

'Rapprochement between US, Iran provides a path to regional peace'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, has stated that "rapprochement" between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran provides a path to regional peace and that the recent prisoner exchange between them will lead to more dialogue and closer relations in the coming months.

H E Sayyid Badr made the comments at the Al-Monitor and Semafor Middle East Global Summit on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York last week.

He said that even if the process was "slow, painstaking and challenging", it was important for Iran and the US to "maintain a momentum of trust ... and de-escalation" for the good of the global economy.

The foreign minister said the



US President Joe Biden and his wife Jill Biden received H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, during a reception held in New York on the occasion of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly last week

Iran nuclear deal was the "best thing we have" and that experts believe "it can be done".

Addressing concerns about Iran's behaviour in the region, he said that Oman is "in favour of having a platform where Iran can

talk bilaterally".

He stressed that the key to security and integration in the Middle East is "to recognise that we are all part of this region, including Iran, and therefore we all have a vested interest in the future of

the region".

The summit brought together the region's leaders, including King Abdullah II of Jordan and prime ministers of Iraq and Lebanon.

On Israel-Saudi talks, King Ab-

dullah II said "the best deal is when everyone walks out of the table slightly unhappy".

He added that Jordan and Egypt were working towards a successful deal but "you can't parachute over Palestine".

"What do the Palestinians get out of it?" he asked.

On the US administration's goal to reduce tensions and alleviate conflict, Barbara Leaf, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, said the Middle East "is one of the least integrated regions in the world in economic terms".

She said one key to integration is the US efforts to persuade Saudi Arabia to normalise ties with Israel. "The road will be long and winding. It will be very complex to get there, but we believe fundamentally that it has strategic value for the US, for Saudi Arabia, for Israel, but more broadly for the region."



Omani athletes bag 14 medals at world taekwondo meet

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's taekwondo team put up an impressive performance at the G1 International Taekwondo Open Championship in Sarajevo, Bosnia, clinching five gold, four silver and five bronze medals.

The championship hosted 350 participants from 28 nations. Oman's contingent of 22 athletes stood out, securing commendable victories against strong opponents.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Hafez al Balushi, Director of Professional Academy in Ibri, said, "The determination and prowess of our athletes were evident as they fiercely competed and emerged triumphant. They added to Oman's illustrious track record in international taekwondo and held our nation's flag high on the podium."

Among the gold medalists were Dawood al Yousfi in the 148cm height category, Al Mundhir al Balushi in 160cm, Al Mu'tasim al Maskari in 172cm,

Abdulrahman al Jabri in the 55kg weight category and Nbaras al Touqi in 51kg.

The silver medalists were Muhannad al Balushi in the 45kg category, Fahad al Zadjali in 48kg, Mohammed al Balushi in 51kg and Mohammed al Hajri in 73kg.

Bronze medals were claimed by Yusuf al Zadjali in the 156cm category, Al Az al Maouli in 168cm, Fida al Burwani in 164cm, Dania al Abdulali in 152cm and Amima al Hinai in the 46kg category.

Reflecting on the event, Professional Academy's Balushi said that while the championship posed numerous challenges, the team's dedication and rigorous training paid off. "Academies like us need financial support as participating in international championships is crucial. It gives the required exposure to players."

Balushi informed that the team's focus now shifts to the upcoming 3rd Qatar International Taekwondo Open G1, scheduled from October 21 to 23.



Autumn Salon 2023 show at Matti Sirvio Art Galleria

Oman joins opening ceremony of 19th Asian Games

Hangzhou, China - Chinese President Xi Jinping opened the 19th Asian Games in a colourful ceremony in Hangzhou on Saturday, launching a two-week sporting extravaganza that boasts more athletes than the Olympics.

After being delayed by a year because of China's now-abandoned zero-COVID policy, more

than 12,000 competitors from 45 nations and territories will battle it out in 40 sports.

In front of Syrian President Bashar al Assad and other visiting leaders, Xi officially opened the games at the 80,000-capacity Hangzhou Olympic stadium, also known as the Big Lotus.

At the opening, the Omani

contingent stood out with athletes donning the traditional dish-dasha. The national flag was carried by Sami al Lun of the hockey team and Ibrahim al Muqbali from the shooting squad. Representing Oman were H E Basil al Rawas, Undersecretary for Sports and Youth in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth; H E

Nasser al Busaidi, Oman's Ambassador to China; and Taha al Kishry, Secretary-General of Oman Olympic Committee.

Raja Randhir Singh, Acting President of Olympic Council of Asia, told a cheering crowd. "The one-year postponement was unprecedented in OCA history."

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Our Correspondent

Additionally, attendees will navigate 25m of stairs from the cave's base to its upper chamber. A picturesque 500m walk in Wadi Darbat has also been organised, where participants can immerse themselves in nature. The ministry has ensured convenience for visitors by ar-



Our team is driven by the mission to unearth and document the sultanate's caves and foster adventure tourism

ABDUL HAKIM AMER
AL MA'ASHANI



Ma'ashani emphasised that the event is more than just a day of adventure. He described it as an endeavour to foster a culture



Hoping to continue such endeavours to improve Omani

tourism, Ma'ashani said, "Our team is driven by the mission to unearth and document the sultanate's caves, foster adventure tourism and promote sustainable practices."

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Elaborating on ASMED's commitment, the official said, "We allocated RO114,969 to back 23 SME initiatives till August 2023, which benefited 18 institutions." This support includes organising exhibitions, conferences, competitions and



Recent statistics indicate the

sultanate had over 24,000 craftsmen by 2020, with women accounting for 88% of these. Dhofar led the count with 7,247 craftsmen, followed by North Sharqiyah (5,454), North Batinah (3,534), Dhakliyah (2,148), Al Wusta (1,534), South Batinah (1,357), South Sharqiyah (1,186), Muscat (608), Dhahirah (482), Musandam (405) and Buraimi (236).

Our Correspondent

Salalah

Known as an economically vital period, serb boosts the livelihoods of farmers, fishermen and livestock breeders.



Agriculturalists harvest
maize, local beans and cucum-

Moreover, the season blankets the plains, plateaus and mountains with green pastures. This fuels a surge in meat and dairy products, facilitating increased production of local items such as *qattamim* butter and *mashah* ghee.

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S

The world has changed and populations have increased. If we look at present populations, we notice that the majority of countries with large populations are not allowed to veto. Countries with small popula-



TIME
FOR CHANGE

tions such as the UK and France are allowed to take decisions which affect the entire world, whilst others such as India with 1.43bn people, or Indonesia with 277mn, Pakistan with 240mn, Nigeria with 223mn and many others are

Isn't it time to reassess the objectives of the United Nations? We are not united any-

We are all part of the same planet and we have no other choice but to get united if we want to avoid catastrophes and total destruction. The time for change has arrived and it is our task to inform our governments that such a change is vital for humanity.



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Air travellers fret over unregulated taxis

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Unauthorised taxi drivers have become a concern for passengers around the bus stand at Muscat International Airport. These drivers often confront and hassle travellers, despite the official and affordable bus services to Ruwi and Mawalah that run regularly from the airport's bus terminal.

Many passengers prefer the bus service, priced at 500 baizas, given its stark contrast to the high fares demanded by taxis.

Saud, an Omani traveller shared, "I routinely travel to Dubai for work. Landing at night, I always rely on the bus for a hassle-free ride home to Azaiba. However, the presence of unauthorised taxi drivers around the bus stand has become a persistent issue, often subjecting passengers to harassment and overcharging."

Sanjay Kulkarni from India recounted his uncomfortable encounter. "Upon arrival, I was overwhelmed by these taxi drivers insisting they were my only option. They were relentless and even suggested sharing rides with strangers, which I found unsettling."

Similarly, Mohammad Salman from Pakistan expressed his frustration on return from Lahore. "Post a tiring transit in Abu Dhabi, my arrival in Muscat was marred by these aggressive taxi drivers, each quoting exorbitant fares. It raised concerns about the transport's safety and legitimacy."

Khalfan - an official airport bus

Post a tiring transit in Abu Dhabi, my arrival in Muscat was marred by these aggressive taxi drivers, each quoting exorbitant fares. It raised concerns about the transport's safety and legitimacy.

MOHAMMAD SALMAN



operator, who only gave his first name - said he regularly witnesses such incidents. "Especially Bangladeshi workers face this harassment daily. It's disheartening to see passengers exploited in this manner. I always urge travellers to remain patient, avoid these drivers, and wait for the buses. In Oman, no one can force them."

To streamline taxis at airports across Oman, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has licensed two companies, Al Sahab World Company with the Otaxi app and Ubar Smart Cities Company with the Oman Taxi app to start operation from October 1.

Pact signed to enhance medical services at Muscat International Airport

Muscat - Oman Airports signed an agreement with Kims Hospitals Group to provide medical care services to travellers at Muscat International Airport.

This initiative is part of Oman Airports efforts to offer the best services and immediate medical care during any emergency.

The agreement was signed by Sheikh Ayman bin Ahmed al Hosni, the CEO of Oman Airports, and Jacob Thomas, Kims Hospitals Group Executive Director - Operations & Projects (GCC).

This agreement is in line with Oman Airports plans to enhance its services at Muscat International Airport by providing assistance to people - whether passengers, airport employees or airline crew members - faced with emergency medical situations, such as cases of strokes, sudden cardiac arrests, or severe injuries.

The four-year pact would also enable the parties to handle emergency situations in flights diverted to Muscat due to a medical condition on board. This agreement also makes sure that any person needing medical intervention can be easily transferred to the nearest hospital for further treatment if necessary.

Kims Hospitals Group will establish a clinic at the airport, including an outpatient clinic at



the ground floor of the airport's passenger terminal entrance, two first aid rooms in the departure area and one first aid room in the arrival area.

Under the contract, a medical team comprising two doctors and six nurses - experienced in handling emergency cases - will be deployed,

along with three ambulances and trained Omani drivers.

The current passenger capacity of the new passenger terminal building at Muscat International Airport is 20mn.

Further expansion of the airport will be done in three phases to raise the airport's capacity to 56mn in the future.

Oman Airports aims to improve the medical services at the airport adhering to the best international standards.

"This effort is aimed at making Muscat International Airport one of the best airports in the Middle East and also in the world," the authorities said.

The medical clinic at Muscat International Airport has saved several passengers during recent periods through rapid intervention and essential medical care.

Muscat International Airport has also witnessed the first case of a birth given by an Indonesian passenger on board a Saudi Arabian Airlines flight coming from Jeddah and heading to Kuala Lumpur.

It had a stopover at Muscat International Airport.

"Necessary medical care services were provided, and the passenger gave birth inside the plane on the grounds of Muscat International Airport," authorities informed.

Oman signs political agreements with Slovakia, Serbia

New York, US - H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received several high-ranking officials of different countries at the Sultanate of Oman's permanent mission to the United Nations, and signed agreements with Slovakia and Serbia.

The Foreign Minister of Oman received his counterpart from Slovak Republic, Miroslav Wlachovsky, on the sidelines of the 78th United Nations General Assembly meetings.

Within the framework of strengthening bilateral relations between Oman and Slovakia, an agreement was signed on mutual exemption of entry visas for the holders of diplomatic, private and service passports.



During his meeting with Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, the two sides discussed various aspects of cooperation and signed two memoranda of understanding.

These MoUs relate to political consultations and cooperation in the fields of diplomatic studies and training between the diplomatic academies of the two foreign ministries.

In his other meetings, H E

Sayyid Badr received Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary of State of the Vatican City for Relations with States and International Organisations.

The two affirmed their support for dialogue between civilisations and cultures and their commitment to the values of tolerance, understanding and respect, the rule of international law and the United Nations Charter. They agreed to enhance constructive cooperation for the good and harmony among nations.

H E Sayyid Badr also met with Mohamed Salem Ould Marzouk, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and Miguel Ángel Moratinos, Under-Secretary-General of High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).

Miguel Moratinos and H E Sayyid Badr discussed the efforts made to promote understanding and tolerance and combating the phenomena of hatred, intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion or race. They exchanged views on enhancing cooperation and partnership between Oman and UNAOC.

H E Sayyid Badr also met Ahmed Attaf, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad of Algeria, and his Belarusian counterpart, Sergei Aleinik.

July saw 570 violations of marine fishing laws

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Twenty-three expatriate workers were arrested for violating fishery laws and legislations in July this year, an official at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) informed.

Additionally, 570 violations were registered for non-compliance with the regulations for fishing of marine resources, and 359 violations of fishing licensing regulations.

"In all 359 items were seized, including boats, engines, nets, devices and fishing equipment," the official said, adding that a total of

3,748kg of fish were confiscated in July this year. The ministry arrested those 23 expatriates for violating provisions of the Marine Fishing Law and Protection of Living Aquatic Resources.

"Of the total violations, 395 were for violation of fishing licensing regulations, 35 for use of prohibited fishing methods and possession of unauthorised equipment, seven violations of fishing in prohibited areas and time, 13 cases of employment of unlicensed expatriate workers, 65 were for non-compliance with placement of number plates on boats and vessels, and 45 other violations," the official added.

OMAN CELEBRATES SAUDI NATIONAL DAY



The Sultanate of Oman marked Saudi Arabia's 93rd National Day with a grand ceremony at the Rub al Khali border on Saturday. The event, coordinated by the Secretariat General for National Celebrations and the Royal Oman Police, witnessed the attendance of Mohammed al Furaih al Sharari, Counsellor at the Saudi Embassy in Muscat, as chief guest. Guests from Saudi Arabia were greeted with heartfelt messages, symbolising the profound and enduring ties between the two nations. The Royal Oman Police serenaded the attendees with musical compositions, enhancing the ambiance of the paragliding display. This was complemented by a rendition of 'Oman Congratulates Saudi Arabia', performed by Al Razha Popular Band, and the traditional Al Ayyala by bands from Dhahirah (ONA)

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Sultanate's economy mildly contracts in second quarter

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's real GDP – gross domestic product at constant prices – experienced a slight contraction of 0.2% in the second quarter of 2023 compared to the corresponding period of the previous year.

The sultanate's economy, however, entered this year on a positive note, expanding at a growth rate of 4.7% in the first quarter of 2023, outpacing the average growth rate of the previous year, driven by non-oil output, which expanded by 4.6%.

According to the official data released on Thursday, the mild contraction in real GDP in the second quarter can be attributed to a minor decrease in oil and gas production.

The real GDP decreased marginally to RO8.431bn in the second quarter of 2023, down from the RO8.448bn recorded during the same period in the previous year, according to the data released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Oman's petroleum GDP, encompassing both oil and gas output, contracted by 0.7% in the second quarter, reaching RO2.927bn, compared to RO2.947bn in the corresponding



Oman's petroleum GDP contracted by 0.7% in Q2 2023

period a year ago.

Non-petroleum GDP saw a slight increase of 0.1%, reaching RO5.830bn during the second quarter of 2023, compared to RO5.823bn in the second quarter of 2022.

Breaking it down further, industrial activities within the non-petroleum sector contracted by 2.9% to RO1.528bn from RO1.574bn in the same period the previous year. Meanwhile, the services sector experienced growth of 1.3% in the second quarter, reaching RO4.090bn.

Nominal GDP shrinks 9.5%

Oman's nominal GDP – which is calculated at current market prices – saw a substantial 9.5% decline, dropping to RO10.085bn in the second quarter of 2023 from the RO11.146bn recorded during the same period in the previous year.

Nominal petroleum GDP contracted by 18.3%, falling to RO3.646bn in the first quarter, while nominal non-petroleum GDP decreased by 3.6% to RO6.861bn.

