-feeder filler
66) Makes it until the end

DOWN

1) Diminutive folklore creature
2) Costa Sol
3) "What was... think?"
4) Tasty flatfish
5) Impaled
6) Cut into metal
7) "... 'tis of..."
8) Farm female
9) Hosts
10) Come back into, as the atmosphere
11) Trying not to go under
12) Dem of TV and films
13) Grimm characters
18) Audiophile's setup
22) Had an elegant supper
23) African sir
24) Ready, willing and able
25) Hippies' '60s catchphrase
26) Change a hem length
28) Life of... (ease)
31) Cheerful little tunes
33) Madcap comedy
34) Beefy bovine
36) Villainous expression
38) Bleak
41) Export-import duties
43) Having three dimensions
46) "The Naked Gun" actor
48) Mind-boggling puzzle
49) Carefree walk
50) Mrs. Eisenhower
53) Kind of softball team
54) Racetrack quote

57) Hidden gold, e.g.
58) Not hers
59) Dynamite stuff
60) Plea at sea

NOTE PAD

BATHS COBRA THE
ISAAC BRAIN THEM
THIS INSTANT ALP
TEA EGO TOT
ENTENTE DENSITY
DOH CUDS RYES
GOA ERICA MATTS
ANTS ECOLI LOUT
REFER TOILE SLY
IRON PALM AIL
LIGATES SUBTYPE
EMU APP MAO
MAR THIS VERY DAY
AGE ERIE GEODE
NOS SWEEP ODEON

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Just coming out of a group conflict? It took a lot of guts to do what you did, and now you've learned how to approach this problem when it pops up again, because, rest assured, it will. The best way to solve problems is by first seeing them from other people's point of view. This kind of insight will enable you to use your charm to get what you want, which should help you achieve a much better balance between being opinionated and being a team player.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Whoever first thought of putting peanut butter with jelly was a genius, and you have the capacity to be that kind of genius today. Your instincts could lead you to the perfect combination of at least two different elements that, when put together, create something really magical. These elements could be people, colors, words, or maybe clothing, but the building blocks you use to create your masterpiece don't really matter. All that matters is that you're using your creativity!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
The friendships in your life are becoming more and more important as a source of your healthy self-esteem, and that's a very good thing. You're loved by your friends, and they accept you for the imperfect but wonderful person you are. Make it a priority to spend time with as many friends as you can. They should even take precedence over your partner or family right now. They're the family you choose, and they would love more time with you.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Your time is going to free up a bit over the next few days, but that doesn't mean you will be bored or idle. You need to fill some of those hours by feeding your mind new concepts, images, and ideas. This is the perfect time to look for culture. Act like a tourist and hit all the museums in town. Go see a foreign film. Eat at a restaurant that specializes in the cuisine of a country you've never been to. Feeding your body and your mind new experiences will only be a good thing.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Having a good sense of humor about yourself has long been one of your stronger traits, and today this valuable skill can help you overcome any minor setback. You just need to laugh at yourself and not get self-conscious if you make a mistake. And if you do goof up, don't try to hide it. That will only make things worse. Now more than ever it's important for you to face the facts and deal with reality as it is, not how you would like it to be.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Today, you're going to have a very good time with a lot of diverse personalities, and the more diverse the better! Being a part of lively discussion where a lot of different opinions are being bandied about will give you lots of energy you can use to build relationships and get to the next level with that certain someone. It's up to you to start the conversation, though. Don't be shy about getting the ball rolling. And once you do, the good times will begin!

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Just when you thought you'd missed the boat on a new opportunity, you're proven wrong! Today, you could get a nice surprise that adds some fun to your life and perhaps even a little bit of romance. This is fleeting fun, however. So be ready to grab hold of it and get as much out of it as you can. You'd better be ready to move at a moment's notice and toss aside any cautious thinking. You'll be among friends, so you know things will be fine.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
If you're expecting to have a super day, you'll have a super day. And if you're expecting to fail today, well, you get the idea. Remember that your attitude can sway a situation. Not only that, but your attitude will sway the attitudes of the people around you. Make sure you're putting out some positive energy, especially if you're going to be involved in a competition. Showing that you're confident is the first step toward intimidating your opponent and making them doubt themselves more.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You have plenty of people standing right behind you, ready to help you out, but the trouble is they aren't the people you think they are. Look past those familiar faces to the newer ones in your life. These are the people who will keep you grounded today, and they're the ones who will keep you confident when times get tricky later in the afternoon. Your usual allies are still on your side, but they just won't have the time to step up to the challenge today.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
If you're having issues around your home, then look to your work or school day as an escape from them. Instead of taking those problems with you everywhere you go, leave them where they belong and let yourself be free to focus on other things. Don't worry, this isn't a form of denial. It's a form of control. You will deal with things when and where it's appropriate. Trust yourself to know when the right time will be. Until then, get back to your life and be happy!

