

GCC SUPREME MILITARY COMMITTEE MEETS IN MUSCAT

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman hosted a regular meeting of the Supreme Military Committee of Chiefs of Staff of GCC Armed Forces on Sunday.

The meeting, which was held at Al Bustan Palace Hotel in Muscat, discussed a number of issues related to strengthening the process of joint cooperation between the GCC countries in various military fields.

Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces and Chairman of the meeting, stressed the importance of the existing cooperation, which enhances common interests and helps achieve coordination between the armed forces of the GCC countries.

The meeting included a session of the GCC Joint Defence Council comprising defence ministers of member states.

16

We demand REDUCTION in PLASTIC PRODUCTION

Battle looms over renewed plastic treaty negotiations

H M Sultan Haitham to open 8th term of Council of Oman on Tuesday

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will open the first meeting of the Council of Oman's eighth term on Tuesday.

In a statement, the Diwan of Royal Court said, 'His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will open on Tuesday, November 14, 2023, the first annual convening of the eighth term of the Council of Oman on its premises in Muscat.

'The meeting will be attended by members of the Royal family, Council of Ministers, Chairman of State Council, Chairman of Majlis A'Shura, Commanders of Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police, members of State Council and Majlis A'Shura, heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, members of the Supreme Judicial Council, Undersecretaries, Governors, prominent business persons, CEOs at Oman Investment Authority, editors-in-chief of local newspapers and representatives of committees and professional associations.'

Based on Royal orders of His Majesty the Sultan, the State Council will begin its eighth term (2023-2027) by holding its first session of its first regular sitting on Wednesday.

The agenda of the session includes swearing-in of members of the eighth term, as well as a speech by Sheikh Abdulmalik Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of State Council.

During its first session, the State Council will elect two deputies to the chairman and members of its office. Council members will also contest seats in its permanent committees.

Oman donates US\$3mn to UNRWA

Amman, Jordan - Oman made an unprecedented and generous donation of US\$3mn in support of the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to respond to the needs of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

"We express our heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, for this timely show of support towards the Palestinian communities in the Gaza Strip. Oman has a tradition of solidarity with Palestinians. This generous gesture is the translation of solidarity into action, to help assist civilians in Gaza through UNRWA," the relief agency's Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini stated.

This contribution from Oman is in response to the Flash Appeal which UNRWA launched on October 10 - currently standing at US\$481mn - that is intended to provide critical support to refugees and help UNRWA address unprecedented humanitarian needs.

With some 748,000 people taking shelter in more than 150 UNRWA schools and other facilities, the agency's resources are under immense strain as frontline workers continue to respond to increasing needs that include food and water, medicines and basic supplies needed in shelters, including mattresses, hygiene items and cleaning supplies.

"Oman's swift response to UNRWA's appeal is commendable. UNRWA calls on other Arab countries to join in and extend exceptional support in this exceptional and unprecedented humanitarian crisis," Lazzarini concluded.



Palestinians arrive south of Gaza City on Sunday after fleeing their homes in Gaza City and the Northern Gaza Strip

World cannot stand silent while hospitals are bombed

Cairo, Egypt - The regional directors of UNFPA, Unicef and WHO have called for urgent international action to end the ongoing attacks on hospitals in Gaza.

In a joint statement, Laila Baker, UNFPA Arab States Regional Director; Adele Khodr, Unicef Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa; and Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said they were horrified at the latest reports of attacks on and in the vicinity of Al Shifa Hospital, Al Rantissi Naser Paediatric Hospital, Al Quds Hospital and others in Gaza city and northern Gaza.

'These strikes killed many, including children. Intense hostilities surrounding several hospitals in northern Gaza are preventing safe access for health staff, the injured and other patients.'

Premature and newborn babies on life support are reportedly dying due to power, oxygen and water cuts at Al Shifa Hospital, while others are at risk. Staff across a number of hospitals are reporting lack of fuel, water and basic medical supplies, putting the lives of all patients at immediate risk, they said.

Over the past 36 days, WHO has recorded at least 137 attacks on healthcare in Gaza, resulting in 521 deaths and 686 injuries, including 16 deaths and 38 injuries of health workers on duty.



Dr Ahmed al Mandhari

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Over 200 companies invest in KOM

Total investment in existing projects at KOM exceeds RO266mn

Our Correspondent Muscat

Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), Oman's first and most successful tech park, is now home to more than 200 future-focused local, regional and global companies and institutions with the total investment exceeding RO266mn.

KOM is one of the industrial areas managed by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and overseen by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

According to Eng Jaafar bin Mohammed al Ajmi, director general of Knowledge Oasis Muscat, the list of international companies invested in KOM includes prominent names such as Microsoft, Oracle, and Motorola, in addition to leading

local companies in this sector such as ITHCA Group and its subsidiaries, Awasr Oman, Oman Data Park, Azyan Telecom and Infoline.