For the full year 2023, the

government's estimates in January had projected Oman's real GDP to grow by 5.5%, mainly due to an expected increase in oil and gas production. As per government estimates, hydrocarbon GDP is projected to grow by 10.1%, and non-hydrocarbon GDP is expected to grow by 2.9% this year.

However, international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and global credit rating agencies have estimated that Oman's 2023 economic growth will remain significantly lower

than the previous year, mainly due to an expected decrease in oil output owing to an OPEC+ decision, of which Oman is a member.

The IMF recently stated that the sultanate's economic growth is projected to slow down to 1.3% in 2023 and then rebound to 2.7% in 2024, reflecting oil production cuts by OPEC+ and moderate growth in the non-hydrocarbon sector.

Last week, a new report commissioned by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) and compiled by Oxford Economics revealed that Oman's economy is expected to expand 'moderately' in 2023.

While Oman's non-oil economic activities are forecasted to grow by 2.9%, up from 1.6% last year, headwinds in the oil sector, driven by OPEC+ policy changes, will cause the sultanate's 2023 GDP growth to slow to 2.5% year-on-year compared to the 4.3% growth in 2022, the ICAEW report said.

According to this report, in alignment with the OPEC+ agreement, Oman is expected to reduce oil output to 1.042mn barrels per day this year, down 2.1% from last year, with further adjustments anticipated in the coming year.

CBO hits pause on repo rate hikes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following the US Federal Reserve's announcement on Wednesday to keep the key interest rates unchanged, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) decided on Thursday to maintain its repo rate for local banks at 6.00%.

The sultanate follows a fixed exchange-rate regime, and as a result, its interest rates closely align with US rates. The CBO's repo rate generally moves in tandem with the Fed's policy rate.

The repo rate is the policy rate that enables commercial banks to borrow short-term liquidity from the Central Bank of Oman as the lender of last resort.

On Wednesday, US Fed officials unanimously voted to keep interest rates at a 22-year high level of 5.25%-5.50% while indicating they expect another hike will be necessary to bring inflation down to the US central bank's long-term target of two per cent.

'After the recent announcement by the US Fed to hold off on its interest rate hike, the Central Bank of Oman decided to maintain its repo rate for local banks at 6.00%,' said the CBO in its statement.

The CBO stated that its monetary policy target is to sustain and maintain its fixed exchange rate. This policy aligns with the structure and nature of the



Central Bank of Oman decided to maintain its repo rate for local banks at 6.00%

Omani economy, the central bank added.

'There are several advantages for Oman derived from this policy, including ensuring the stability of the Omani rial, mitigating capital outflow, and promoting certainty among investors by removing exchange rate risk,' said the sultanate's central bank.

Oman's central bank has largely followed each rate hike by the US Fed over the last one and a half year as the US central bank fought to curb inflation with the most aggressive tightening cycle since the 1980s.

In line with the Fed's actions, Oman has raised its key policy rate to 6.00% in 11 successive rate revisions since March 2022.

Duqm Economic Forum to focus on renewable energy, green industries

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) will host the Duqm Economic Forum from October 16 to October 17. The event is organised by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), with the support of several government agencies and the participation of a number of private sector companies.

Over the course of two days, the forum will address current advancements in the green industry sector as well as the most prominent initiatives that have attracted investment to SEZAD. These topics will be discussed in light of the growing local and international trend towards green industries and renewable energy.

This is in line with OPAZ's focus on green industries, encouragement of investment in this field in response to the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, and the fact that 2050 has been set as the goal year for achieving carbon neutrality at all levels.

Among the strategic investments that SEZAD has attracted in the green industries sector are the Vale Green Iron Production Complex, Jindal Shadeed Group's green iron production initiatives, and the reduced iron factory that Kobe Steel and two Japanese companies, Mitsui and Partners Limited, will construct.

A number of discussion sessions covering the benefits of renewable energy in Duqm, supply and demand trends, consumer requirements, and chances for successful investment in green industries in SEZAD are part of the Duqm Economic Forum.

The forum will also focus on



the green hydrogen industry, solar and wind energy, energy transition efficiency, energy storage, the need for green energy in international markets, and the anticipated function of public-private partnerships in the success of renewable energy projects.

Additionally, the forum will cover renewable downstream projects in Duqm, utilising Duqm's enormous natural renewable energy potential, supplying renewable energy, decarbonisation, satisfying industrial demand for green materials, IoT and smart manufacturing, and chances for exporting renewable energy.

The discussions will cover the prospects in the supply chain and the crucial role of Duqm Port as a green port in promoting investment in the green industries sector in light of the synergy between the various projects in SEZAD.

Along with the potential for large industrial companies that rely on infrastructure and the Port of Duqm for their operations, the potential for shipping, maritime, and transport companies in SEZAD will also be explored at the event. In addition,

the outstanding investment prospects in this important hub for global commerce and pioneer in the distribution of renewable energy will be discussed.

The event will also discuss the network of factors that contributed to the Port of Duqm's success and provided it with a distinct competitive advantage.

The forum will cover key innovations in the petrochemical sector and how they contribute to the production of numerous essential components of the renewable energy system, such as solar panels, wind turbines, batteries, thermal insulation, and electric vehicles. This discussion will also cover the interest in green industries. The event will also examine the opportunities for Duqm to attract these industries, as well as the general demand for these products.

A number of local, regional, and international companies that invest in SEZAD will attend the discussion. The forum is anticipated to host in-depth discussions with a large number of experts, specialists, and potential investors in the green industries sector and other sectors from Oman and abroad.

UAE government awards \$5.1bn satellite capacity contract to Yahsat

Abu Dhabi, UAE – Al Yah Satellite Communications Company (Yahsat), the UAE's flagship satellite solutions provider, announced that its government services arm, Yahsat Government Solutions (YGS), has received from the UAE government an 'authorization to proceed' to provide satellite capacity and managed services for 17 years.

This mandate, valued at AED18.7bn (\$5.1bn), combines related operations, maintenance and technology management services of ground segment satellite systems and terminals currently provided under a separate contract.

The mandate will replace two current agreements, the Capacity Services Agreement (CSA)



Musabbah al Kaabi

and the Managed Services Mandate (MSM), which come to an end in November and December 2026, respectively. Under the new mandate Yahsat will provide the government with secure and reliable satellite capacity and related managed services using the Al Yah 1 and Al Yah 2 satellites, currently in orbit, and supplement this by two new

satellites, Al Yah 4 and Al Yah 5 which are expected to be launched in 2027 and 2028, respectively.

The mandate significantly increases Yahsat Group's contracted future revenues to AED25.7bn (\$7bn), over 16 times its 2022 annual revenues, extending backlog well beyond 2040 and providing security and visibility over its future cash flows.

In a press release, Musabbah al Kaabi, chairman of Yahsat, said, "This award is a testament to our long-standing relationship with the government and the quality of service that we provide as we continue to strive to consistently exceed customer expectations. By complementing our existing fleet with Al Yah 4 and Al Yah 5 next generation

satellites, we will be able to serve the government with new cutting-edge solutions that are not currently possible. The performance of the new satellites is expected to significantly surpass current industry capabilities including capacity, coverage and flexibility allowing us to offer a wide range of next generation applications to our end user."

Ali al Hashemi, group CEO at Yahsat, said, "This AED18.7 bn mandate positions Yahsat for sustainable future growth, alongside other ambitious projects in the pipeline. Our financial position has never been stronger and we now enjoy a contracted revenue backlog of AED25.7bn or over 16 times annual revenues based on backlog figures at the end of the second quarter."

ADES gets \$76bn in orders for \$1.2bn IPO

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – ADES Holding Company, a leading oil and gas drilling and production services provider in the Middle East and North Africa region, announced the successful completion of the book-building process for institutional investors (Participating Parties), and the final offer price for the company's initial public offering (IPO).

The final offer price for the offering has been set at SAR13.50 per share, implying a market capitalization of SAR15.242bn (\$4.065bn) at listing. The institutional book-building process ended with a subscription coverage of 62.7 times, while the recorded orders from institutional investors stood at approximately SAR286.853bn (\$76.494bn).

The retail subscription period will last for three days, commencing on Tuesday and ending on Thursday, according to a press release.



The IPO of ADES comprises an offer of 338,718,754 ordinary shares, representing 30% of the company's issued share capital (post capital increase) through the sale of a mix of existing shares and newly issued shares.

The sale shares represent 9% and the new shares represent 21% of the company's issued share capital upon completion of the offering, totalling 30% of the issued share capital (after issuance of the new shares and the company's capital increase).

The offer shares will be listed and traded on the Saudi Exchange's Main Market following the completion of the IPO and listing formalities with the Capital Market Authority and the Saudi Exchange.

The offer shares will be offered for subscription to individual subscribers and Participating Parties, including Participating Parties outside the United States in 'offshore transactions' in accordance with Regulation S under the Securities Act.

A maximum of 338,718,754 shares, representing 100% of total Offer shares, will be allocated to Participating Parties.

The financial advisors may, in coordination with the company, reduce the number of shares allocated to Participating Parties to 304,846,879 shares, representing 90% of total offer shares, to accommodate for individual subscriber demand.

A maximum of 33,871,875 ordinary shares, representing 10% of the total offer shares, will be allocated to individual subscribers.

With respect to the offering, the company appointed EFG Hermes KSA, Goldman Sachs Saudi Arabia, JP Morgan Saudi Arabia and SNB Capital Company as its financial advisors and global coordinators. In addition, the company has appointed SNB Capital Company as lead manager in relation to the offering.

Central banks in no rush to cut rates

Paris, France – Investors were hoping to hear central banks finally signal that they were close to being done raising interest rates in their battle against inflation.

Instead, policymakers indicated that high rates are here for a while yet, with more hikes on the cards and few, if any, cuts in the near future.

The US Federal Reserve set the tone on Wednesday when it paused its rate-hike campaign but caused a stir by leaving the door open to another increase before the end of the year.

The US Federal Reserve voted to keep interest rates at a 22-year high, between 5.25% and 5.50% while forecasting an additional rate hike before the end of the year to bring down inflation.

The US central bank also unsettled investors by saying that only two cuts were expected next year instead of four as anticipated.

The Fed has more room to keep its "hawkish" stance as the US economy has performed better than feared despite the rate



US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell holds a press conference in Washington, DC, on Wednesday (AFP)

increases.

This firm position is shared by other central banks.

Norway's rate hike Thursday

was anticipated, but it also warned further tightening was "likely" in December, while ruling out any easing before next year.

Growth or inflation

This firm tone came "as a sur-

prise to the markets," which have "decided that the peak" of rate hikes is "happening right now," HSBC economist Fabio Balboni told AFP, even though "central banks' communications leave the door open to the possibility to further hikes".

It leaves "real uncertainty about the level of inflation next year", he said. Their decision "reflects a compromise between growth and inflation", he added.

The rate hikes raise the cost of credit for businesses and consumers, which theoretically in turn reduces demand and inflationary pressures.

But if demand slows too much, it runs the risk of triggering a recession.

Faced with this dilemma, the European Central Bank (ECB) chose inflation-limiting measures, with a 10th consecutive rate hike. That took its benchmark rate to 4.0%, the highest since 1999.

"We can't say we have peaked," ECB president Christine Lagarde said, although other officials indicated that the cycle of raising rates might be coming to a close.

"Our future decisions will ensure that the key ECB interest rates will be set at sufficiently restrictive levels for as long as necessary," the bank's chief economist Philip Lane said Thursday in New York.

Return to lower rates

There are other signs, however, that rates are reaching their peak.

The Bank of England on Thursday announced its first pause on raising rates since December 2021, following a slight decline in UK inflation in August.

Switzerland and Japan – like half of all central banks – have also chosen to halt raising rates in the past 10 days.

"We expect no more rate hikes in the future" for the US, England and Europe central banks, said Balboni.

Jennifer McKeown of Capital Economics said she expected the last hikes to come in the fourth quarter, and that the easing cycle would take hold as 2024 approaches.

AFP

Russia curbs fuel exports to avoid shortages

Moscow, Russia – Russia's government announced Thursday it was temporarily limiting exports of petrol and diesel fuel to avoid shortages on the domestic market.

The exchange price of domestic petrol soared to a record high this week, in part due to a weaker ruble, rising global oil prices and repair work at refineries curbing supplies. The announcement comes weeks after Moscow decided to extend a voluntary cut of oil exports until the end of the year in a coordinated move with Saudi Arabia aimed at propping up global crude prices.

"The government introduced a temporary restriction on exports of motor gasoline and diesel fuel to stabilise the domestic market," the government said Thursday.

"The decision was made to stabilise fuel prices on the domestic market," it said, without specifying what kind of measures would be introduced.

AFP

Eurozone growth contraction less severe in Sept

Brussels, Belgium – Eurozone economic activity shrank further in September but the rate of decline has slowed, a key survey showed.

Data from the HCOB Flash Eurozone purchasing managers' index (PMI) published by S&P Global rose to 47.1 in September from 46.7 in August. A figure below 50 indicates contraction.

Cyrus de la Rubia, chief economist at Hamburg Commercial Bank, said he expects the 20-country single currency area to "enter a contraction in the third quarter", shrinking 0.4% from the previous quarter.

The data also showed falling activity in services for a second month.

"The numbers for PMI services in the Eurozone paint a grim picture, but it's not all doom and gloom," he said, pointing to firms hiring "at a somewhat faster pace" in September than in August.

The eurozone economy is struggling since Russia's war on Ukraine began last year, which pushed energy prices to sky-high levels and led to soaring inflation.

Although the economy weathered the storm better than expected and energy costs have since fallen, inflation remains



well above the European Central Bank's two-percent target and households are feeling the pinch from higher food and drinks prices.

The eurozone's misery has been worsened by the weak performances of the European Union's biggest economies, France and Germany.

French activity shrank sharply, falling to its lowest level since November 2020, while Germany recorded another contraction in overall activity for the third month.

"In terms of the weakness in the manufacturing sector, France is catching up with Germany," de la Rubia said.

The European Commission earlier this month cut its 2023 and 2024 eurozone economic growth forecasts.

AFP

President Biden to join picket line as auto workers union expands strike

Center Line, US – The US auto workers union expanded a strike against two of Detroit's "Big Three", while President Joe Biden announced plans to join the picket line in solidarity with employees.

Biden announced Friday he will travel to the US state of Michigan on Tuesday to show support for striking auto workers, a visit coming on the eve of a similar trip by his right-wing 2024 election challenger Donald Trump.

Some 5,600 members of the United Auto Workers union walked out of 38 US parts and distribution centers at General Motors and Stellantis at noon Friday, adding to last week's dramatic worker walkout.

The UAW has described its campaign as an effort to level the economic playing field for the working class, but Friday's events also underscored the lofty political stakes, with Biden's visit coming just a day before a planned trip by Republican rival Donald Trump.

In announcing the expanded strike, UAW President Shawn Fain said the latest action would stretch across 20 states, targeting sites owned by General Motors and Stellantis, with whom negotiations have stalled.

"As we have said for weeks,



Members of UAW union march through the streets of downtown Detroit following a rally on September 15 (AFP)

we're not going to wait around forever for fair contracts at the Big Three," Fain said in a briefing.

Fain said Ford would be spared the latest strike escalation because of progress in talks at the company.

Fain extended an invitation to Biden to join workers on the picket line, saying the "way you can help is to build our movement and show the companies that the public stands with us."

By nightfall, the president announced his plan on X, the site formerly called Twitter.