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Someone you care about has been acting very sensitive lately, taking everything the wrong way, assuming the worst, and getting upset over nothing. You've been patient with them, but today your patience might be starting to wear thin. This means that you run the risk of snapping at them if they say the wrong thing, which will probably only send them further down that emotional spiral. It's wisest to get your distance from them until they're back to their old self.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Your heart is open to new beginnings right now. You're ready to toss aside old habits and old ways of viewing things. And you should definitely ditch old grudges! Moving forward has never felt so possible or so right. In terms of your career, today is the day to start asking your superiors how you can get to the next level. Find out what you need to do to reach your potential. In terms of your private life, ask your friends what you can do to show them how much you care about them.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In 2016 UNESCO marked a four-cave complex in the sheer limestone cliffs of eastern Gibraltar as a World Heritage Site for its place in preserving and demonstrating what?
A. Record of bird life over 100 million years
B. Evolution of prehistoric cave painting
C. The culture and life of Neanderthal humans over a span of 100,000 years
D. Late Iron Age religious communities

02. The computer game, the aim of which is to peel something (usually a fruit or vegetable), is known as what?
A. Peelers
B. Peel the Apple
C. Peel-I-Span
D. I Peel Good

03. If an animal bears live young it is termed what?
A. Vital
B. Vivid
C. Vituperative
D. Viviparous

Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. D

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

C	P	A	R
K	N	E	S
G	S	L	A
O	P	I	P

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Captain Shai leads Windies to first ODI win over India in four years

Bridgetown, Barbados - West Indies captain Shai Hope played the sheet anchor role to perfection in taking his team to a series-leveling six-wicket victory over India in the second One-Day International of a three-match series at Kensington Oval in Barbados on Saturday.

After his bowlers capitalised on a helpful pitch and an unconvincing India batting effort to dismiss their opponents for 181 off 40.5 overs, Hope's unbeaten 63 and the support of Keacy Carty (48 not out) in an unbroken fifth-wicket partnership of 91 ended a nine-match run of defeats to India in ODIs spanning four years.

It was also a swift comeback in the wake of the Caribbean side's dispiriting five-wicket loss in the opening match at the same venue on Thursday and sets the stage for the series decider on Tuesday at the Brian Lara Stadium in Trinidad.

Hope was joined by Carty when Kuldeep Yadav bowled Shimron Hetmyer to leave the home side at 91 for four in the 17th over.

That strike came after Shardul Thakur's three-wicket burst which brought India back into the match following a 53-run opening stand between Kyle Mayers and Brandon King.

"Once I can contribute to team



Shai Hope of West Indies hits a four during his unbeaten knock of 63 against India in the second ODI in Bridgetown on Saturday (AFP)

wins I am happy. Whether I get a 50, whether I get a hundred, whether I get a double-hundred, as long as we win I am happy," said a delighted Hope.

Of his partnership with Carty, he added: "Against such a good bowling attack, we had to push hard for ones and twos and that kept us on course."

Earlier, left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie and seamer Romario Shepherd claimed three wickets each as India, who rested regular captain Rohit Sharma and premier batsman Virat Kohli, tumbled after an opening stand of 90 between Ishan Kishan and Shubman Gill.

With their innings also inter-

rupted twice by seasonal showers, the visitors laboured to gain any middle or lower-order momentum. Motie separated the opening pair when Gill, on 34, was held at long-off and Kishan slashed a short ball from Shepherd four balls later to be well held by Alick Athanaze diving at backward-point.

Kishan's 55, his second consecutive half-century, came off 55 balls with six four and one six. Suryakumar Yadav (24) was the only other player in the line-up to last any length of time in the middle as the pace of Alzarri Joseph (2 for 35) also proved unsettling for the visitors.

"This will now get the charac-

ter out of everyone going to a decider rather than a dead match," said stand-in captain Hardik Pandya in putting a positive spin on the loss.

"Things didn't go our way today but we still had some good performances so we are all looking forward to the final match." AFP

Afghan cricketer smashes 42 runs off one T20 over

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan international cricketer Sediqullah Atal smashed an astonishing 42 runs off one over Saturday in a Kabul Premier League Twenty20 match.

Cricinfo, considered a definitive record keeper, has an entry for most runs scored off a T20 over only for the Indian Premier League -- 37 by West Indian Chris Gayle in 2011 -- but Atal beat that by five.

The onslaught overcame as the Shaheen Hunters were playing Abasin Defenders at Kabul's Ayubi Cricket Stadium in the country's domestic Twenty20 competition.

Atal, a 21-year-old all-rounder who has one T20 international cap to his name, was on 76 -- and his team on 158 for six -- when spinner Amir Zazai trundled in to deliver his first ball of the 19th over.

Zazai had conceded 35 runs for one wicket off three overs at that point, but overstepped the crease and Atal smashed him for six.

The next ball was a wide -- which went through the keeper for four byes -- meaning Zazai's two deliveries had cost 12 runs, and he still had six balls to bowl.

Each of those was sent soaring over boundary ropes by Atal in an astonishing display of power hitting as he finished on 118 not out off 56 balls.

It is the first season of the Kabul Premier League and only a smattering of spectators were at the stadium to witness the feat, but it was captured on video in a clip now doing the rounds on social media.

"Unbelievable performance," the commentator bellows as Atal completes the task.

Shaheen Hunters finished on 213 for six, while Abasin Defenders were all out for 181 in reply.

AFP

Australia openers start strongly in pursuit of Ashes glory

London, United Kingdom - Australia openers David Warner and Usman Khawaja hit unbeaten fifties as the tourists reached 135-0 on Sunday in pursuit of a mammoth target of 384 runs to win the fifth Ashes Test at The Oval.