"The number of companies operating in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector based in KOM runs to 200 that include corporates, government and quasi-government institutions. The volume of investments in the existing projects amounts to about RO266mn," Ajmi said in an interview published in the latest edition of *Duqm Economist* magazine, which is published quarterly by OPAZ.

Ajmi noted that the current workforce in KOM has reached 3,958 employees with an Omanisation rate of up to 67%.

Ajmi also informed that Madayn has completed the ring road project in KOM at a total cost of more than RO6.6mn.

He said that this road project aims to raise the efficiency of infrastructure and take in more investment projects in the promising economic sectors such as IT, telecommunications, knowledge business in addition to educational institu-



A ring road project in KOM has been planned to transform the area into a more fertile environment for the growth and attraction of investments, enhancing its competitiveness locally and regionally

ENG JAAFAR BIN MOHAMMED AL AJMI

tions, advanced training centres and other supporting projects.

"This [ring road] project is planned to transform KOM into a more fertile environment for the growth and attraction of investments, enhancing its competitiveness locally and regionally and reinforcing Ma-

dayn's vision to provide world-class business cities," Ajmi said.

New projects

With respect to the new investment projects in the Knowledge Oasis Muscat, Ajmi said there are many new projects that have been implemented or are expected to come into operation during the current year.

Among the major new projects are the satellite communications station with an investment exceeding RO4mn and the International School being built on an area of 43,000sqm with an investment exceeding RO8mn.

There is also a multi-storey parking building project being built on an area of 12,000sqm with a capacity of up to 1,500 parking lots in the first phase and will be increased to 2,500 in the future.

The companies based at KOM range from flourishing home-grown SMEs and leading higher education providers to burgeoning businesses capitalising on KOM's well-established reputation as a centre of excellence and opportunity.

Major multi-nationals have also based themselves at KOM, benefiting from access to Oman's multi-lingual talent pool, exceptional trade links and the advantages of its prime location.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Internal Tender Committee, Ministry of Labour, invites the following Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Last date for electronic purchasing	Last date of tender submission
26 /2023	Providing computers to the General Office of the Ministry of Labour	Sunday 19/11/2023 at 02:00 pm	Monday 27/11/2023 at 10:00 am

- Specialised establishments can obtain electronic documents from this link below, starting from Monday 13/11/2023, at 8:00 am.
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>
- Tender envelopes will be opened at 11:00am on the same day on Monday 27/11/2023.

(The ministry is not bound to accept the lowest price of or any tender)

labour_OMAN

Buy local campaign to kick off on Nov 21

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman is launching a nationwide campaign on November 21 to give a fillip to the sale of local products in all the stores, supermarkets and malls in the sultanate.

The 'Made in Oman' campaign, which will run until December 31, will be launched in the presence of H E Qais al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

"We are launching this campaign as part of the ministry's activities to mark and celebrate the very special occasion of Oman's 53rd National Day," an official from the ministry told *Muscat Daily*.

With the ultimate objective of encouraging consumers to buy local, 'Made in Oman' campaign will showcase and raise the profile of the wide range of items grown and made in the sultanate.

These items are produced both by large manufacturers as well as small and medium en-



terprises "along with the incredible services our great local businesses provide", the official informed.

"The campaign will make consumers aware of the benefits of buying local products for the communities living in the country and the importance of it for us as a nation."

The MoCIIP official explained that a key goal of the campaign is to get consumers to see Omani products and services in a new light, extending beyond just talking about GDP and how rials spent on local products help long-term growth.

"It will also be showing real examples of how 'going local' is already helping create quality

The campaign will make consumers aware of the benefits of buying local products for the communities

jobs for young people as well as making a difference to everyday life. The success Omani products enjoy in international markets will also be featured during the campaign," the official added.

The campaign will also promote the new Omani product identity logo, attract the largest number of industrial enterprises to obtain the new logo, create integration between enterprises, increase industrial investments and support national non-oil exports, the ministry official added.

The Omani factories that obtain the new national product identity will receive various privileges.

"The new identity will contribute to raise consumers' awareness of Omani products, and enhancing the local added value of national products."

The campaign targets industrial institutions, entrepreneurs, and the public from different age groups.

Talking about the ministry's efforts to support the Omani product, the official informed that in February this year, H E Yousef issued a Ministerial Decision (No 62/2023) on national product identity licensing regulations.

That decision was taken to establish a unified national framework for Omani products. Besides unifying the products' marketing identity, it was aimed at augmenting competitiveness, enhancing in-country value (ICV) of national products, and raising local and international consumers' awareness of Omani products.

The decision made violators subject to a fine of not less than RO500 and/or suspension or cancellation of their commercial licence for a year.