"Tuesday, I'll go to Michigan to join the picket line and stand in solidarity with the men and women of UAW as they fight for a fair share of the value they helped create," Biden said. "It's time for a win-win agreement that keeps American auto manufacturing thriving with well-paid UAW jobs."

The visit will mark the US president's latest voyage to America's auto center. He has appeared at the 2022 Detroit Auto Show and at major project unveils alongside GM Chief Ex-

time status, and granting the union the right to strike over plant closures.

"We're not done at Ford," Fain said, noting that the company was "serious about reaching a deal."

"At GM and Stellantis, it's a different story," he added.

Ford said in a statement that it "is working diligently with the UAW to reach a deal," adding that the two sides have made progress but "still have significant gaps to close on the key economic issues."

GM and Stellantis both pointed to an article in the Detroit News on leaked messages from the UAW's communications director discussing creating "operational chaos" at the automakers as a bargaining strategy.

GM said Friday that the UAW's latest move is "unnecessary," describing it as confirming the Detroit News report that "UAW leadership is manipulating the bargaining process for their own personal agendas."

"We question whether the union's leadership has ever had an interest in reaching an agreement in a timely manner," said a Stellantis statement that, as with GM, reiterated a commitment to bargaining in good faith to reach a deal.

AFP

Inflation-battered Turkey hikes interest rate to 20-year high

Istanbul, Turkey – Turkey's central bank on Thursday raised its key lending rate to a 20-year high following a sudden turn towards conventional economics by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The bank lifted its policy rate to 30% from 25% and promised more belt-tightening measures in the future.

It followed a new surge in inflation that came in partial response to tax increases that Erdogan's government imposed to help pay for the vast spending pledges of his May re-election campaign.

"Inflation was above expectations in July and August," the bank said in statement.

"Attaining price stability is our top priority," Turkey's new Wall-Street trained finance chief

Mehmet Sismek declared on social media.

The mercurial Erdogan performed one of his trademark policy reversals after winning the May campaign.

The vote came during Turkey's worst economic crisis in decades -- one that analysts universally blamed on Erdogan's orthodox conviction that high interest rates contribute to inflation.

Erdogan called high rates "the mother and father of all evil" and spent years pushing the central bank to lower borrowing costs to speed up economic growth.

He also made low rates the mantra of his re-election campaign.

But the annual inflation rate is again rising after officially peaking at 85% 11 months ago.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

It approached 60% in August and is climbing much faster than projected by Erdogan's new economic team of respected technocrats.

That team has been widely applauded for convincing Erdogan that Turkey would enter a

Turkey is flirting with disaster because interest rates remain far below levels at which consumer prices are going up.

This gives Turks the incentive to spend their savings before they lose value and is making the economy overheat.

"Turkey's economy isn't slowing anywhere near as quickly as we thought it would a few months ago," Capital Economics consultancy analyst Liam Peach wrote this month.

Fitch Ratings this month improved Turkey's outlook from "negative" to "stable" thanks to the policy U-turn.

But it also warned that "there is still uncertainty regarding the magnitude, longevity and success of the policy adjustment to bring down inflation, partly due to political considerations".

Simsek expects to keep rates elevated until the middle of next year.

"Starting from the second half of 2024, we will be discussing lowering interest rates," he said this month. But Simsek has a second major problem.

Turkey's finances are also being weighed down by a hugely costly bank deposit support scheme that compensates the lira's loss in value against hard currencies.

Unwinding that system could spook depositors to buy up dollars and put renewed pressure on the lira -- its value has plunged from 10 to the greenback two years ago to 29 this week.

Simsek took the first cautious steps towards scaling back the support measures last month.

But he later told reporters that he wanted to "reinforce our (hard currency) reserves" so that Turkey could better support the lira before making any more radical cuts to the \$124bn scheme.

Emerging markets economist Timothy Ash called the programme "an unexploded hand grenade placed in Simsek's pocket by the outgoing team".

"The problem is that the lira needs to be allowed to adjust weaker given high inflation, but each move weaker costs the (central bank) in compensation paid to depositors," Ash said.

"Much higher policy rates, taking them positive in real terms would be the solution... but it might also need the confidence shock of an external anchor -- an IMF programme."

AFP

Lulu opens export hub in Italy, aims to export €200mn to boost food security

To further boost its sourcing operations and to bring in high quality products for its large chain of hypermarkets, Abu Dhabi based retail giant Lulu Group officially opened it's world-class sourcing, food processing and export hub in Italy.

Y International Italia, the sourcing division of Lulu Group was inaugurated by Guido Guidesi, Italian Minister of Economic Development in the presence of Yusuffali M A, Chairman and Managing Director of Lulu Group.

Also present on the occasion were Roberto Rizzardo, Head of FDI Department of Invitalia; Valerio Soldani, Director of Italian Trade Agency; Naser al Khaja, Charge d'affaires at the UAE Embassy in Italy; Dr Nasser al Balooshi, Bahrain Ambassador to Italy; Cesare Trevisani, Chairman of Arab Chamber of Commerce of Italy; Mohamed Althaf, Director of Lulu Group; Alessandro Simone, Country Head of Lulu Group in Italy and other officials.

This move by the Lulu Group will further boost its sourcing operations not only from Italy but also from nearby European countries to ensure uninterrupted supply and price stability of food products.

Ideally located at World Trade



Center Malpensa Airport in Milan, the state-of-the-art facility will primarily focus on sourcing, processing, storing, packaging and exporting of top quality food products from Italy

to more than 255 Lulu Hypermarkets spread across GCC countries, Egypt, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The focus categories will be varieties of cheeses, chocolates,

fruit jams, sweet and puff pastries, organic pasta, infused extra-virgin olive oil, high quality sea salt from well-known Italian brands. Apart from packed food the center will also source and

export a wide range of fruits and vegetables mainly apples, grapes, kiwi, olives, etc.

Chief guest Guidesi expressed his excitement in having Lulu Group's new project in Italy and

assured highest level of support and cooperation that will further enhance trade tie between Italy and the Arab world.

Speaking at the inauguration, Yusuffali M A, Chairman of Lulu

Group said, "As a key partner in the 'food security' sector in the Middle East, it is our ongoing strategy to set up our own sourcing and food processing units around the world to ensure uninterrupted supply and ensure competitive pricing by eliminating middlemen.

"Italy has some unique cuisines, vast variety of fruits, vegetables and various commodities and we are working closely with the Italian Trade Agency to boost the export of these products to our hypermarkets. We will be working closely with all stakeholders to promote the Italian brands by organising 'Italian Food Festivals' across our hypermarkets."

"We will be initially exporting worth €50nm and expect to reach €200mn in two years. We are tying up with farmers cooperative societies to source fruits & vegetables, which will surely have a very positive impact on the Agricultural sector of Italy. In addition this project will also generate significant employment in Italy," he added.

Headquartered in Abu Dhabi, Lulu Group has an annual turnover of US\$8bn and employs over 65,000 people from 43 different countries ranked as the No.1 retailer in MENA region.

Sohar International's Ahmed al Musalmi named 'CEO of the Year'

In a remarkable testament to his commitment to excellence, Ahmed al Musalmi, the Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, has been once again honoured with the prestigious 'CEO of the Year' title at the Alam Al Iktisaad Awards 2023.

The much-coveted accolade not only underscores Ahmed al Musalmi's visionary leadership that embraces robust growth - most recently exemplified by a seamless national-scale merger, continuous innovation, and premium levels of customer-centricity, but also highlights his exceptional ability to align Sohar International's strategic endeavours with the national agenda.

This alignment continually contributes to the development of a resilient banking ecosystem, spearheads economic diversification, and empowers the broader community.

"Going beyond navigating the complexities of a continuously evolving market, Sohar International has solidified its position



as a trailblazer in the financial sector. Acting as a catalyst for transformation and progress, Mr Ahmed al Musalmi has taken the lead to steer the bank to greater heights. His capacity to instill purpose and clarity of objectives within the organisation has been pivotal to the bank's extraordinary journey toward excellence," said Mohamed Mahfoodh al Ardhi, Chairman of Sohar International.

"At Sohar International, we are firm believers that achieving strategic transformation necessitates a deeper comprehension of customer needs, a nurturing culture that fosters innovation, and an unwavering determination to embrace change. As our bank continues its journey towards progress, these awards will serve as a powerful catalyst, propelling us even further along the path to success."

The red carpet event, held on September 20 at Sheraton Oman Hotel, welcomed as its Chief Guest H H Sayyid Melek bin Shihab al Said, in the presence of a diverse gathering of industry leaders, market experts, CEOs, senior government representatives, and influential decision-makers.

The awards felicitated not only the top-ranking companies in the sultanate but also celebrated changemakers whose achievements transcend the balance sheet. These prestigious awards aim to empower executive leaders in various fields, foster a spirit of competition, and strengthen the financial and business communities.

On receiving the award, Musalmi said, "While I am indeed honoured to have been bestowed with this prestigious award, it signifies much more than a personal achievement - it is a reflection of the collective efforts of the bank's dedicated team."

Chery Automobile becomes No 1 Chinese Brand in J D Power

Recently Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J D Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM(IQS).

Chery vehicles in the list included the Chery Arrizo 5 and the Chery Tiggo 5X which won the first place in the compact sedan and compact SUV market segments respectively.

The Initial Quality Study SM(IQS) is one of J D Power's global flagship industry joint studies. The study covers 230 models of 48 brands, focusing on the quality problems encountered by owners of fuel vehicles with a vehicle ownership period of two to six months.

The specific diagnostic questions include 218 problems in nine categories (body appearance, body interior, driving experience, configuration/control system/dashboard, infotainment system, air conditioning, seating, powertrain, and driver assistance). Expressed as the number of problems per 100 vehicles (PP100), the lower the score, the



fewer the number of problems and the better the quality.

In recent years, Chery has kept performing well in major J D Power awards. In the '2023 Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout Study SM (APEAL)' model ranking recently released by J D Power, Chery's Tiggo 7 series and Tiggo 8 series products won two market segments of mid-sized economical SUV and mid-sized SUV respectively.

In '2022 Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout Study SM (APEAL)', the Chery Arrizo 5 PLUS won the first place in the mid-sized basic sedan market segment. In the '2021

China Vehicle Dependability Study SM (VDS)', the Chery Tiggo 3X won the champion of the mini SUV segment. Numerous awards have fully confirmed the strength and excellent quality of Chery's products.

Chery has always adhered to the concept of 'creating excellent brands with craftsmanship' and regarded quality as the life of the enterprise. Chery continuously improves product quality and wins users' trust with its full life cycle quality management and upgraded driving experience brought to users. Chery will soon be launched in the Oman market by Saud Bahwan Group.

Barceló Group collects 2 tonnes of waste to mark Cleanup Day

Barceló Hotel Group, including their resort in Musannah participated in the World Cleanup Day this year and collected over two tonnes of waste in beach cleaning initiatives.

In a dedicated effort to maintain the pristine beauty of Musannah's coast, Barceló Mussanah Resort in Oman, in partnership with Oman Sail, organised an arduous beach cleaning event spanning a 1km stretch of beach, with 55 enthusiastic colleagues and members of the Musannah community.

Efforts from over 100 staff across Barceló hotels, including Occidental Sharjah Grand Hotel in the UAE and Barceló Musannah Resort in Oman, took part in beach cleanup initiatives, col-



lecting over two tonnes of waste - equivalent to CO2 emissions from charging 183,072 smartphones, or 6,210km travelled by a gasoline-fueled vehicle," a release said.

Occidental Sharjah Grand Hotel, with over 50 dedicated staff members from various departments, initiated an extensive beach cleanup at the hotel's private beach. Their collective goal was not only to enhance the

beach's aesthetics but also to contribute to a healthier planet.

Sharjah Grand Hotel general manager Asier Baquero said, "Caring for the environment lies at the heart of Barceló Hotel Group's values. We firmly believe that as responsible members of the global community, it is our duty to actively contribute to transformative initiatives like World Cleanup Day. Our unwavering commitment to sustainable practices is deeply ingrained in our corporate culture, and our dedicated staff consistently demonstrate an extraordinary level of dedication to this cause. We take great pride in being a pivotal part of the global movement towards a cleaner and greener planet."

Inspired ropes in Royal College of Music, Forte

Inspired Education sets a new music standard in private education. With a dedication to excellence permeating every aspect of the group's practices, the Inspired educational experience integrates enriching academics and engaging creative and performing arts opportunities with specialist sports programmes to ensure a holistic approach to modern education.

Collectively, the three pillars of academics, performing and creative arts, and sport, are integrated into the Inspired educational approach allowing students to develop their interests and talents both inside and outside the classroom environment.

Nadim Nsouli, Founder, Chairman and CEO, Inspired Education said, "Inspired is proud to be the



exclusive partner to The Royal College of Music and Forte 'Pathways' programme, enabling us to offer exceptional, world leading musical tuition to all our Inspired students. At Inspired we are constantly working to ensure our students receive the best possible education, and that includes their music learning and enrichment."

Music plays a key role in the performing arts pillar in every school, whether it is deepening students' creativity, developing their memory skills, learning to collaborate in a band or orchestra or for the sheer enjoyment and sense of achievement that comes from learning and playing music. To further develop stu-

dents' musical enrichment, Inspired is delighted to announce an exclusive partnership with Forte, a unique online music education platform, to connect Inspired students with the very best musicians in the world for private tuition. Forte's commitment and dedication to excellence in music has already made a profound impact on over 8,000 families in 98 countries around the world.

In partnership with The Royal College of Music in London, Forte has launched the Pathways to Performance programme exclusively for Inspired students. The programme offers a package of private lessons with otherwise inaccessible top music tutors, verified by The Royal College of Music, the world's #1 ranked music conservatory.

Migrants do not invade: Pope Francis

The pontiff urged European governments to welcome migrants instead of viewing them as invaders

Marseille, France - Pope Francis on Saturday urged European governments to welcome migrants instead of viewing them as invaders, striding into in a hugely sensitive political debate again inflamed by mass arrivals on the second day of his visit to France's Mediterranean port of Marseille.

The pontiff made the comments hours before he leads a mass in Marseille's main stadium - usually the venue for rugby or football matches - in a gigantic event due to be attended by French President Emmanuel Macron.

"Those who risk their lives at sea do not invade, they look for welcome," Francis said in a speech closing a conference of bishops and young people from around the Mediterranean.

Migration is 'a reality of our times, a process that involves three continents around the Mediterranean and that must be governed with wise foresight, including a European response,' the pontiff added.

Noting the risk to the lives of migrants if they are not taken to safety, he warned against turning 'the Mediterranean, the mare nostrum, from the cradle of civilisation into the mare mortuum, the graveyard of dignity'.

Francis' 35-minute speech drew a standing ovation from his



Children wait to greet Pope Francis, the French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte at the Palais du Pharo in the southern port city of Marseille on Saturday (AFP)

The pope's interventions come as the migration debate has been stoked by mass arrivals on the Italian island of Lampedusa last week

audience, but his position on migration was unlikely to please Macron and Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who were both present and plan tougher

measures to control arrivals.

The pope's forceful interventions come as the migration debate has been stoked by mass arrivals on the Italian island of

Lampedusa last week.

Speaking at a monument to people lost at sea on his arrival in Marseille on Friday, the pontiff had insisted that 'people who are at risk of drowning when abandoned on the waves must be rescued'. He thanked aid groups rescuing migrants in danger at sea, condemning efforts to prevent their work as 'gestures of hate'.

Tens of thousands of people

are expected to watch Francis as he travels through the streets of Marseille later on Saturday before celebrating mass for almost 60,000 people in the city's famed Velodrome stadium.