They kept Stuart Broad waiting for a farewell wicket after the England fast-bowling great made a shock announcement on Saturday that he was retiring after the match.

Warner was 58 not out and fellow left-hander Khawaja unbeaten on 69 when rain stopped play at 2:41 pm (1341 GMT) on the fourth day.

Australia need 249 more runs

to complete a 3-1 series win and a first Ashes campaign triumph in England since 2001.

If they do manage to reach that target, it will be the sixth-highest fourth-innings total to win any Test.

It would also be a new ground record -- the highest successful fourth-innings chase at The Oval is England's 263-9 against their arch-rivals in 1902.

Fast-medium bowler Broad has dismissed Warner 17 times in Test cricket.

Neither he, nor the rest of England's pace attack were able to break through before rain sent the players hurrying from the field an hour after lunch.



Australia's Usman Khawaja plays a shot on day four of the fifth Ashes Test against England in London on Sunday (AFP)

Warner, 30 not out at the interval, lofted England veteran James Anderson, who turned 41 on Sunday, straight back over the paceman's head for a resounding four. Two balls later Anderson, struggling to produce swing, shook Warner up with an accidental head high full-toss, or beamer, the bowler immediately apologising as the ball sped away to the boundary for four.

Khawaja, the leading run scorer in the series, went to fifty with his fifth four in 110 balls when he edged express quick Mark Wood.

Warner, who by contrast has been struggling for runs, then followed him with a 90-ball fifty

featuring seven fours.

Earlier, Broad was given a guard of honour as he made his way to the wicket for the final time, but England added just six runs to their overnight total of 389-9. The 37-year-old seamer is the fifth most successful bowler in Test history, with 602 wickets so far.

"I've had a love affair with the Ashes my whole life and the thought of being able to bowl my last ball and face my last ball against Australia fills me with joy," he said.

Broad, whose highest Test score is 169, was batting with his long-time bowling partner Anderson.

Swiatek wins home WTA title in Warsaw

Warsaw, Poland - Iga Swiatek cruised to the title in her home tournament, the Warsaw Open with a 6-0, 6-1 victory over exhausted Laura Siegemund on Sunday.

The world No. 1 completed two busy days by sweeping aside her German opponent in 68 minutes for a second victory of the day.

"I wanted to put it all in and go for it. I'm pretty happy that I did," Swiatek said in her winner's speech.

The rain delays in the tournament meant Swiatek started Friday by playing her quarter-final and ended it by starting her semi-final against Yanina Wickmayer. She led 5-1 in the second set and had three match points before the Belgian fought back. Play was halted with the match finely balanced.

On Sunday, Wickmayer won a fifth straight game and reached deuce on Swiatek's serve. The Pole wasted two more match points in the tiebreak before



Iga Swiatek celebrates with the trophy

clinching a 6-1, 7-6 (8/6) victory.

In the final, Swiatek won the first nine games and never faced a break point as she overpowered the unseeded German.

"It's not easy to play in War-

saw, but I'm so happy that we could manage and do everything we could today, after a pretty tiring day yesterday," Swiatek said.

Siegemund had spent more than six hours on court on Satur-

day as she beat Lucrezia Stefanini and then compatriot Tatjana Maria, both in three sets, to reach a first final since 2017.

"I'm sorry I couldn't put up more of a battle today, but it was a little bit too much yesterday," Siegemund said. "The legs, they stayed at the hotel today."

Fritz in Atlanta final

Top-seeded American Taylor Fritz defeated compatriot JJ Wolf 6-3, 7-5 on Saturday to book a title clash with Australian Aleksandar Vukic in the ATP Tour hardcourt tournament in Atlanta.

Fritz, ranked ninth in the world, will be chasing his second title of the season after lifting his fifth career ATP trophy in Delray Beach in February.

"It was really solid," Fritz said. "I served well the whole match."

"Whenever I was in trouble I played a lot of good points, I just did what I was supposed to do and didn't really give him much," added Fritz, who saved both break points he faced.

Axelsen, An triumph in Japan Open

Tokyo, Japan - Badminton powerhouse Viktor Axelsen clinched victory in the Japan Open final on Sunday while An Se-Young of South Korea took the women's trophy to secure her promotion to world number one.

The Danish world number one fended off a brave challenge from Jonatan Christie of Indonesia to win 21-7, 21-18 in 45 minutes.

After cruising through the first game, Axelsen struggled in the second with his 3-0 lead becoming an 8-13 deficit at one point, as Christie fired a barrage of sizzling shots at the reigning world champion.

"It's always a tough game, playing against Jonatan Christie. But I came out really strong. He seemed a little bit tense" especially early in the match, Axelsen said. "Winning titles is always hard," he added. "Second game, I was under quite a bit of pressure. But I am happy about how I came back." Axelsen said he was focused on the World Championships slated for next month in Denmark.



Viktor Axelsen celebrates after beating Kodai Naraoka in the Japan Open final in Tokyo on Saturday (AFP)

In women's singles, world number two An beat He Bing Jiao of China 21-15, 21-11.

With the victory, the South Korean was set to rise to the world number one spot, replacing Japan's reigning world champion Akane Yamaguchi, who crashed out in the quarter-finals.