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Low pressure from Nov 16 to bring heavy rains: CAA

Muscat - Oman will receive moderate to heavy rains due to a low pressure from Thursday, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

In a statement, the authority said, 'Preliminary indications suggest that the atmosphere in the Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a depression starting from November 16.'

'Rainfall is expected in Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates from now on till November 15', CAA alerted, while advising everyone to be cautious during rains and near over flowing wadis, and to check the state of the sea before sailing.

'Motorists should be careful when driving on wet roads to avoid losing control and skidding.'

Nearly 5,000 livestock vaccinated

Muscat - The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has completed its campaign to vaccinate livestock in Dhahirah as part of its National Project for Livestock Immunisation.

Over 55,000 animals have been immunised so far under this project, the ministry informed.

The ministry's veterinary team visited breeders in the Al Shu'iyah village in the wilayat of Yanqul and vaccinated 4,890 animals (goats, sheep and cows) against

diseases including intestinal poisoning, foot-and-mouth disease and rabies.

"The campaign to immunise livestock was undertaken to protect them from epidemics, including plague, smallpox and foot-and-mouth disease that cause great economic losses," said Mohammed bin Ali al Shandoudi, Director of the Animal Wealth Department at the Directorate General of Agricultural Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhahirah.

Dakhliyah embarks on ambitious development

Key investment ventures are poised to rejuvenate economy and boost tourism in the governorate

Our Correspondent Muscat

In a strategic move to invigorate the local economy and enhance recreational facilities, Dakhliyah governorate has announced a series of development projects.

Hilal bin Saeed al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah, outlined several key investment ventures poised to transform the governorate. These include creation of a full-service commercial centre in Bisiya in the wilayat of Bahla and a comprehensive commercial complex for tourism and entertainment in Hail al Yemen in Jabal Akhdar.

Additionally, the Nizwa station development project is set to boost public transportation with integrated facilities for buses and taxis.

The governor highlighted future projects such as the Greater Nizwa project and the Jabal Akhdar Development Project. These initiatives, steered by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in collaboration with Office of the Governor of Dakhliyah



and various governmental bodies, promise to start a new era of urban development in the region.

Hajri also informed that the governorate, in partnership with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, plans to organise annual festivals, including the Dakhliyah and Jabal Akhdar festivals, to promote local culture and tourism.

The governorate is also focused on enhancing its green

spaces. Tenders have been floated and auctions conducted for the development of gardens and afforestation projects. Additionally, two investment sites have been earmarked for establishing and operating full-service commercial centres and markets for artisanal and local products in Bahla and Jabal Akhdar.

In the industrial sector, Hajri shed light on the progress in Nizwa and Samail industrial

cities. Nizwa Industrial City hosts 166 projects, with investments totalling RO471mn, covering an area of 7.1mn sqm.

Samail Industrial City comprises 156 projects, valued at RO155mn, spread over 11.9mn sqm. These figures indicate robust industrial growth in the governorate. Dakhliyah has also seen notable increase in commercial activities. In the first half of 2023, a total of 26,507 commercial

records were registered - a 7.7% increase compared to 2021.

The governorate distributed 4,518 plots of land from September 2022 to September 2023, with 9,869 plots registered during this period. Municipal projects in the governorate saw an investment of RO22.16mn from October 2022 to October 2023, further emphasising the governorate's commitment to comprehensive development.



3 lounges for taxi drivers in Sohar near completion

Our Correspondent Muscat

The North Batinah Municipality has made significant progress in enhancing public transport infrastructure, with the near completion of new waiting lounges for taxi drivers in the wilayat of Sohar. This development forms part of a broader initiative to improve facilities for both taxi operators and passengers in the governorate.

Eng Malik Saleh al Rushdi, project engineer in North Batinah Municipality, shared that the construction of the waiting lounge in the Falaj al Qabail area along the Sohar-Buraimi road is 95% complete. The lounge, covering a total built-up area of 173sqm, includes separate waiting areas for men and women, each with a capacity to accommodate around 20 people. These facilities are designed to provide several public services, enhancing convenience and comfort for taxi drivers and their customers.

The North Batinah Municipality is also going to get five more waiting lounges for taxis, each of 40sqm in area, in various locations across the governorate.

These lounges will have a capacity to accommodate 15 people each and will be equipped with essential public services.

Of these five proposed lounges, two are already underway in Sohar.

The first one in the Al Humbar commercial area in the heart of Sohar is 90% complete, while the second one, in the Al Waqayba area next to the Sohar Bridge on the Sohar-Shinas road, is 85% complete.

Rushdi emphasised that the North Batinah Municipality is collaborating with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology to ensure the timely completion of other three lounges.

The establishment of these additional three taxi waiting lounges in various wilayats within the governorate aims to streamline taxi operations and enhance the overall quality of public transportation services in the region.