Thousands were already starting to pour into the iconic venue which only on Thursday had hosted France's clash with Namibia in the Rugby World Cup.

Clutches of black- or white-

robed priests and nuns were scattered through the crowds while volunteers tasked with distributing communion wafers during the service were taking up position.

Up to 100,000 are expected to line the Avenue du Prado for his 'popemobile' tour and many roads are decked out with the white-and-yellow colours of the Vatican. Francky Domingo, a Beninese man who heads a group of undocumented mi-

grants in Marseille, said he hoped the pontiff's visit would 'give us back a little hope' and 'calm the political tensions'.

Around 40 people have been killed in shootings in Marseille this year, and Macron has promised billions of euros to upgrade city infrastructure in a bid to stop the downward spiral.

Not everyone has welcomed the pope's visit.

Some politicians on the left have criticised Macron's decision to attend Saturday's mass as an infringement of state secularism.

Others on the right have attacked Francis for 'interfering' in domestic politics.

The pontiff did nothing on Saturday to dodge such allegations, appearing to weigh in on two of Macron's projects - assisted dying and inscribing the right to abortion in the constitution.

Old people risk being 'pushed aside, under the false pretences of a supposedly dignified and 'sweet' death that is more 'salty' than the waters of the sea', Francis warned.

He also spoke of 'unborn children, rejected in the name of a false right to progress, which is instead a retreat into the selfish needs of the individual'.

Francis' messages may have less resonance given Catholicism's long decline in France.

AFP

Niger slams UN chief for 'obstructing' participation

Niamey, Niger - Niger's coup leaders accused the head of the United Nations on Friday of obstructing their participation in the body's General Assembly, saying it was 'likely to undermine any effort to end the crisis in our country'.

Rebel elite soldiers overthrew president Mohamed Bazoum on July 26 and have since detained him at home with his family.

Negotiations to restore civilian rule have yet to bear fruit, with the junta demanding a three-year transition and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) calling for the immediate return of the democratically elected Bazoum.

The coup has also been strongly criticised by Western governments and global bodies such as the UN, which is holding its General Assembly of world leaders in New York this week.



US Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (AFP)

In a news release read on public television, the military said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres 'went astray in the exercise of his mission by obstructing Niger's full participation in the 78th session of the UN General Assembly'.

It criticised 'the perfidious actions' of the UN leader, adding that they were 'likely to undermine any effort to end the crisis

in our country'.

Bakary Yaou Sangare, who before the coup was Niger's ambassador to the UN and is now its foreign minister, was the new leaders' chosen representative for the gathering.

But, according to a diplomatic source, there was also an application by the overthrown government to represent Niamey.

"In case of competing credentials from a Member State the secretary-general defers the matter to the Credentials Committee of the General Assembly who will deliberate on the matter," Guterres' spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

"The secretary-general does not decide."

Because the committee will not meet until later, no representative from Niger was added to the speakers' list.

AFP

Karabakh separatists hand in arms

Kornidzor, Armenia - Nagorno-Karabakh separatists were negotiating the end of their long struggle against Azerbaijani rule on Saturday, surrendering their weapons after a lightning government offensive.

If the ceasefire holds it will mark the end of a conflict between Caucasus rivals Armenia and Azerbaijan that has raged, off and on, through the three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

On Friday, Moscow confirmed that the rebels had surrendered their first weapons and the process is expected to continue through the weekend, with the help of Russian peacekeepers.

Germany meanwhile called for the rights of the residents of the mountainous region to be guaranteed, as concern grew in the international community over the plight of the mainly Armenian-speaking civilians there.

A US congressional delega-



Vehicles of a Red Cross convoy drive through the border from the Azerbaijani side near Kornidzor on Saturday (AFP)

tion was expected to meet Armenian leader Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to, in the words of the US embassy, discuss 'the impact of Azerbaijan's recent military actions on the Armenian population of Nagorno-

Karabakh'.

Refugee crisis

The years of fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh have been marked by abuses on both sides and there are fears of a new refugee cri-

sis. This week's Azerbaijani offensive left tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians cut off from electricity in the disputed enclave.

In the Armenian border town of Kornidzor, civilians have been gathering, some of them waiting for days, at the last checkpoint before Azerbaijani territory hoping for news of relatives stuck in the embattled enclave.

"I've been here for three days and nights, sleeping in my car," said 28-year-old Garik Zakarian, as displaced Armenians borrowed a soldier's telescope to scan a village on the other side of the valley.

It was shelled by Azerbaijani forces on Tuesday. No-one was killed, but witnesses who managed to escape report that 150 inhabitants were forced to take refuge close to a Russian peacekeeper base a kilometre from the last Armenian positions.

AFP

Haiti crisis force finally gathers steam after UN talks

New York, US - An international force for violence-plagued Haiti came closer to reality on Friday after months of fruitless efforts, with the United States saying up to a dozen countries had offered support and pledged its own logistical assistance.

"Ten to 12 came with concrete offers to this mission," State Department number two Victoria Nuland said after a ministerial meeting on Haiti on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

Kenya has offered to lead the force with a contribution of 1,000 security personnel and Jamaica, the Bahamas and Antigua have made known their willingness to participate. Nuland did not name all the countries.

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry has been calling for nearly a year for a force to deploy to the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, where armed gangs have seized control of vast swathes of land following intersecting public health, political



Antony Blinken, flanked by Haitian PM Ariel Henry and Kenya's representative in New York City on Friday (AFP)

and economic crises.

In an address to the General Assembly after he took part in the US-led talks, Henry said the Security Council 'must act urgently' in authorising the multinational force.

"Kidnappings for ransom, looting, arson, massacres, sexual violence, organ trafficking, human trafficking, murders, extrajudicial killings, child soldiers, blockades of major roads - this is

a non-exhaustive list of the crimes perpetrated by the armed gangs," Henry said.

He asked for 'brotherly solidarity to help us turn this dark page. I ask the international community to act, and act quickly'.

Until the Kenyan offer, no country had been willing to take charge of the Haiti force, with Canada considering but determining it was too risky. In the meantime, more than 2,400

people have died in Haiti's violence since the start of the year, according to the United Nations.

US raises support but not troops

US President Joe Biden has made clear he will not put American troops in harm's way. But the United States has offered logistical support including through air transport, intelligence, housing and medical support.

Kidnappings for ransom, looting, arson, massacres, sexual violence, human trafficking, organ trafficking... this is a list of the crimes perpetrated by the armed gangs

ARIEL HENRY

Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the ministerial meeting that the Biden administration would ask Congress for US\$100mn to support the mission, which includes both troops and police.

"With our support, this mission can deploy within months - and we really have no time to lose," Blinken told the meeting that included Henry.

AFP

'Long COVID linked to multiple organ changes'

Paris, France - A third of people hospitalised with COVID-19 have 'abnormalities' in multiple organs months after getting infected, a UK study said on Saturday, potentially shedding light on the elusive condition of long COVID.

Millions worldwide are estimated to suffer from long COVID, in which a range of symptoms such as shortness of breath, fatigue and brain fog last long after patients first contracted the virus. Yet much about the condition, including exactly how COVID causes such a wide range of symptoms, remains unknown.

The authors of the new study, which was published in The Lancet Respiratory Medicine journal, said it marks a 'step forward' in helping long COVID sufferers.

The study is the first to look at MRI scans of multiple organs - the brain, heart, liver, kidneys and lungs - after being hospitalised with COVID. It compared the organ scans of 259 adults hospitalised with COVID across the UK in 2020-2021 with a control group of 52 people who never contracted the virus.

Nearly a third of the COVID patients had abnormalities in more than one organ on average of five months after leaving hospital, the study found.

Those hospitalised with COVID were 14 times more likely to have lung abnormalities, and were three times more likely to have abnormalities in their brain, it said. However hearts and livers appeared to be more resilient.

AFP

Kamala Harris tasked with new role fighting US gun violence

Washington, US - US Vice President Kamala Harris took on a new role on Friday fighting gun violence, a job likely to give her more visibility ahead of the 2024 election.

The 58-year-old Democrat will head up the new White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, which will provide coordination on the issue but largely lacks any kind of enforceable power to tackle the scourge in a country that has more firearms than people.

"We know true freedom is

not possible if people are not safe," Harris said in a statement announcing the new office.

"We do not have a moment to spare nor a life to spare" while the United States is 'torn apart' by gun violence, she said at the White House on Friday.

"After every mass shooting, we hear a simple message, the same message all over the country," she added, saying Americans are begging for their leaders to 'do something, please do something'. Despite the new push, the White House does not



US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris shake hands after speaking about gun safety in Washington, DC, on Friday (AFP)

have unilateral power to meaningfully limit gun use in the United States, such as by banning assault weapons.

Any substantial moves would have to come from Congress, where fiercely anti-gun regulation Republicans control the House of Representatives.

Biden has therefore tried to work around legislative requirements and imposed certain regulatory and administrative restrictions, which have only a limited scope. The new role adds a significant job to Harris's port-

folio just a little over a year ahead of the 2024 race, in which she and the 80-year-old president are facing re-election.

The vice president has already been tasked with handling other politically sensitive issues such as immigration.

Tackling gun violence gives the former California prosecutor the chance to work on a visible issue that often garners more widespread consensus from the American public. According to the Gun Violence Archive, a non-governmental organisation,

44,374 people were killed by guns across the United States last year.

Gun deaths have slowed slightly this year, at 28,793 for the first eight months, according to the archive. Harris - the first woman to become vice president as well as the first Black person and person of South Asian descent to hold the job - also recently embarked on the so-called Fight for Our Freedoms College Tour, in which she visited several US universities.

AFP

Thailand: MFP gets temporary leader in Tulathon

Bangkok, Thailand - The Thai reformist political party which won the most seats at this year's election appointed a temporary leader on Saturday, a week after blocked prime minister challenger Pita Limjaroenrat resigned as party head.

Thai voters disenchanted with a near-decade of rule by military-linked parties backed the Move Forward Party at the May poll.

But there was a long political stalemate as conservatives thwarted Pita's bid to secure the prime minister's job and he was suspended as an MP.

Move Forward now sits on the opposition benches after Pheu Thai - the election runners-up - last month formed a coalition government with some pro-military parties while property mogul Srettha Thavasin was endorsed as prime minister.

Under current rules, the opposition leader must be an MP.

On Saturday, Chaithawat Tulathon, 44 - who was previously the party's secretary general - was elected MFP leader. "This is a temporary restructuring. For legal reasons Pita Limjaroenrat can not perform the duty of opposition leader and be an MP in parliament at the moment," Chaithawat told reporters.

"I am willing to step down once Pita resumes the position

as an MP in the parliament again." Chaithawat studied environmental engineering at university and has been involved in Thailand's progressive political movement for more than five years, co-founding MFP's predecessor party.

Pita will take on a chief adviser role for the party and vowed to travel the nation and meet with international stakeholders until he can resume as an MP in parliament.

Move Forward now sits on the opposition benches after Pheu Thai last month formed a government with some pro-military parties

"I ask everyone who believed in Move Forward, continue believing in us," he told reporters.

Pita was suspended in July while waiting for the Constitutional Court's ruling over his alleged ownership of shares in a now-defunct media company.

MPs are prohibited from owning media shares, under the Thai constitution.

AFP

Libya: Authorities in the east want aid conference in Derna

There was no immediate reaction from recognised government in Tripoli

Benghazi, Libya - Libya's flood-devastated port city of Derna will host an international conference next month to aid reconstruction efforts, authorities in the east of the divided country said on Friday.

There was no immediate reaction from the internationally recognised government in Tripoli nor any details on how the rival administration would accommodate delegates in a city where entire neighbourhoods have been swept away.

A tsunami-sized flash flood broke through two ageing dams upstream from Derna after a hurricane-strength storm lashed the area on September 10, sweeping thousands of people into the sea.

"The government invites the international community to participate in the conference planned for October 10 in Derna to present modern, rapid projects for the reconstruction of the city," the eastern administration said in a statement.

It said the conference was being held in 'response to the demands of residents of the stricken city of Derna and other towns that suffered damage' during the flooding.

Despite a wave of nationwide solidarity since the flood, there was no immediate show of support for the proposed conference from the Tripoli-based govern-



Rescue teams search through the rubble in the eastern city of Soussa on Thursday (AFP)

ment of interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah.

And even the office of strongman Khalifa Haftar, the main military backer of the eastern administration, questioned how many donor governments would attend. "Are donor countries going to take part or are they going to wait for a conference organised by Dbeibah?" Haftar's spokesman Ahmad al-Mismari asked. "This political polarisation has harmed Libyans."

Libya has been wracked by division and on-off conflict ever

since a NATO-backed uprising toppled and killed veteran dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

A bloody 2019 assault on Tripoli by Haftar's forces ended in defeat by Dbeibah loyalists and an August 2020 ceasefire that largely holds.

Mass burials

There is still no widely accepted death toll for the floods which devastated Derna and nearby coastal towns.

The latest official death toll released on Friday evening stood at

3,753 but the eventual count is expected to be far higher, with international aid groups giving estimates of up to 10,000 people missing. Bodies are still being found in large numbers, under the debris or on beaches where they have washed up after being swept out to the sea by the flood.

On Friday, dozens of bodies were delivered in a lorry and two pick-ups to the village cemetery in Martouba, 27km (17 miles) southeast of Derna, for burial, footage posted on social media showed.

Libyan media said 200 people were buried in the cemetery in a single day.

The International Organization for Migration said on Thursday that more than 43,000 people have been displaced from the disaster zone.

It said a 'lack of water supply is reportedly driving many displaced out of Derna'.

In Susa, about 60km (40 miles) to the west, residents complained that they too had no access to drinking water after the flood badly damaged a desalination plant.

Instead, volunteers have to 'bring water from nearby cities in big trucks', 34-year-old Ahmed Saleh told AFP.

Mobile and internet services were restored in Derna on Thursday following a two-day disruption that came after demonstrations by angry residents on Monday.

The protests saw hundreds of demonstrators gather outside the city's grand mosque, chanting slogans against the eastern-based parliament and its leader and calling for accountability over the high death toll.

Amnesty International reported 'arrests of critics and protesters' in Derna and criticised 'efforts to choreograph and control media access'.

AFP

High-ranking US Democratic senator Menendez indicted for corruption

New York, US - Federal prosecutors charged powerful US Senator Robert Menendez on Friday with bribery and extortion, saying gold bars and hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash had been found at the high-ranking Democrat's home.

In one of several allegations, the Justice Department said Menendez had provided sensitive information to the Egyptian government in order to help an Egyptian-American businessman protect his monopoly.

It was the second corruption indictment in eight years against the veteran New Jersey politician, 69, and may place into question his hold on his seat in Congress and the Democratic Party's slim majority in the Senate. Hours after the indictment Menendez stepped down 'temporarily' as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, a position that had given him significant influence over US foreign relations.

"The senator and his wife accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes in exchange for Senator Menendez using his



It is not lost on me how quickly some are rushing to judge a Latino and push him out of his seat. I am not going anywhere

ROBERT MENENDEZ

power and influence to protect and to enrich those businessmen and to benefit the government of Egypt," said Damian Williams, the federal prosecutor for the Manhattan, New York district.

In a statement, Menendez

called the allegations 'baseless' and characterised the indictment as a personal attack on him and his wife Nadine Menendez, who was also indicted.

"They have misrepresented the normal work of a Congressional office," Menendez said.

Calls for his resignation even came from fellow Democrats, with New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy saying the charges were 'deeply disturbing'. "The alleged facts are so serious that they compromise the ability of Senator Menendez to effectively represent the people of our state. Therefore, I am calling for his immediate resignation," he said.