"I was so happy that when I

won I didn't know what to say and how to describe it in words," she said in a post-victory press conference. When asked about her hopes for the World Championships and the 2024 Paris Olympics, An said she was only focused on her next match and next practice.

AFP

UNREAL!

Real Madrid hit
woodwork five
times in defeat
to Barcelona

Arlington, United States - Barcelona beat Real Madrid 3-0 in a fiercely contested friendly match on Saturday with an early strike from Ousmane Dembele and late goals from Fermin Lopez and Ferran Torres.

The result was harsh on Carlo Ancelotti's team, who struck the woodwork five times and created plenty of opportunities. But Spanish champions Barcelona's more clinical finishing proved to be the difference.

A packed AT&T Stadium, home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys, witnessed a game which had all the passion and commitment of a real derby despite being a pre-season warm-up.

The crowd were soon on their feet when Oriel Romeu rattled the Real cross-bar with a thundering drive in the fourth minute but Barca soon had their fans celebrating. A cleverly worked free-kick saw Pedri slide a diagonal pass into the path of Dembele, who expertly drilled the ball into the far corner.

Real had a great chance to get level just five minutes later when Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo handled in the box but Vinicius Junior blasted the penalty against the bar.

The action was non-stop as



Barcelona's Ousmane Dembele scores against Real Madrid in their pre-season friendly in Arlington, Texas, on Saturday (AFP)

Rodrygo then forced Barcelona keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen into a fine, full-length save with a free-kick that was flying towards the top corner.

The woodwork denied Real again when Vinicius struck the bar and although Jude Bellingham outjumped ter Stegen, the midfielder's header hit the post.

At the other end, Dembele had a chance for a second after a mistake from Ferland Mendy allowed him to break through on goal, but the French forward's soft shot was easily dealt with by Thibaut Courtois.

Tempers flared after a sliding challenge from behind from Frenkie de Jong on Eder Militao, with players from

both teams scuffling on the half-way line and half-time likely came as a relief for American referee Allen Chapman.

Real's bad luck continued after the break with Aurelien Tchouameni blasting against the bar while Vinicius continued to torment from the left, poking a shot from a tight angle just wide.

There was no let-up from either side, despite multiple substitutions, but Barcelona's finishing proved to be the difference with substitute Fermin Lopez making it 2-0 with a brilliant blast from outside the box in the 85th minute after being set up by Sergi Roberto.

AFP



Alex Zinchenko (R) and Andriy Shevchenko

Toll on Ukrainian children's mental health leaves its mark on Zinchenko

Paris, France - Arsenal defender Oleksandr Zinchenko says he only had to look into the eyes of Ukrainian children who lived under Russian occupation in a village to find the motivation to raise money to rebuild their school.

"You realise the mental injuries they will carry for the rest of their lives," he told AFP.

The 26-year-old Ukraine international went home in May for his first trip since Russia invaded in February 2022 - "even the air smelt different," he said - and visited the village and the school, the Mykhailo-Kotsiubynsky Lyceum in Chernihiv Oblast, Ukraine.

It was heavily damaged in a rocket attack on March 4 last year killing a 62-year-old female cleaner - the death toll could have been a lot worse as

there were around 100 civilians, the youngest aged two months, living in the basement. "I was really upset, it was very hard for me morally to understand it," the school's headmaster Mykola Shpak told AFP. "When I saw the level of destruction I understood how much work will be needed to renovate it and restart education."

The estimated cost of the rebuilding work is \$1.7 million (1.54 million euros).

Zinchenko and Ukrainian football great Andriy Shevchenko, who accompanied him on the visit, played with some of the 412 pupils and chatted to them about their experiences when the Russians occupied the village from February 28 to March 31 last year.



Rasmus Hojlund

Man Utd in reported deal for Hojlund, Ten Hag tight-lipped

Las Vegas, United States - Manchester United have reportedly agreed a deal worth an initial £64 million to sign Atalanta striker Rasmus Hojlund.

The Denmark international is the third major arrival at Old Trafford during the summer transfer window after the signings of Chelsea midfielder Mason Mount and Inter Milan goalkeeper Andre Onana.

United are understood to have agreed a fee of £64 million (\$82 million) for Hojlund, with a further £8 million in add-ons.

The 20-year-old is reported to have agreed terms on a five-year deal with the option of a further season. Hojlund joined Atalanta in August 2022 from Austrian club Sturm Graz for a reported 17 million euros. He scored nine goals in 32 appearances in Serie A last season.

United manager Erik ten Hag was tight-lipped about the reports when asked by reporters on Saturday ahead of Sunday's

friendly against Borussia Dortmund in Las Vegas. "I can't talk about the player who is still under contract (with) another club," said the Dutchman.

Ten Hag said however that he hoped Mount and Onana would be joined by a new forward, as he tries to get United back in contention at the top of the table.

"With this squad, we built a foundation last season...now we have to find the right players to fit in and who can help to raise the bar. I think we succeeded with Andre Onana, we succeeded with Mason Mount and now we are looking for a striker," he said.

The Red Devils finished third in the Premier League but scored just 58 goals, Ten Hag urged his English forward Marcus Rashford to step up his game.

Rashford, who prefers to play wide on the left, scored 17 goals in 35 Premier League appearances last season and had 30 goals in 56 in all competitions.

AFP

Liverpool fire four past Leicester in friendly

Singapore, Singapore - Liverpool geared up for the start of their new Premier League campaign with an impressive display in Singapore on Sunday as they thumped English rivals Leicester City 4-0 in a pre-season friendly.

Goals by Darwin Nunez, Bobby Clark and Diogo Jota in an eight-minute spell late in the first half gave the Reds a 3-0 lead at the interval.

Ben Doak then headed in their fourth midway through the second half to seal a thumping victory at the National Stadium.

With two weeks left before Liverpool kick off their Premier League season at Chelsea, manager Jurgen Klopp could reflect on a good day of preparation for his side.

"We had a lot of good moments but we can do better," said the German.

"I'm absolutely fine (with how things went). The result was good, nobody was injured - just a few knocks - and the atmosphere during and after the game was top class. So yeah, it was a good day in the office."

Liverpool face Bayern Munich in another pre-season friendly in



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah dribbles the ball past Leicester City players during their friendly in Singapore (AFP)

Singapore on Wednesday while Leicester, who were relegated from the Premier League last season, are returning to England for the start of their Championship campaign against Coventry City next Sunday.

Leicester had the first big opportunity after nine minutes when Kasey McAteer's through

ball found Wilfred Ndidi behind the Liverpool defence but the Nigerian midfielder's attempt was smothered by goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher at point-blank range.

Liverpool were denied an opening goal shortly afterwards when Nunez's effort was ruled out for offside while Leicester

goalkeeper Mads Hermansen did well to palm the ball away when Mohamed Salah attempted to find Jota with a low cross.

However, Liverpool's pressure would finally pay off on the half-hour mark. Hermansen kept out Jota's hard low shot from the left channel but he could only parry

the ball to the far post where Nunez arrived to turn in for his side's opening goal.

A second arrived five minutes later when Salah laid the ball off in the box for Clark with the 18-year-old sending a right-footed shot past Hermansen into the bottom corner of the net.

Salah also played a big part in Liverpool's third three minutes later as the Egyptian scooped the ball up for Jota to head the ball home.

Liverpool changed all 10 of their outfield players at half-time but they continued to enjoy the lion's share of possession in the second half.

They added a fourth in the 64th minute from a well-worked set-piece as Joel Matip flicked Dominik Szoboszlai's corner to the far post for Doak to nod home. Leicester went close to a consolation goal when Patson Daka's attempt was well blocked by Jarell Quansah while at the other end, Luis Diaz was twice left frustrated as he saw his headed goal disallowed for offside before being denied by a good save by Hermansen.

AFP

Tunisia's Hafnaoui wins men's 1,500m freestyle world title

Fukuoka, Japan - Tunisia's Ahmed Hafnaoui won the men's 1,500m freestyle title at swimming's world championships on Sunday.

Hafnaoui came home in 14min, 31.54sec to finish ahead of American Bobby Finke on 14:31.59 and Australia's Sam Short on 14:37.28.

Hafnaoui's time was less than a second off the world record of 14:31.02 set by China's Sun Yang in 2012.

"Bobby is so fast in the end of the race, he just pushed us," said Hafnaoui.



Tunisia's Ahmed Hafnaoui celebrates after winning the men's 1500m freestyle at the World Aquatics Championships on Sunday (AFP)

"It was so close to the world record. I enjoyed the race and thanks Bobby for pushing me."

Short won the 400m freestyle title earlier in the week, pipping Hafnaoui to the line.

Hafnaoui, the Olympic 400m freestyle champion, got his revenge in the 800m freestyle final, edging Short after an epic battle.

The United States salvaged some pride with three golds on the final night of the championships on Sunday, while Canadian teen Summer McIntosh showcased her immense talent

with a second title.

The Americans went into the last day of competition in Fukuoka with only four golds to their name, with no chance of catching runaway leaders Australia at the top of the medal table.

But Hunter Armstrong kicked off a late gold rush with victory in the men's 50m backstroke, while later US success in the men's and women's 4x100m medley relays capped off the night. "This is the cherry on top," said women's relay member Regan Smith.

AFP

LAST-GASP WINNER

Colombia stun Germany with 97th minute goal in World Cup classic

Sydney, Australia - Colombia scored a 97th-minute winner through a Manuela Vanegas header to snatch a dramatic 2-1 victory over Germany and stand on the cusp of the Women's World Cup last 16 on Sunday.

Skipper Alexandra Popp thought she had rescued a point for Germany as she held her nerve to score from the spot on 89 minutes.

But in an incredible finish to a pulsating clash, Vanegas popped up deep into stoppage time for all three points with a close-range header.

It came after Linda Caicedo scored one of the goals of the tournament in front of 40,000 in Sydney near the start of the second half, but that was just the beginning of the drama.

Their victory left Colombia top of Group H with a perfect six points. Germany and Morocco have three and all to play for.

South Korea are just about alive on zero points.

Germany face the Koreans in the last round of matches while Colombia are up against Morocco.