But Menendez was defiant in a statement issued on Friday evening: "It is not lost on me how quickly some are rushing to judge a Latino and push him out of his seat. I am not going anywhere."

Cash, gold and a Benz

Prosecutors said they found more than a half-million dollars in cash in Menendez's New Jersey home and in his wife's safe deposit box, allegedly received

from three New Jersey businessmen seeking his help.

Much of the cash was stuffed in envelopes and boxes and hidden around their home, some tucked into jackets bearing his name.

Gold bars worth around US\$150,000 and a luxury Mercedes Benz convertible, gifted by one of the businessmen, were also found.

Prosecutors said they had evidence showing that around the time he and his wife received the gold bars, Menendez searched Google to find out how much they were worth.

Menendez took the money to help protect two of the businessmen from Justice Department investigations, and to help the third, Egyptian-American Wael Hana, with a business monopoly granted to him by the Egyptian government, the indictment said.

"Among other actions, Menendez provided sensitive US Government information and took other steps that secretly aided the Government of Egypt," it said.

AFP

Australian protesters fight Indigenous rights reform

Sydney, Australia - Hundreds of protesters rallied in Sydney on Saturday against a plan to adapt Australia's constitution to enshrine Indigenous rights, ahead of a referendum next month.

The crowd gathered in the city's Hyde Park rallied against the proposal, which if it passes on October 14, would give Indigenous peoples the right to be consulted on policies that affect them, a measure dubbed the Voice.

"I'm here because I believe that everyone should be voting no. This Voice is causing so much division in the whole of Australia. And we don't need it," Faye Bevan, who attended the rally, told AFP.

Some protesters held signs with slogans such as 'Vote no to the Voice of division' and 'I don't trust the Voice, I'm voting no'. Others carried placards referring to a range of conspiracy ideas, such as about human trafficking and corporate interests.

The rally in Sydney was not part of the official anti-Voice campaign, but was instead linked to Australian anti-vaccination



A demonstrator holds a sign as she attends a rally in Sydney on Saturday to show their opposition to Indigenous reform (AFP)

and pro-Putin activist Simeon Boikov - also known as 'Aussie Cossack' - who has protested government action on COVID-19.

The 'No' campaign group, 'Fair Australia', has distanced itself from Boikov and any affiliated demonstrations.

More than 200 years since British colonisation, Indigenous Australians make up less than four per cent of the population and face an array of disadvan-

tages, including poorer education and a greater chance of dying in police custody.

But the plan for constitutional change to give Indigenous people more of a say in policies that affect their communities appears to be in deep trouble. Recent surveys show about 60 per cent against the reform versus 40 per cent in support - a near reversal of the situation a year ago.

AFP

India seizes assets of Sikh separatist

Pannun is a close ally of Nijjar whose killing sparked a diplomatic row between India and Canada

New Delhi, India - India's top investigation agency confiscated on Saturday the properties of a prominent Sikh separatist and close ally of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, whose killing has sparked a diplomatic row between India and Canada.

Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a lawyer believed to be based in Canada, was designated as a terrorist by Indian authorities in 2020 and is wanted on charges of terrorism and sedition.

He is also the founder of the US-based group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ), whose Canada chapter was headed by Nijjar before he was gunned down by masked assailants in June near Vancouver.

The group, which has been banned by India, has been a vocal advocate for the creation of an independent Sikh homeland called Khalistan. A diplomatic firestorm erupted this week with Canadian



Devotees visit the Golden Temple to pay their respect, in Amritsar on Friday (AFP)

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau saying there were 'credible reasons to believe that agents of the government of India were involved' in Nijjar's death.

New Delhi dismissed Trudeau's allegations as 'absurd', tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions followed, and India has stopped processing visa applications by Canadians. Pannun jumped into

the raging row and issued a video telling Canadian Hindus to 'go back to India', claiming they had adopted a 'jingoistic approach' by siding with New Delhi.

In an interview with an Indian news channel, Pannun said Nijjar had been his 'close associate' for over 20 years and was like a 'younger brother' to him. He also blamed India for Nijjar's killing.

'Heinous crimes'

Soon after his interview was aired, the Indian government issued an advisory to news networks asking them to refrain from giving a platform to people accused of 'heinous crimes'.

Armed with court orders, officials of India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday confiscated Pannun's house in

Chandigarh, the capital of the Sikh-majority state of Punjab, it said in a statement.

The NIA also confiscated agricultural land belonging to him in Amritsar, it added.

It accused Pannun of 'actively exhorting Punjab-based gangsters and youth' on social media 'to fight for the cause of independent state of Khalistan, chal-

Blinken calls on India to cooperate on killing probe

New York, US - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on India on Friday to cooperate with Canada and ensure 'accountability' over the killing of a Sikh separatist, after Ottawa accused New Delhi of involvement.

Blinken said the United States has been in touch both with India, with which it has warming ties, and Canada, a close ally which expelled an Indian diplomat earlier this week.

"We want to see accountability. And it's important that the investigation run its course and lead to that result,"

Blinken told reporters in New York, where he was taking part in the UN General Assembly.

"We would hope that our Indian friends would cooperate with that investigation as well," Blinken said.

Blinken, without commenting directly on the substance of the allegations, said that the United States took 'very, very seriously' incidents of 'transnational repression'.

"I think it's important, more broadly, for the international system that any country that might consider engaging in such acts not do so," he said.

AFP

Dozens in Nigerian university abducted

Kano, Nigeria - Gunmen have kidnapped more than 30 people, including at least 24 female students, in a raid in and around a university in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state, residents said on Saturday.

Dozens of gunmen from criminal gangs called bandits stormed Sabon Gida village on the edge of a Federal University outside the state capital Gusau in a predawn attack on Friday breaking into three female hostels and taking away the occupants, residents told AFP.

The attack was the first mass kidnapping at a college since President Bola Ahmed Tinubu came to power, promising to tackle the country's security challenges. "The bandits rode into the village on motorcycles and broke into the hostels and gained access into rooms by bringing down the windows," Sabon Gida resident Sahabi Musa said.

"They took away at least 24 female students from the hostels along with two male neighbours, one of whom is a staff (member) of the university," said Musa, who lives close to the hostels.

The attackers went into the university and seized nine welders working on a new building while they were sleeping, said another resident who corroborated Musa's account. One of the welders managed to escape and returned to the school, he said.

Troops deployed from Gusau, 20km away and engaged the attackers in a gunfight but a group of the kidnappers herded the hostages away while another group faced the soldiers, the two sources said.

AFP

Dozens of migrants arrive at US-Mexico border

Eagle Pass, US - Dozens of migrants arrived at the US-Mexico border on Friday hoping to be allowed into the United States, with US border forces reporting 1.8mn encounters with migrants in the last 12 months.

In Eagle Pass, Texas, migrants from countries including Honduras and Venezuela crossed the Rio Grande River that separates the United States and Mexico to encounter an almost impassable wall of barbed wire preventing them from entering US territory.

"I'm happy because I'm one step away... but I'm sad because we can't get through," said Noe Zelaya, a Honduran who had traveled to the border with his wife and two children, aged 12 and 5.

"They can't get through," said one of the border guards, as Zelaya's wife, Belkys Cruz, pleaded for help and the couple's son cried and asked to go home.



US Border Patrol agents process migrants alongside the Rio Grande in Eagle Pass, Texas on Friday (AFP)

"We couldn't take the maras anymore," said Zelaya, who worked as a mechanic in the Honduran city of San Pedro Sula, referring to organised crime in his country. "That's why we fled."

"We are desperate," said Cruz, as her husband tried to move the sand from under the barbed wire to dig a hole.

The family crossed the river with water up to their chests, as did a couple of Venezuelans who arrived just as the sun was beating down on Eagle Pass.

"I feel sad because I thought it would be easier getting here," said Juan Diaz, 28, who identified himself as a Venezuelan military deserter fleeing from his country's political and economic crisis.

King Charles wraps up France trip with cheering crowds in Bordeaux

Bordeaux, France - King Charles III on Friday enjoyed a warm welcome from cheering crowds, a glass of organic wine and even an encounter with llamas as he wrapped up a state visit to France with a stop in the southwestern city of Bordeaux focused on the environment.

The 74-year-old British head of state's three days of diplomacy have sought closer cross-Channel links after Brexit but also closer cooperation on environmental issues, his lifelong passion, that are now top of the global political agenda.

The tour, rescheduled from March after unrest in France over pension reforms forced a last-minute postponement, included a glittering state dinner at the Palace of Versailles as well as a landmark address at the Senate, and been largely well received.

Crowds of Union Jack-waving well-wishers gathered outside Bordeaux city hall to welcome



Britain's King Charles III gestures to the crowd at Place de la Bourse on the third day of his state visit to France in Bordeaux on Friday (AFP)

Charles and Queen Camilla as they arrived after landing at the city's airport, with the royal couple happily mingling and shaking hands, AFP correspondents said.

The welcome was even more cheerful than that the king and queen received during their stay in Paris, with the royal couple at times lost from view amid a sea of outstretched arms recording the scene for posterity with phones and occasional shouts of 'long live the king'.

"We like this kind of event, just going there and taking photos, because these are social moments, which bring people together," said Marie, a 20-year-old student. "The political culture in France is completely different, but that's what's inter-

esting to see too."

Walking through the centre of Bordeaux, Charles and Camilla were also given a rousing welcome by the Fiji rugby team, in town for the World Cup, with the Pacific islanders treating the couple to a full-throated rendition of a hymn.

Bordeaux is well placed to illustrate the point hammered home throughout Charles' visit, about Britain and France's shared personal, political and cultural history.

It became a British possession in 1152, when the future English king Henry II married Eleanor of Aquitaine, effectively beginning three centuries of English dominance in the region, until the end of the Hundred Years' War in 1453.

The British influence remains: some 39,000 British expats live in Bordeaux - the highest number in France.

AFP

Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan resume Nile dam talks

Nairobi, Kenya - Ethiopia said on Saturday that it has begun a second round of negotiations with Egypt and Sudan over a controversial mega-dam built by Addis Ababa on the Nile, the source of long-running tensions between the three nations.

Ethiopia this month announced the completion of the fourth and final filling of the Grand Renaissance Dam, prompting immediate condemnation from Cairo, which denounced the move as illegal.

Egypt and Sudan fear the massive US\$4.2bn dam will severely reduce the share of Nile water they receive and had repeatedly asked Addis Ababa to stop filling it until an agreement was reached.

For years at loggerheads over the issue, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed agreed in July to finalise a deal within four months, resuming talks in August.

"The second round of the tripartite negotiation among #Ethiopia, #Egypt, and #Sudan on the... annual operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (#GERD) has commenced today, September 23, 2023, in Addis Ababa," Ethiopia's foreign ministry said on X.

"Ethiopia is committed to reaching a negotiated and amicable solution through the ongoing trilateral process."

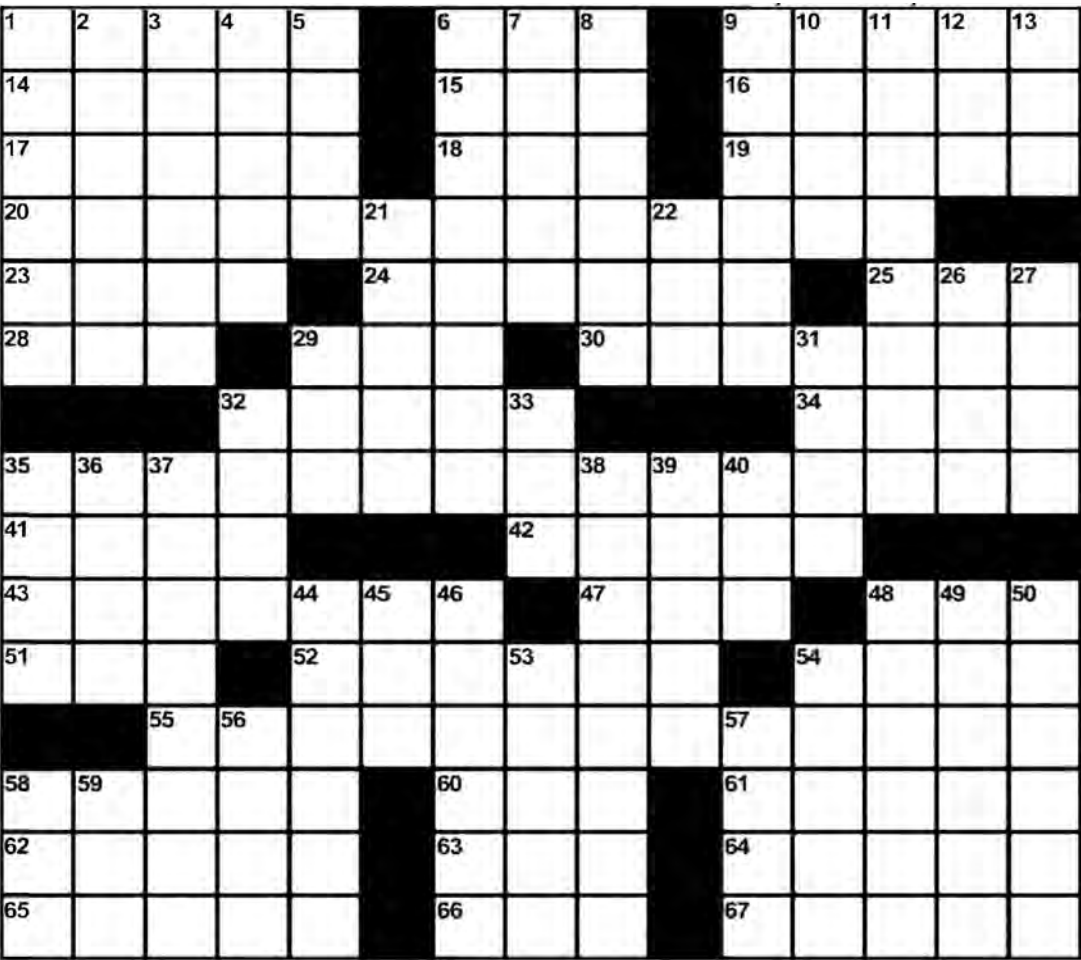
Protracted negotiations over the dam since 2011 have thus far failed to bring about an agreement between Ethiopia and its downstream neighbours.

Egypt has long viewed the dam as an existential threat, as it relies on the Nile for 97 per cent of its water needs.