"Germany is a world power, that's a reality, but Colombia has been making great strides and today Colombia is a world



Colombia's Manuela Vanegas celebrates with teammates after scoring against Germany in their Women's World Cup Group H match in Sydney on Sunday (AFP)

Colombia has been making great strides and today Colombia is a world power. I dreamed of scoring a goal in a World Cup, I knew it was going to come and I decided to do it for today's game

MANUELA VANEGAS

power," said the defender Vanegas.

"I dreamed of scoring a goal in a World Cup, I knew it was going to come and I decided to do it for today's game."

Germany were one of the pre-tournament favourites and their coach felt they should have been

"smarter" at the end and settled for a draw.

"We need to learn our lessons and take a draw, but we tried to win and we need to talk about this," Germany's coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg said.

"With our goal difference a draw would have left us first in

the group, which would have been good mentally, but the pressure has now increased."

Caicedo classic

Singing and dancing Colombian fans vastly outnumbered German supporters in a raucous crowd at Sydney Football Sta-

dium. Loud boos and whistles went up each time Germany had the ball, and they had plenty of possession in the first half.

Lina Magull swung and missed the ball as it sat up invitingly for her in the Colombian penalty area.

Magull was a menace and after making life difficult once more for the Colombian defence, the ball fell to striker Popp with the goal gaping just before the break.

But the usually deadly striker skied her volley high and wide to give the South Americans a huge letoff.

The second half started with Germany, champions in 2003 and 2007, again looking the more likely to score.

Teenager Caicedo started the game for Colombia following her training-ground scare on Thursday when she went to the ground holding her chest and on 52 minutes added to her goal from the 2-0 win over South Korea with a strike of the highest quality.

The Real Madrid attacker dinked inside, fooled the German defence with a body swerve and bent the ball wonderfully into the top corner.

Germany went in search of an equaliser and Lena Oberdorf skewed inches wide after a corner fell her way.

With minutes left of normal time, Colombia goalkeeper Catalina Perez brought Oberdorf over in the box and Popp defied the whistles to score her penalty, before Vanegas's late intervention.

AFP



Morocco's Nouhaila Benzina (L) tackles South Korea's Ji So-Yun during their Group H match on Sunday (AFP)

Morocco's Benzina makes history with hijab at Women's World Cup

Adelaide, Australia - Nouhaila Benzina became the first player to wear a hijab during a Women's World Cup game when she sported the Muslim headscarf in Morocco's match against South Korea on Sunday.

World governing body FIFA lifted its ban on footballers wearing the hijab nearly a decade ago, after previous concerns over player safety.

The 25-year-old defender Benzina, who plays her club football in Morocco, ran out against South Korea in Adelaide to write her name in the history books.

Benzina shared social media

posts in the lead-up to the World Cup about wearing a hijab, but has not spoken to the media in Australia and New Zealand about it.

She told broadcaster Al Jazeera recently it would be a proud moment.

"Lots of work was done over many years, and thank God it had a positive result," she said.

"We hope to play at a high level and honour Moroccans."

Several other sports have lifted hijab bans in recent years including basketball, but it is still not allowed during official football matches in France.

Morocco beat South Korea for first Women's WC win

Adelaide, Australia - Morocco won a Women's World Cup match for the first time after Ibtissam Jraidi struck early to give them a stunning 1-0 victory over South Korea on Sunday.

Having been thrashed 6-0 by Germany on their World Cup debut, this hard-earned win kept alive Morocco's unlikely chances of reaching the last 16.

"We are just so glad that our efforts paid off," said the goal-scorer Jraidi.

"I would like to dedicate this victory to Morocco and all the Arab nations at large. It was the fruit of our hard work."

French coach Reynald Pedros saw his Morocco team take the lead after only six minutes in



Morocco's Ibtissam Jraidi scores against South Korea in their Group H match in Adelaide on Sunday (AFP)

front of just over 13,000 fans in Adelaide.

Hanane Ait El Haj crossed and forward Jraidi nipped in ahead of her marker to expertly glance her header into the far corner.

Morocco, one of the lowest-ranked teams at the tournament at 72 in the world, were supposed underdogs against the 17th-ranked Koreans.

But they made by far the better start against shell-shocked opponents.

Colin Bell's Korean side belatedly grew into the game towards the end of the first half, but like in their 2-0 opening defeat to Colombia, they lacked punch up front.

AFP

Switzerland, Norway qualify for last 16

Auckland, New Zealand - Switzerland and Norway qualified for the last 16 of the Women's World Cup on Sunday as co-hosts New Zealand were eliminated along with the Philippines.

The Swiss finished top of Group A thanks to a 0-0 draw with New Zealand in Dunedin, while Norway hammered the Philippines 6-0 in Auckland to

overtake the co-hosts in the standings on goal difference.

Norway had to beat the tournament debutants to stand a chance of advancing and they cruised to victory at Eden Park with Sophie Roman Haug scoring a hat-trick.

Roman Haug, filling in for the injured Ada Hegerberg, netted twice early on before the recalled Caroline Graham Hansen made

it 3-0 at the break.

Alicia Barker scored an own goal just after half-time and Guro Reiten netted a penalty before crossing for Roman Haug to complete her hat-trick, and the victory, in injury time.

The scoreline allowed the 1995 World Cup winners Norway to pass in front of New Zealand into second place on goal difference.



Switzerland's Ana-Maria Crnogorevic dribbles past New Zealand's Rebekah Stott during their Group A match in Dunedin on Sunday (AFP)



Alen Stajcic

Philippines coach filled with pride after Women's World Cup run ends

Auckland, New Zealand - Philippines coach Alen Stajcic said he could not have asked any more of his team despite a 6-0 hammering by Norway on Sunday which ended their Women's World Cup adventure.

"They are a classy team and they picked us apart. We tried hard all the way to the end and I am proud of the heart and spirit of our team," said Stajcic after

the game at Eden Park in Auckland.

"They fought to the end. From that perspective it has been an amazing World Cup. The players have punched so far above their weight."

The Philippines came into their final game in Group A fresh from a stunning victory over co-hosts New Zealand, their first ever World Cup win on their

debut appearance at the tournament. Another win against the former champions would have taken them through to the last 16 but they never recovered after Sophie Roman Haug scored two early goals for the Norwegians.

A Caroline Graham Hansen strike made it 3-0 at half-time, and an Alicia Barker own goal coupled with a Guro Reiten penalty meant it was 5-0 early in

the second half.

The Philippines had substitute Sofia Harrison sent off before Roman Haug completed her hat-trick, and the rout, in stoppage time. Despite the outcome, the Philippines players still took the acclaim at full-time of their noisy support, which made up the majority of the crowd of close to 35,000.

"It felt like a home game," said

Stajcic, the Australian who has previously coached his home country at the Women's World Cup. "To bring football to life in the Philippines has been a moment you can't turn back from.

"These players have really left their mark and left a legacy for future generations. I can't ask any more. They gave everything."

AFP

STOP ME IF YOU CAN!

Verstappen makes light of Spa penalty to secure eighth straight win

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Max Verstappen made light of a five-place grid penalty to reel off an eighth consecutive victory for his invincible Red Bull team at the Belgian Grand Prix on Sunday.

The defending double world champion and runaway series leader came home 22.305 seconds ahead of team-mate and nearest title rival Sergio Perez.

Pole-sitter Charles Leclerc was third for Ferrari ahead of Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton who clocked the fastest lap.

It was Red Bull's record-extending 13th win in succession,



Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen celebrates with his trophy after winning the Belgian Grand Prix on Sunday

and their fifth one-two of the season.

Verstappen, who completed a hat-trick of Belgian wins, can now draw level with Sebastian Vettel's record of nine straight wins set in 2013 at his home Dutch Grand Prix next month.

He said: "It's a new spot, that's for sure - P6. I knew that we had a great car. It was just about surviving turn one."

"We made all the right moves."

Two-time champion Fernando Alonso finished fifth for Aston Martin ahead of George Russell in the second Mercedes, McLaren's Lando Norris, Esteban Ocon of Alpine and Lance Stroll in the second Aston Martin. Yuki Tsunoda was 10th for Alpha Tauri. The race began under grey skies, but in dry conditions as Leclerc led from pole into La Source hairpin where, after a decent start, McLaren's Oscar Piastri was squeezed into the wall by Sainz and after limping slowly on the Australian rookie pulled up to retire at the exit of Fagnes chicane.

By then, Perez had blasted past Leclerc on Kemmel Straight, a show of power to take the lead.

Behind him, Verstappen was swiftly up to fourth from sixth, his starting slot after taking a five-place penalty for a new gearbox. It was clear Red Bull had superior handling and pace and on lap nine Verstappen eased past Leclerc into Les Combes. It meant Perez had his team-mate in his mirrors before they had run 10 laps.

After a flurry of pit stops Verstappen chose to attack on his new medium tyres and on lap 17 swept past Perez on Kemmel Straight and promptly clocked a fastest lap before rain began to fall.

AFP

Boutier storms to first major triumph at Evian

Evian, France - France's Celine Boutier on Sunday clinched her first major title by winning the Evian Championship by an impressive six shots.

The 29-year-old started the last day with a three-shot lead and she finished on 14 under par after a near perfect closing 68.

Brooke Henderson, last year's winner, was second on eight under after a 70.

Boutier is the third French woman to win a major, following in the footsteps of Catherine Lacoste, who won the 1967 US Women's Open as an amateur, and Patricia Meunier Lebourg, a winner of the Kraft Nabisco Championship in California 20 years ago.

In ideal conditions, Boutier, a former world No.1 amateur, swiped away the nerves with an brilliant start.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

WHEEL OF CHANGE

Two AI experts - Sorav Jain and Rishi Jain – co-founders of Digital Scholar, were in Oman recently to propagate the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) among business houses.

Anirban Ray tries to understand the 'wheel of change' that is ready to roll forth to increase efficiency, enhance output, and rev up the human element for smart living



SORAV JAIN:

Is AI a threat to mankind?

AI is not a threat until one masters it. It is not our enemy – indeed, it is our best friend. AI helps you increase your productivity, it helps you become more creative and helps you show that you are smarter than everybody else in the room. So if you're not gonna learn AI, it is then when it becomes a threat.

Indeed, AI may replace a lot of jobs because it can perform multiple tasks at once, and so, productivity will increase. But, it does not have a mind of its own and can function only as programmed – that's where the human element comes in.

Can it be misused?