The dam is central to Ethiopia's development plans, and in February 2022 Addis Ababa announced that it had begun generating electricity for the first time.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

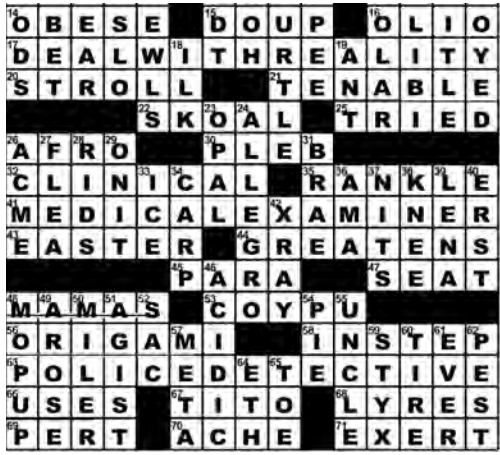
- 1) Fighting tools
- 6) Wiretapper's device
- 9) Confiscate
- 14) Plato's marketplace
- 15) Olympics monogram
- 16)"_ofGod"(1985movie)
- 17) Prepare for dry dock
- 18) Hilo welcome gift
- 19) More than dislikes
- 20) Thing about to detonate
- 23) Genealogy symbol
- 24) TV scan line pattern
- 25) Pi follower
- 28) "Is it soup.?"
- 29) Bard's "above"
- 30) Did some wishful thinking
- 32) TV studio sign
- 34) Attachment to "plane" or "smith"
- 35) Was perfect on the mound
- 41) Musical composition evoking rural life (var.)
- 42) Chop-chop, to Chaucer
- 43) Lower in rank
- 47) Wall-climbing greenery
- 48)Beaver'shandiwork

- 51) Psychic power
 - 52) One of Saturn's moons
 - 54) Trigonometric ratio
 - 55) Was rude, in a way
 - 58) Make amends
 - 60) Tokyo of old
 - 61) Marks from a flogging
 - 62)_Carlo
 - 63) ATM digits
 - 64) Say
 - 65) Handy things that go around the world?
 - 66) "Affirmative"
 - 67) "Austin Powers" star
- DOWN**
- 1) Like a recall candidate
 - 2) Give a cold shoulder to
 - 3) Frozen dessert
 - 4) Cleveland Indians' nickname
 - 5) Certain cooking herb
 - 6) Balkanrepublic
 - 7) Manual consultants
 - 8) Merriment
 - 9) African desert
 - 10) Old-fashioned exclamation
 - 11) The Web
 - 12) Center of Arizona?

- 13) Silly start?
- 21) Be fearful of
- 22) Previously named
- 26) Roll call call
- 27) Landfill problem
- 29) "Out of many,_" (e pluribusunum)
- 31) Give a "PG" to
- 32) Nobel Peace Prize place
- 33) Retrovirus component
- 35) Sandcastle's undoing
- 36) Exalting poems
- 37) Orchestral piece
- 38) Points of view
- 39) Port in a storm
- 40) Frost-covered
- 44) What good things come in?
- 45) Sushi fare
- 46) Droopy-eyed
- 48) Prepare pupils for an exam?
- 49) It's over a buck
- 50) Multiple misters (abbr.)
- 53) Young Munster
- 54) Full ofbeef fat
- 56) "Golden rule" word
- 57) Like one third of a

triathlon 58) Adams of Hollywood 59) Word before "little," "late" or "much"

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Long-term changes don't happen overnight, especially when they involve another person. So cool your jets! You've simply got to learn how to be a little bit more patient. Just regard the other person in this situation and everything will be fine. Follow their lead and do as they do. For once they might have a better handle on the way things need to go than you do. The power is shifting out of your hands, but you're due for a bit of a break. Enjoy it.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Adding more romance to your life doesn't always mean turning up the heat on a love relationship. Romance should be a part of everything in the truest sense of the word. Today, try to make sure that what you see is beautiful, what you hear is mellifluous, and what you eat is delicious. Give yourself the gift of pleasurable moments that you can look back on later. Now is a great time to splurge on yourself and feel extra special.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Try to put some good old-fashioned silliness at the top of your to-do list today. Practical jokes and wacky faces are free and can be totally fun. Your sense of humor is one of your greatest strengths, and your ability to see humor in just about any situation is one of the biggest reasons you're so loved by your friends. Socializing is a wonderful idea today. Organize a get-together or walk outside with some of your favorite people.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which European country did not finally lose its territory in India until 1961?

- A. Portugal
- B. Spain
- C. Great Britain
- D. China

02. Members of which Californian rock band formed the group known until 2001 as Kara's Flowers?

- A. Maroon 5
- B. John Mayer Trio
- C. Sugar Ray
- D. The Donnas

03. Where is the South American railway stretch popularly known as "El Zig-Zag" found?

- A. Between Callao and Huancayo and Cerro de Pasco, Peru
- B. Between Guayaquil and Quito, Ecuador
- C. Between Cusco and Machu Picchu, Peru
- D. Between Antofagasta, Chile, and Uyuni and Oruro, Bolivia

Answers: 1. A 2. A 3. C



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your left brain hasn't been getting any love lately. It's time to check out some art or music that makes you think and feel differently. All of this logic stuff has its place, but too much of it will turn your personality into something you won't even recognize. Getting back in touch with your creativity doesn't take much. Just walk around an art museum or listen to music you've never heard before. There is so much culture out there to explore!



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Try to use more of your creativity today. Just let yourself go and try not to work so hard to come up with expected answers. Express what you feel and communicate in the way you feel most comfortable. If that means singing a song, then sing! If that means writing a poem, then start rhyming. Your personality is conveyed whenever you open your mouth, so make sure that you don't miss the chance to make an unforgettable impression today.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You could encounter a person from a different culture today who sets your world on edge. But whether the change they inspire is a good or bad one is completely up to you. If you can keep an open mind, you'll have a positive the experience, so try to think the best of everyone you meet and not make judgments. Just because someone doesn't handle a difficult situation in the same way you do doesn't mean they're wrong.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

This isn't such a great day to mull things over. Now is the time for decisive action! Even if you're not totally sure about what you're doing, you need to fake it until you do. Your brain is excellent at coming up with new schemes but maybe not so good at understanding how to pull them together. To make it happen, you need to ask a friend for help. So grab a willing accomplice and stir up some new adventures. See what happens.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It's a super day for you to live your life large! Be over the top and take your shameless flirting to a whole new level. Just have fun with whatever you do, and don't modify your behavior based on who might be watching. Who cares what other people think? It's a day for you to be carefree and even a little bit crazy. Let loose with silly jokes and groan-worthy puns. You'll keep the room laughing and yourself smiling!



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've always found learning to be an enjoyable activity, but today your brain is more hungry for information than ever. Go and seek some new people and places to discover. Don't just step outside your comfort zone, leap out of it! Approach people you've never talked to and introduce yourself. Take some chances and dive into some new territory. Each time you experience something new, you energize yourself and create a whole new connection that could come in handy soon.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Try to be more socially active right now. Getting involved in making the changes you want to see in the world is a wonderful way to get a deeper understanding of what motivates other people, and ultimately you. You need to focus more on the process of living in order to get more out of your own life. Stop getting distracted by disposable culture trends. High-minded ideas will preoccupy you for a while now, so you have to pay more attention to them.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

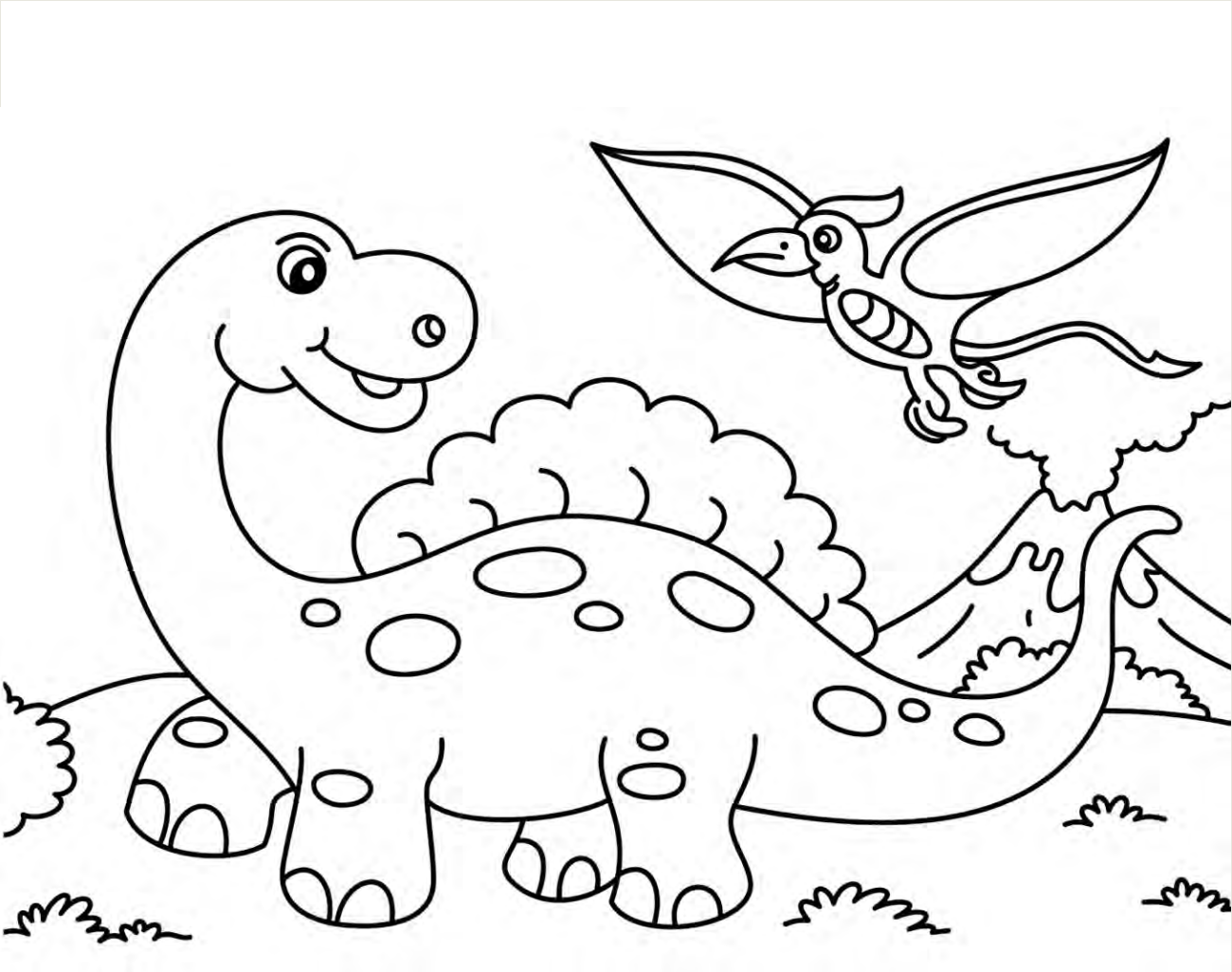
You can't change the past, so if you're full of regret today, you might just have to start getting comfortable with them, because there's no going back. The pain of what you did or didn't do will fade with the passage of time, so look ahead. Make some plans with friends for a road trip and give yourself something to look forward to, something to take your mind off the past. Your patience will get you through this time of life, and your hopefulness will prepare you for better times.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

When it comes to your finances, you can't sacrifice your savings for your reputation. If you're afraid of being called cheap by your friends, you need to get over it. First of all, if you bow out of an expensive event due to budget constraints, the people who care about you won't judge you for it. And second, if they do, who needs them? When you choose friends, put their ability to support you high on your list. If they only like you when your wallet is open, they're not your friends.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	A	U	J
R	G	S	S
U	E	R	U
E	T	P	H

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

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

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

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

Third Gary Kirsten Cricket camp in Oman to start on October 26

Muscat - Following the success of the previous two coaching camps since October 2022, Oman Cricket (OC) is now gearing up to host the third edition of the Gary Kirsten Cricket (GKC) coaching camp at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat from October 26-30.

OC's endeavour to promote cricket at the grassroots level has been one of the primary goals of their development programme and the hosting of coaches from the renowned GKC is part of the efforts to achieve their goals.

GKC hosted the inaugural camp last year and was attended by nearly 100 students and the second camp saw the visit of the famed cricketer Gary Kirsten to Muscat in February earlier this year.

According to Evert Laubscher, Oman Cricket Academy manager, the five-day camp will be split into grassroots development and high-performance camps.

Laubscher said: "The Gary Kirsten coaching team have really done a tremendous job to get to know and un-



derstand the young aspiring cricket players of Oman. We look forward to building on this relationship.

"This time we are also including T20 matches along with the coaching sessions. These matches will also be closely observed by the Gary Kirsten coaching team."

Another bonus for cricketers who attend the forthcoming GKC camp will be a 20 per cent discount at the Oman Cricket Academy for three months, beginning in November.

Jimmy Cook, a leading trainer from

GKC will be part of the coaching team during the third camp next month.

The grassroots development camp will be for beginners and Omanis will be provided free lessons while the others will have to pay OMR10 for the camp.

The high-performance camp will be for under-14 and under-19 players and the four-day camp will also include three T20 matches at the Oman Cricket grounds and two days of coaching lessons.

The fee for this camp is OMR60



New Zealand's Tom Blundell plays a shot as Bangladesh's captain Liton Das looks on (AFP)

Kiwis make 254 against Bangladesh

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Tom Blundell top-scored with 68 to guide New Zealand to 254 runs in the second one-day international against Bangladesh in Dhaka on Saturday.

Blundell, who smashed six fours and a six in his second ODI half-century, helped New Zealand recover from 36-3 after stand-in captain Lockie Ferguson won the toss and opted to bat.

Henry Nicholls chipped in with 49 runs as the pair added 95 runs for the fourth wicket to steady the New Zealand innings.

Bangladesh seized the early momentum in overcast conditions thanks to left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who dismissed openers Will Young for a duck and Finn Allen for 12.

Debutant Khaled Ahmed forced Chad Bowes (14) to edge a catch at square leg to Towhid Hridoy for his maiden wicket.

Khaled also broke the partnership between Blundell and Nicholls as the latter nicked a catch behind the stumps.

Right-arm pacer Hasan Mahmud, who was included in the side as a late replacement for Tanzim Hasan, uprooted the off-stump of Blundell four overs later.

But Ish Sodhi (35), Cole McCrindle (20) and Kyle Jamieson (20) all made decent scores down the order to take New Zealand's tally past the 250-run mark before they were all out in 49.2 overs.

Sodhi was Mankaded by Hasan on 17, but Bangladesh captain Liton Das withdrew the appeal as the Kiwi was walking back to the pavilion.

Off-spinner Mahedi and pacer Khaled claimed 3-45 and 3-60 for Bangladesh, respectively.

AFP

NUMERO UNO

India reach number one in all three cricket formats

New Delhi, India - India have become only the second team in men's cricket history to occupy the number one spot across all three formats after defeating Australia in the first ODI on Friday.

The Indian team moved past arch-rivals Pakistan to take the top position in the one-day rankings as a result of their latest victory, just before they host the World Cup.

They were already number one in Tests and T20 internationals.

Only South Africa in 2012 have previously achieved the feat, according to the International Cricket Council.

India's five-wicket victory over Australia in Mohali took them to 116 rating points, one ahead of Pakistan.

But the hosts could slip down the table if Australia - on 111 points - win the remaining two



India's Mohammed Shami (2R) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Australia's Sean Abbott during the first ODI in Mohali on Friday (AFP)

matches in the series, a warm-up for the World Cup.

If India win the series, they will head into the showpiece tournament as the world's top-ranked ODI team.

India, who last week won their eighth Asia Cup title by thrashing Sri Lanka in the final, were in top form as they registered a comfortable win over Pat Cummins's team.

Mohammed Shami claimed five wickets to restrict Australia to 276 before half-centuries from Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shubman

Gill, KL Rahul and Suryakumar Yadav sealed the win for the home side.

AFP

India batters shine after Shami's five-star show

Mohali, India - India's young openers ensured an easy five-wicket win over Australia after pacer Mohammed Shami took five wickets to restrict visitors at 276 in the first one-day international in Mohali on Friday.

Stand-in skipper KL Rahul, who won the toss and chose to field first, hit an unbeaten half-century, and stitched a key 80-run stand with Twenty20 sensation Suryakumar Yadav (50).

The duo stabilised the innings as the hosts lost four quick wickets, including openers Ruturaj Gaikwad (71) and Shubman Gill (74), after their 142-run opening stand.

The Indian openers looked at ease against the varied Australian attack led by skipper Pat



India's KL Rahul (R) and Ravindra Jadeja celebrate after their victory against Australia in the first ODI (AFP)

Cummins who returned for the three-match ODI series after a wrist injury.

Australian leg-spinner Adam Zampa removed both openers to finish his spell with 2-57.

After Gaikwad's wicket at 142, India also lost Shreyas Iyer (3), Gill, and Ishan Kishan (18) to slip to 185-4.

Flamboyant Yadav fell to Sean Abbott with only 12 runs needed, trying to hit India to the winning target of 277.

Earlier, Shami gave India the perfect start by dismissing dangerous Mitchell Marsh in the first over.

Opener David Warner and veteran Steven Smith stabilised the Australian innings after Marsh's wicket with a 94-run stand before Warner fell to the

left-arm spin of Ravindra Jadeja.

Smith fell soon after to leave visitors struggling at 112-3, and India's veteran off-spinner R Ashwin removed a well-set Marnus Labuschagne (39).

A passing shower briefly disrupted play before a key partnership between Josh Inglis (45) and Marcus Stoinis (29) began to take the initiative from the hosts. But Shami returned to remove Stoinis, Matthew Short, and Sean Abbott and finish with 5-51.

Cummins remained unbeaten after nine-ball 21 as Australia set the hosts a below-par target. Rahul praised player-of-the-match Shami and said that India "started really well with the ball".

AFP

Caribbean nations named as T20 World Cup venues but no Jamaica

Miami, United States - Seven Caribbean countries will host matches at next year's T20 World Cup, including Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced on Friday.

The ICC awarded the hosting of the event, to be held in June 2024, to the West Indies and the United States in November 2021.

Dominica, Guyana, St Lucia and St. Vincent and the

Grenadines have also been named as hosts.

"The matches will again give cricket fans the unique experience of enjoying cricket in the Caribbean," said ICC chief executive Geoff Allardice.

Matches will also be held in New York, Florida and Texas in the United States, the first time a major ICC event has been held in the country.

One notable absence from the list of Caribbean host nations is

Jamaica, whose Sabina Park ground in the capital Kingston is one of the iconic homes of West Indies cricket.

Jamaica has the largest population of the main cricket-playing nations in the Caribbean but did not submit a bid to host the tournament.

Courtney Francis, chief executive officer of the Jamaican Cricket Association, said Cricket West Indies engaged with national governments over poten-

tial bids and that Jamaica's administration had opted against participation.

"The government is the one who determines whether we could be able to host matches because all the expenses would have come back to the government," he told CVM television.

"The government is the one who would have put up the bid money. They would have been the one to carry out repairs to the infrastructure and so on.

"The government did not see it as a viable option in their view and that is the reason why I believe that we have not been able to bid."

West Indies hosted the tournament in 2010, three years after holding the 50 overs World Cup, and Cricket West Indies chief executive Johnny Grave said they were ready to put on a show again.

"The West Indies has got a huge experience in hosting ICC

events and we're currently hosting the Caribbean Premier League, which has been another successful tournament.

"We have very experienced operators throughout the region that we work with and partner with and all the stakeholders will be ready to welcome the world and stage this iconic ICC event," he said.

"We're all tremendously excited by the opportunity and the platform that it gives our region

to promote itself to the world for tourism, for economic development, as well as hopefully to give our men's team a huge home advantage and going for a record third title."

Next year's tournament will be the first edition of the event to include a record 20 teams.

England are the current T20 world champions, winning their second title when they beat Pakistan in the final in Melbourne last year.

Ten-man City beat Forest to extend Premier League lead

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester City moved five points clear at the top of the Premier League despite having Rodri sent-off in a fiery 2-0 win over Nottingham Forest on Saturday.

Phil Foden and Erling Haaland struck inside the first 15 minutes as City extended their perfect start in the Premier League to six games.

Pep Guardiola's men have now won 20 consecutive home matches in all competitions, but were made to work much harder by Rodri's moment of madness.

The Spaniard grabbed Morgan Gibbs-White around the neck less than 60 seconds into the second-half and could face a costly suspension as a three-game ban would see him miss the Premier League visit to Arsenal next month.

City were at their ruthless best early on to seemingly put the game to bed.

Foden smashed home a sweet volley from Kyle Walker's cushioned cross to open the scoring.

Guardiola said after losing Bernardo Silva to injury in a 3-1 win over Red Star Belgrade that his squad was "in trouble" due to a number of injuries.

Mateo Kovacic and John Stones remain sidelined, while Jack Grealish was only fit enough for a place on the bench.

But the absences gave

SILK AND STEEL



Manchester City's Erling Haaland (4R) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Nottingham Forest in their English Premier League match on Saturday (AFP)

Matheus Nunes a chance to make his first league start since joining from Wolves and he made a positive impact by setting up the second goal.

The Portuguese played a neat one-two with Foden before chipping the ball across for Haaland to power home his ninth goal of the season.

Julian Alvarez could have added to City's lead when his effort from point-blank range was blocked behind.

But the European champions

did not appear in any danger until Rodri lost his cool.

Taiwo Awoniyi had Forest's best chance to get back into the game when the in-form Nigerian

lifted over under pressure from Ederson. Awoniyi and the Brazilian goalkeeper were then lucky not to also see red as they went head-to-head in a fiery con-

frontation.

City, though, restored order as Guardiola switched to a back five to withstand an aerial bombardment from the visitors.

Haaland should have had his second when he spooned over with the goal gaping from Nathan Ake's cross late on.

Elsewhere, Luton picked up their first ever Premier League point but let a huge opportunity slip in a 1-1 draw at home to Wolves.

The visitors at Kenilworth Road were reduced to 10 men when Jean-Ricner Bellegarde saw red on 39 minutes.

Pedro Neto still fired Wolves in front early in the second-half, but Carlton Morris' penalty saved a point for Luton.

Crystal Palace and Fulham remain in the top half after a 0-0 draw at Selhurst Park.

All the pack directly behind City at the top of the table are in action on Sunday.

Phil Foden and Erling Haaland struck inside the first 15 minutes as City extended their perfect start in the Premier League to six games

Arsenal host Tottenham in the north London derby, while Liverpool host West Ham and Brighton take on Bournemouth.

AFP

Coach Pochettino defends Chelsea medical team amid rash of injuries

London, United Kingdom - Mauricio Pochettino insists Chelsea's medical department are not to blame for the rash of injuries that have derailed the start of his reign.

Chelsea's injury crisis left Pochettino with only 15 fit senior players for last weekend's disappointing draw at Bournemouth in the Premier League.

Although Chelsea have spent over £1 billion (\$1.2 billion) on signings since Todd Boehly's consortium took over in 2021, the squad is stretched to breaking point.

The Blues had 12 stars absent against Bournemouth, forcing Pochettino to include three players aged 19 or under who had no first-team experience on his bench, as well as two goalkeepers.

Christopher Nkunku, Reece James, Romeo Lavia, Wesley Fofana, Carney Chukwuemeka, Trevoh Chalobah and Moises



Mauricio Pochettino

Caicedo are among the players filling the treatment room.

Chelsea are languishing in 14th with one win from five games ahead of Sunday's clash

with Aston Villa, but Pochettino doesn't believe the medical staff are at fault.

"Before we arrived here we did everything to try and have a

clear idea of why there were too many injuries last season also, to analyse the risk," Pochettino told reporters on Friday.

"It's about the profile of the player, the risk of the player. It's not the people working in the medical staff of performance area.

"I think we need to respect these areas at the club are very good professionals, qualified people. That's why they are working in football. But there's an individual risk to certain players, you need to assess.

"Then there's bad luck. We have injuries that maybe happen in one season or maybe in two, but have happened to Chelsea because of different situations you cannot control."

AFP

Paris, France - Folarin Balogun missed two penalties on his first Monaco start before local rivals Nice grabbed a stoppage time winner to go top of Ligue 1 on Friday.

One week after stunning champions PSG at the Parc des Princes 3-2, Nice claimed the three points again when Jeremie Boga slalomed through the Monaco defence to score as Francesco Farioli's team continued an undefeated start to the season. Nice leapfrogged previously unbeaten Monaco to take top spot by one point after a third win in six games.

It was a miserable first start for US international striker Balogun who left Arsenal for Monaco in the summer on a 30-million-euro transfer. He had penalties saved by Nice goalkeeper Marcin Bulka in the 12th and 54th minutes.

His first effort, awarded when



Monaco's Folarin Balogun misses a penalty against Nice on Friday (AFP)

Monaco slip to defeat after Balogun misses two penalties

Jordan Lotomba brought down Aleksandr Golovin, was tame.

His second spot-kick, which came after Morgan Sanson was penalised for a foul on Takumi Minamino, was again saved by the Polish goalkeeper.

"He was unlucky. He is frustrated," said Monaco coach Adi Hutter. "We're going to help him bounce back - we win together and we lose together."

Farioli admitted: "We were very lucky. It's very rare to win after having conceded two penalties that were then saved."

Balogun, who had scored off the bench in last week's 2-2 draw with Lorient, was eventually replaced by Wissam Ben Yedder, a penalty-taking specialist.

"I'm not going to justify myself every time Ben Yedder or Balogun plays. Balogun was very good on the pitch in the game tonight," added Hutter.

No Messi but Miami seek derby win against Orlando

Miami, United States - Inter Miami head into Sunday's Florida derby against Orlando City with their Major League Soccer playoff destiny in their own hands but without star performer Lionel Messi.

Messi and his former Barcelona teammate Jordi Alba both limped out of the first half of Wednesday's 4-0 win over Toronto and were immediately ruled out of the Orlando game by coach Tata Martino.

On Friday, Martino confirmed that Messi is coping with some old "scars" while Alba has "muscle fatigue".

Martino said that while Messi's problem is not serious, he cannot "play freely" in his current condition.

Miami already won the Leagues Cup since Messi's arrival, the club has a US Open Cup final against Houston on Wednesday and will hope to have the seven-times Ballon d'Or



Lionel Messi

winner back for that game.

But without Messi, Finnish winger Robert Taylor made the most of his opportunity, scoring twice in a 4-0 win over Toronto.

The victory, along with other results going Miami's way, boosted the team's playoff hopes with six matches remaining in the regular season.

AFP

Record-setting Kane's hat-trick helps Bayern rout Bochum

Berlin, Germany - Harry Kane on Saturday bettered a record first set by legendary German striker Gerd Mueller when he hit a hat-trick in Bayern Munich's 7-0 rout of Bochum which took the champions back to the top of the Bundesliga.

Kane fired in Bayern's second just 13 minutes in, before scoring a penalty in the second half. He added a third with two minutes remaining when he tapped in a low cross from Leroy Sane.

With six goals in five games, the England captain now has more goals in his first five league matches than any other player in Bayern's history, beating the mark of Mueller (1965), Miroslav Klose (2007) and Mario Mandzukic (2012) who all scored five times in their first five games for the club.

"I'm happy to play my part and I hope there will be many more to come. So far so good,"



Bayern Munich's Matthijs de Ligt scores against Bochum in their Bundesliga match in Munich on Saturday (AFP)

said Kane. Bayern have now beaten Bochum 7-0 in three of their past five fixtures.

Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, Matthijs de Ligt, Leroy Sane and Mathys Tel -- again from the bench -- also got on the score-sheet.

Thomas Tuchel's Bayern, who conceded two goals late in

Wednesday's 4-3 home win over Manchester United in the Champions League, kept a clean sheet for just the second time this season from seven matches.

Bochum remain winless.

Borussia Dortmund overcame a dogged Wolfsburg at home, winning 1-0 thanks to a late goal from Marco Reus.

Girona smash Mallorca in goal fest to move top of La Liga

Barcelona, Spain - Girona romped to a 5-3 win over Real Mallorca on Saturday to move provisionally top of La Liga.

Michel's unbeaten side have started the season in superb form, with five wins from six matches.

Vedat Muriqi sent the visitors ahead early on with a penalty, but David Lopez levelled after 26 minutes after a scramble in the

box. Girona hit three more before half-time, with Artem Dovbyk, with another spot kick, Ivan Martin and Yangel Herrera on target.

Electric Brazilian forward Savio hit the fifth before the hour mark, with Abdon Prats pulling two goals back late on for the visitors to restore some pride.

Champions Barcelona could overtake Girona with a win against Celta Vigo later Saturday.

THE HEAT IS ON

Jorge Martin wins sprint race at India MotoGP to close gap on Bagnaia

Greater Noida, India - Jorge Martin held the lead from the start to win the sprint race at India's debut MotoGP on Saturday and close the gap on championship leader Francesco Bagnaia.

Ducati-Pramac rider Martin started second on the grid and jumped into the lead, while a crash on the first corner saw Marco Bezzecchi slip back from pole position.

World champion Bagnaia came second and Marc Marquez completed the podium at the Buddh International Circuit on the outskirts of New Delhi.

Bezzecchi's Ducati-VR46 got hit from the rear by teammate Luca Marini, who crashed out along with Stefan Bradl and Pol Espargaro.

Marini fractured his left collarbone and will miss Sunday's main race.

The sprint belonged to Martin, who won the previous MotoGP at Misano, with the Spaniard remaining in control as others slipped away.

"The moments before the race were difficult because of a lot of time in the box and it was difficult to concentrate," Martin said about a rain delay.

"But finally everything went well. I did a great start and that was my plan. I got half a second in the first lap and then I tried to push more to increase the gap."

The race was trimmed by a lap after riders complained about the heat in Friday's practice sessions, but he said the conditions for the sprint had been good.



Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the sprint race of the Indian MotoGP Grand Prix in Greater Noida on Saturday (AFP)

I did a great start and that was my plan. I got half a second in the first lap and then I tried to push

JORGE MARTIN

"With low temperature it was nice to ride," he added. "I am the best so far in my career but hope to keep improving."

Bagnaia, sitting on the next chair, quickly responded: "Hope not."

Bezzecchi, who scorched the track in the second qualifying session, climbed back up several places over the course of the

sprint to finish fifth in a race watched by hundreds in the stands. Bezzecchi said the result was not what he was looking for despite being very "strong at braking".

Italy's Bagnaia kept his composure to finish second.

"It was a good race. It's never frustrating when you finish on the podium for sure," said Bagnaia,

who now leads the championship on 292 points, 33 points clear of Martin.

"Following Jorge was too much. He has the best advantage while breaking."

On the heat, Bagnaia said: "For me the temperature is not a problem honestly... I don't suffer too much in the hot conditions." AFP



Felix Auger-Aliassime of Team World shakes hands with Gael Monfils of Team Europe after his victory on Friday (AFP)

Team World launch Laver Cup title defence with first day sweep

Vancouver, Canada - Laver Cup newcomers Ben Shelton and Francisco Cerundolo notched crisp victories and Felix Auger-Aliassime pulled off a testy triumph over Gael Monfils as Team World opened their title defence Friday with four victories.

US Open semi-finalist Shelton of the United States put Team World on the path to a 4-0 lead with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 victory over Team Europe's Arthur Fils of France.

Argentina's Cerundolo followed with a 6-3, 7-5 victory over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain - the first time that Team World had led after the opening session of the team tennis event.

Auger-Aliassime, whose Sunday singles win over Novak Djokovic was key to Team World's win last year, opened the night session with a 6-4, 6-3 win over French veteran Monfils, whose lighthearted approach to the contest rubbed the Canadian the wrong way.

Auger-Aliassime was irked when Monfils briefly took a seat

near a line judge rather than preparing to receive serve, pointedly asking the umpire if he planned to enforce competitive match rules.