Every coin has two sides and we may expect a lot of misuse as AI is still at a very nascent stage. This is only going to get intense as it passes the Beta phase, but with time, governments will step in to legislate and regulate its functions. It is like any drug that has healing powers on one side and negative effects which can be misused, and so its use needs to be regulated.



RISHI JAIN:

How does 'prompt' in AI work?

Prompt is the main key and heart for a successful AI generative material.

We have a framework called 'CRAFT' that helps get the right prompt.

Where C stands for curation of content. For example, GPT has limited content, so we need to create new content for better activity. One needs to curate and bring out latest information from new books, new sources, news channels, and maybe, from YouTube videos. R stands for refine, and A for the audience for whom you need to refine it. Finally T stands for tracking and it can be done to save conversations for future reference.

Will AI make us lazy?

AI will make us smarter and productive but not lazy. Laziness does not have any place in the 'smart' age - one needs to consistently upgrade oneself with new skills and learnings that enrich as well as facilitate our existence. The world is yet to be educated on some of the good and bad impacts of AI – at present, its use is at the experimental stage and pitfalls have yet to be identified.



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NIGHT TRAIN



BACK ON TRACK

Europe's night trains make a bumpy comeback, amid climate concerns, offering a convenient mode of transport



Passengers board the Nightjet train line Vienna - Venice (-Zurich) of the Austrian Federal Railways (OeBB) at the main station in Vienna, Austria



Train attendants stand on the platform in front of sleeping cars of the Nightjet train line Vienna - Venice (Zurich) of the Austrian Federal Railways (OeBB)

Night trains have made a comeback in Europe, thanks to their low-carbon footprint, but after years of neglect, the renaissance has had a bumpy ride.

Operators admit that the trains are outdated - with passengers facing the occasional delays, technical problems or malfunctioning toilets - while companies compete in an overloaded network.

Despite the challenges, national rail operators are giving night trains another chance while startups are jumping on the bandwagon as climate concerns are making travellers ditch kerosene-burning planes for cleaner modes of transportation.

Sitting at the crossroads between western and eastern Europe, Austria has been at the heart of this revival with the backing of the government even as low-cost airlines threatened to relegate sleeper trains to the history books.

Austrian rail operator OeBB, a pioneer in the sector, has Europe's biggest fleet of night trains, serving 1.5 million passengers in carriages that include sleeper compartments.

The state-owned company considered abandoning its overnight services at one point, but it went the opposite direction and invested in them instead.

"Our night trains are nearly fully booked," OeBB spokesman Bernhard Rieder told AFP as summer travel is in full swing in Europe. OeBB runs 20 routes connecting Vienna and other cities throughout Europe.

"We have a long tradition with night train service," Rieder said, pointing out how the Alpine nation's mountainous topography makes having high-speed connections difficult.

VERY CONVENIENT

Astrid Reiter, a 27-year-old consultant, booked a night train from Vienna to Zurich. "It's nice because you basically wake up in

Operating night trains is very difficult, complex and expensive. There's not really a European approach to train travel now

PHILIPP KOSOK

a different country," she said. "If everything works out well, it's a convenient way to travel."

She added, "I do hope that other companies other than the Austrian railway company develop more night trains and make it easier to have faster night trains."

Rieder admits that the quality of its service is 'not always as high these days as what we want to deliver to our customers'.

"There was no demand and no request for night trains for over 25 years, causing manufacturing to grind to a halt," he said.

In 2018, OeBB ordered 33 new night trains from German conglomerate Siemens to expand its reach and replace part of its ageing fleet.

The first trains - with a modern design, more privacy, and more shower facilities - are expected to go into service at the end of this year.

Chris Engelsman, co-founder of the Belgian-Dutch startup European Sleeper, also complained about a shortage of proper night train coaches.

Established in 2021, his company inaugurated a Berlin-Brussels link in May.

"The train is not always up to the modern standards, but despite that many people would like to travel by night train and the enthusiasm is quite big," he told AFP.

"There are breakdowns sometimes or the toilets are not working or electricity is

not working properly - things like that," he added, blaming the lack of investment for decades.

Competition from low-cost flights and a lack of coordination between different European rail operators and companies are other obstacles.

It is difficult to compete with some flights' unreasonably low prices, according to a recent report by NGO Greenpeace, with the aviation sector benefitting from subsidies and tax exemptions.

Rail transport, on the other hand, is subject to various taxes and fees, in particular for using the infrastructure, said Philipp Kosok, an analyst at the German think tank Agora.

COMPLEX AND EXPENSIVE

"Operating night trains is very difficult, complex and expensive," Kosok said, adding that the infrastructure was overloaded even at night when freight trains ply the rails.

There is also no centralised site to consult timetables and compare prices, with some in the industry complaining of a lack of political will.

"There's not really a European approach to train travel now," Engelsman said.

French startup Midnight Trains co-founder Adrien Aumont said his company's aim was to reinvent the night train to make it a truly competitive means of transport against aviation. Aumont had the idea to create the company when his partner decided never to get on a plane again.

His startup is partnering with a night train maker to relaunch the once popular Paris-Milan-Venice line in 2025.

"I realised that it was almost impossible to travel in Europe (without flying). People were asked to get off the planes, but without necessarily offering them solutions," he told AFP. He, however, slammed a service that has 'deteriorated' over time, far from the luxurious Orient Express.

AFP