An underhand serve from Monfils didn't improve Auger-Aliassime's mood. The Canadian's complaints seemed to send Monfils into a spiral that saw him surrender the opening set with a service break that featured a double fault and three forehand errors. Monfils pulled himself together to give himself a triple break chance in the opening game of the second set. He couldn't capitalise, however, and once Auger-Aliassime broke him in the second game the Canadian was able to cruise home, the two exchanging a hug when it was all over.

Europe won the first four editions of the event that began in 2017, but Team World triumphed last year in London in an edition notable for the farewell doubles appearance by Swiss great Roger Federer alongside long-time rival Rafael Nadal.



Argentina's Emiliano Boffelli takes a penalty kick during their World Cup Pool D match against Samoa on Friday (AFP)

Boffelli sparkles as Argentina beat Samoa in World Cup

Saint-Étienne, France - Emiliano Boffelli scored 16 points as Argentina put their World Cup campaign back on track with a disciplined and composed 19-10 victory over erratic Samoa on Friday.

Victory keeps the Pumas' in the hunt for the quarter-finals following their opening Pool D defeat to England two weeks ago. Samoa face an uphill battle to make the knock-out stages.

"We knew it wouldn't be easy. Samoa are a strong team. It was a very important win today," Boffelli said.

An error-strewn display proved Samoa's undoing, with numerous knock-ons halting their progress and momentum.

Samoa did set up a grandstand finish when replacement hooker Sama Malolo burrowed over five minutes from time, before Argentina veteran Nicolas Sanchez ended Samoan hopes with a last-gasp penalty.

"Extremely proud of the boys today," said Samoa captain Chris Vui. "I thought the better team won, all credit to Argentina, they were more clinical, so full credit

to them."

Samoa made a poor start and then paid for some hapless kicking and dubious tactical choices as Argentina steadily clocked up the scores in driving rain.

Samoa full-back Duncan Paia'a was yellow-carded inside the first 35 seconds for taking out Santiago Carreras in the air. Just before Paia'a returned, Argentina made Samoa pay, switching play from one wing to the other before Boffelli darted in off his flank to stretch out an arm and score. Samoa had been the architects of their own downfall, as veteran fly-half Christian Leali'ifano gifted Argentina possession inside the 22 by taking a free-kick from the wrong place.

Boffelli converted his own try and soon added a penalty before Leali'ifano got the Pacific Islanders off the mark with a three-pointer that bounced on the crossbar and over.

A second penalty from Boffelli pushed Argentina's lead to 13-3, while Leali'ifano missed two straightforward looking kicks at goal in what was quickly turning into a personal horror show.

'Fired up' Verstappen takes Japanese GP pole position

Suzuka, Japan - A "fired up" Max Verstappen took pole position on Saturday for the Japanese Grand Prix, as he looks to take a giant stride towards a third-straight world title this weekend.

The Red Bull driver bounced back from a fifth-place finish at last week's Singapore Grand Prix to top the timesheets ahead of McLaren pair Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris.

Verstappen said "Singapore didn't happen" after he roared round the Suzuka circuit in a fastest time of 1min 28.877sec - 0.581sec quicker than Piastri.

The runaway championship leader warned there was more to come in Sunday's race, saying he was "very fired up to have a good weekend here".

"As soon as we put the car on the track it's been very enjoyable to drive, very predictable, which I think is the most important," said Verstappen.

"Lap after lap in qualifying was getting better."

Verstappen, who leads teammate and nearest rival Sergio Perez by 151 points in the championship standings, cannot clinch the title on Sunday but a favourable result can set him up to seal the deal at the Qatar Grand Prix next month.

He has won 12 of 15 races so far this season, including a record streak of 10 in a row that ended in Singapore.

He and Perez can help Red Bull clinch the constructors' championship in Japan.

"That was the aim, especially coming from Singapore, I wanted to have a really strong weekend," said Verstappen, who finished fastest in all three Suzuka practices.

"Of course, we know that this is the first proper opportunity to win it."

Verstappen said he was en-



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates his pole position for the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix on Saturday (AFP)

joying cutting loose on the sweeping high-speed curves of Suzuka after the tight street circuit of Singapore.

"These high-speed corners are really well-balanced and you can push it to the limit," he said.

"It's just really enjoyable to

do."

Piastri claimed second place on the grid with a time of 1min 29.458sec.

The Australian rookie had the third-fastest time in Saturday's final practice before qualifying and said he thought he "could be in for a solid weekend".

"This morning we made some good changes and the car looked quick in FP3, I was getting more used to the track too," said the 22-year-old.

"Very happy to be on the front row. Of course, the gap is a lot bigger than I would prefer but I'm happy to be in second."

McLaren teammate Norris was third fastest, 0.035sec behind Piastri. Norris, who finished second behind Ferrari's Carlos Sainz in Singapore, said it had been "a good day".

"I think we've been strong all weekend," he said.

AFP

Second-seed Sakkari books Guadalajara title clash with Dolehide

Guadalajara, Mexico - Second-seeded Maria Sakkari beat third-seeded Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-0 on Friday to book a return trip to the Guadalajara WTA 1000 tournament, where she'll face first-time WTA finalist Caroline Dolehide.

Greece's Sakkari, ranked ninth in the world, is in the Guadalajara final for the second straight year. Last year she battled through a string of tough three-setters, but this year she hasn't dropped a set on the way to the final, where she'll be seeking her first title since Rabat in 2019.

A victory would be a late high



Maria Sakkari celebrates after defeating Caroline Garcia on Friday (AFP)

note in an up-and-down season that included a first-round exit at the US Open last month.

"I said it the first day that I felt like this was the week," said Sakkari, who lost to Jessica Peg-

ula in last year's final. "This is the place where I was going to overcome a lot of difficult obstacles and difficult emotions."

"I don't want to go back to the US Open because that's passed, but I'm just so happy to be back in the final, I couldn't have asked for anything better."

Sakkari had just three unforced errors in the opening set, breaking for a 3-1 lead as she took control. She broke Garcia to open the second set in a game the French player led 40-15, and fought off three break points to push her lead to 4-0.

Sakkari had lost three of four

prior meetings with France's Garcia, finally getting past her in Doha this year.

"The last match we played was one of the toughest matches in my career," Sakkari said. "My goal today was to smile, to enjoy, to come out here and have fun. Because those are the emotions that I haven't felt in a while."

"I'm going to have the same goal tomorrow," she said.

Dolehide, playing in her first WTA semi-final, booked her first title match with a 7-5, 6-3 victory over resurgent 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin.

AFP

THE SPECTACLE BEGINS

China President Xi declares biggest-ever Asian Games open

Hangzhou, China - Chinese President Xi Jinping declared the 19th Asian Games open at a colourful ceremony in Hangzhou on Saturday, launching a two-week sporting extravaganza that boasts more athletes than the Olympics.

After being delayed by a year because of China's now-abandoned zero-Covid policy, more than 12,000 competitors from 45 nations and territories will battle it out in 40 sports.

In front of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and other visiting leaders, Xi officially opened the Games at the 80,000-capacity Hangzhou Olympic stadium, also known as "the Big Lotus". Xi was given a rapturous reception by spectators waving mini Chinese flags.

Assad, on his first visit to ally China since the civil war erupted in Syria in 2011, stood up and applauded as his country's team entered the arena and the crowd cheered when his image flashed up on a big screen.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach was also among the dignitaries - and leaders from Cambodia, Kuwait and Nepal, among others, had all been expected to attend.

"Finally we can gather for the 19th Asian Games," Raja Randhir Singh, acting president of the



The Oman contingent at the opening ceremony of the 2022 Asian Games at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre on Saturday

Olympic Council of Asia, told the crowd to more cheers.

"The one-year postponement was unprecedented in OCA history," he added.

Security was tight in the area around the arena in the hours leading up to the ceremony, with roads closed and police stationed on street corners.

Spectators were given thorough security checks before entering and staff confiscated food and umbrellas. The light rainfall in recent days had stopped.

The theme of the ceremony was water and it also celebrated Hangzhou's ancient history and

landscape, while also giving a nod to the city's reputation as the unofficial home of China's tech industry.

"I feel very happy and excited," a 35-year-old woman spectator surnamed Zhang said. "I feel it's a great honour for the city." Jung-Woo Lee, sport policy expert at the University of Edinburgh, told AFP the Games were "China's post-pandemic soft-power exercise".

But they have already been rocked by a row between New Delhi and China over three Indian wushu fighters, with a trip to the city by India's sports minister

cancelled on Friday.

China denied Indian claims that the trio had been barred from entering the country.

China's status as a sporting and business destination took a severe hit during the pandemic, when snap lockdowns and strict travel rules saw almost all international events cancelled in the country.

North Korean athletes, who like those from Taiwan were given loud cheers as they entered the ceremony, are contesting their first major international competition since the pandemic.

But the biggest cheer of all

was reserved for hosts China, who are overwhelming favourites to top the medals table, with Japan and South Korea battling for second.

Games athletes will fight for medals in Olympic staples such as athletics, swimming, football, gymnastics and cycling.

ESports will make its debut as a medal event at the Games, in what is seen as a step towards inclusion one day in the Olympics.

There will also be regional specialties including dragon boat racing, the Chinese martial art wushu and kabaddi.

Nine sports, among them boxing, break dancing and tennis, will serve as Asia qualifiers for next year's Paris Olympics.

A sprinkling of world and Olympic champions adds some stardust, including India's javelin king Neeraj Chopra, Qatari high jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim and Chinese swimming royalty Qin Haiyang and Zhang Yufei.

Olympic Council of Asia honorary life vice-president Wei Jizhong said having so many sporting disciplines was about giving opportunity to as many athletes as possible.

AFP



Thomas Bach

IOC's Bach sees 'shift in sport towards Asia'

Hangzhou, China - IOC president Thomas Bach forecast a "shift in the world towards Asia in sport", as the Asian Games was officially opened on Saturday.

The International Olympic Committee chief visited athletes in Hangzhou after meeting Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who vowed to work with the IOC on upholding the "non-politicisation" of sport.

Bach said the biggest-ever Asiad, would "set new standards in many different respects".

"We have here a great number of new sports, we see an organisation which is making use of all the digital expertise which China and Hangzhou has to offer," he said.

More than 12,000 athletes from 45 countries and territories are taking part in Hangzhou, making it bigger than the Olympics.

"The cooperation with the Chinese Olympic Committee is going very well and in many international federations China is playing an ever growing and more important role," he told Xinhua.

"This is greatly appreciated because we see an overall shift in the world towards Asia in sport."

AFP

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PARASOLS

HEAT BRINGS HOPE FOR TOKYO'S HANDMADE UMBRELLA MAKER

One of Tokyo's last handmade umbrella shops has weathered many storms and is now thriving, thanks to booming demand for parasols as Japanese summers get hotter, including increasingly from men.

"You'll feel cool under a parasol... Once you use it, you can't let go," promised Hiroyuki Komiya, the owner of Komiya Shoten, on a recent sweltering day. The 54-year-old's grandfather started the business 93 years ago.

It used to be one of 70 shops selling handmade umbrellas in Nihonbashi, an area that was once the core of old Tokyo. Now, only Komiya Shoten and a handful of others remain in the whole city, pushed out of business by cheap 'Made in China' plastic products on sale in every convenience store.

Unlike these mass-manufactured rival products, Komiya Shoten uses quality textiles made in Japan. The umbrellas are handmade by in-house craftworkers with techniques in use since Japan's Meiji era (1868-1912).

"You need at least five, six years to master umbrella making," craftsman Ikko Tanaka said, as he carefully attached the navy fabric onto the carbon fibre umbrella ribs. But their products also use modern technology, coating the fabric with materials that block the light nearly 100%.

They last longer but do not come cheap, costing several hundred dollars.

Paper and oil

Traditionally, Japanese umbrellas were made of wood, bamboo and paper called washi coated with oil to repel Japan's often torrential rain, and took weeks to make. But the import of Western umbrellas - as we know them today - began in 1859 after the country ended its 220-year-old isolation policy, according to the Japan Umbrella Promotion Association.

Western ones were an expensive fashion accessory but they spread across Japan in the Meiji period as local makers spotted a gap in the market. Komiya's grandfather was one of them, moving to

A traditional Meiji Era-style umbrella made of silk on display at Komiya Shoten

SHADES OF PROGRESS



Hiroyuki Komiya, the owner of Komiya Shoten

Employees working on umbrellas for Komiya Shoten



Tokyo to become a craftsman and starting the company in 1930.

"Everyone who wanted to be chic dreamed of having one," his grandson said.

Blown away

The business peaked in the late 1960s as cheaper rivals started flooding in from other Asian countries. Many Japanese makers went out of business and Komiya Shoten was almost turned inside out, too.

"You can buy plastic umbrellas at 500 yen or 100 yen. We sold ours at 20,000 yen. We couldn't compete."

The family business has, however, found a niche in making 'luxury' umbrellas, building a slick-looking website, and having social media presence extolling their skills.

The business started to turn around 10 years ago and their products were officially recognised as traditional crafts by the Tokyo government in 2018. And although volumes are small with fewer than 10 craftworkers, sales are going up, including for parasols.

"We're experiencing hot summers, probably because of global warming and more people are using parasols to stay cool," Komiya said. "The number of male customers has increased significantly," he pointed out.

AFP

Lost in the Crowd



AUTUMN SALON

The Autumn Salon 2023 exhibition opened at Matti Sirvio Art Galleria under the auspices of Sayyid Nasr bin Badr al Busaidi, vice president of Oman Post last evening

Hubert Vaz

Thirty artists, one theme - exploring individuality, countless interpretations!

Matti Sirvio Art Galleria, at Jawharat al Shatti, has now come alive with its annual Autumn Salon on the theme 'Lost in the Crowd' wherein international as well as local artists were invited to explore their own individuality in artistic expression. The result: a myriad of overlapping colourful expressions, each reflecting a clear identity, yet all conforming to a common narrative of distinct individualism.

Curator Matti Sirvio, a Finnish artist and proprietor of the gallery says, people are different but art gives a lot of opportunities to sort out differences. As the population of the world is growing at high speed, more and more people feel ignored, isolated, and 'lost in the crowd,' he asserts, pointing towards the idea behind the theme of the exhibition.

Matti Sirvio Art Galleria invited

artists to explore individualism - different ways to look at oneself and others, also a different way to produce and enjoy art. The current exhibition was inaugurated by Sayyid Nasr bin Badr al Busaidi, vice president of Oman Post, last evening.

Matti, who has curated numerous shows with scores of Omani as well as international artists, is, this time, lost for words to describe the creative expressions of the participant artists whose works have been selected after much thought. The effort behind the show, nevertheless, has been Herculean.

"Everyone has something to contribute... it is just waiting for the right moment and the right 'crowd' to be recognised," he simply puts it, adding, "When an artist is free to express his/her inner life, the final picture has roots to everything that they have been taught and what they have seen, heard, and experienced."

Asked if individualism in art does restrict an artist's creative freedom, Matti said 'personality can be a great obstacle or an asset,' but declined to comment on whether it was important for an artist to bring in an element of 'artistic shock' in a work of art or a series to stand out in composition and creative expression.

While individualism in art indicates an artist's absolute freedom in expressing his own creative flair, it also is an opportunity to carve a niche for himself with a clearcut style that sets him apart from the rest. And, 'Lost in the Crowd' illustrates each of the participant artists' originality as well as autonomy in a way that it provokes thought while also pointing towards each artist's own leanings.



Everyone has something to contribute... it is just waiting for the right moment and the right 'crowd' to be recognised

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