Dhofar Foods & Investment S.A.O.G

P.O. Box 1220 – PC 211 – Phone 23225381 – Fax 23225258

Financial Statements Consolidated and Parent Company for period ended 30th September 2023

Chairman's Report for year 2023

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to place before you the unaudited group results of your company for the 3rd quarter ended 30th September 2023.

Financial Performance Group

The group revenue for the period ended 30th September '23 was RO 37,084 Million, as compared to RO 28,246 Million achieved during the 3rd quarter of previous year. Group's gross profit for the period under review was RO. 4,946 Million as against RO. 4,064 Million achieved during 3rd quarter of previous year. The loss after tax for the period under review was RO. (1,254) Million as against a loss of RO. (1,470) during the same period last year. The total assets of the group increased by 25.7% and stood at RO 71,950 Million as compared to RO 57,225 Million at the same period of previous year. The DFI acquired Omani Gulf Food Co. remaining stake from other shareholders.

Company

The company achieved a revenue of RO. 26,287 Million during the period under review, compared to RO 23,526 Million with increased of 11.7% compared to the previous year. The sale revenue increased were mainly due to feed mill sale increased and dairy products sale increased during 3rd quarter after dairy sale price adjustment. The international raw materials and grain price are still on the high side and has high impact to period financial performance in spite of revenue increase. The gross profit for the period reached RO. 3,895 Million compared to RO. 2,749 Million for the same period of previous year due to revenue increase. The company profit after tax estimated RO 1,091 Million compared to loss RO (1,392) Million for same period last year.

The macro-economic indicators shows slow pace of investment and government projects delay and increasing interest costs, in-addition to dividend reduction of from listed Companies for current period.

The total assets of the company increased by 16.7% and stood at RO 56,939 Million as compared to RO 48,797 Million at the same period of previous year. The NAV stood at 150 Bzs as against NAV of 268 Bzs as of last year. We believe this is mainly due to low market value of company investment available for sale for the current period.

Corporate Governance

The Company believes that to succeed on a sustainable basis, it must maintain high standards of corporate governance towards its shareholders, employees, consumers and community. To this end, the Company has always and will remain focused on good corporate governance. Your company has adhered to all the regulations covering corporate governance in Oman and your Board is fully committed to ensure compliance of all the applicable rules and regulations.

Omanisation / Training

Your company attaches enormous importance to Human Resources as a strategic asset with specific attention to employ and nurture the local Omani talent. We continue to develop our staff to lay the foundation for our future growth with great amount of emphasis being done to develop local talent.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Board, I express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tareq for his wise leadership and constant and generous support extended to the private

sector.

I would also like to thank our Management, staff, bankers, suppliers and our customers for their continuous trust placed upon your company.

Nasser Bin Mohammed Salim Al Harthi

Chairman

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE 3 MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

	Group 2023 RO'000	Parent Company 2023 RO'000	Group 2022 RO'000	Parent Company 2022 RO'000
INCOME				
Revenue from sales of goods and services	37,084	26,287	28,246	23,526
Rental income	61	70	61	70
Cost of sales	(32,199)	(22,463)	(24,243)	(20,847)
Gross profit	4,946	3,895	4,064	2,749
EXPENSES				
Selling and distribution	4,563	3,296	4,191	3,453
General and administration	1,900	1,031	1,695	1,062
Directors' remuneration and meeting	113	81	82	57
	6,577	4,408	5,968	4,572
Profit / (loss) from operations	(599)	(636)	(554)	(432)
Dividend income (net)	217	217	282	282
Other income	389	190	1,048	990
Share of result of associates	215	-	527	-
Fair value on acquisition of subsidiary	934	2,154	-	-
Finance costs (net)	(1,362)	(956)	(1,230)	(840)
Profit / (loss) before taxation	(1,238)	1,091	(1,470)	(1,392)
Taxation	(16)	-	-	-
Net profit / (loss) for the period	(1,254)	1,091	(1,470)	(1,392)
Other comprehensive income for the period:				
Potentially reclassified to the income statement:				
Movement in fair value reserve	(266)	(266)	(2,299)	(2,299)
Deferred tax Effect on movement in fair reserve	-	-	-	-
Other comprehensive income for the period	(266)	(266)	(2,299)	(2,299)
Total comprehensive loss for the period	(1,520)	825	(3,769)	(3,691)
Net profit / (loss) attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	(1,139)	1,091	(1,228)	(1,392)
Non-controlling interest	(115)	-	(49)	-
	(1,254)	1,091	(1,429)	(1,392)
Total comprehensive income attributable to: (1,1405)				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	825	(3,728)	(3,691)	-
Non-controlling interest	(115)	-	(49)	-
	(1,520)	825	(3,769)	(3,691)
Basic earnings per share (RO)	(0.006)	0.006	(0.018)	(0.017)

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS OF 30TH SEPTEMBER 2023

	Group 2023 RO'000	Parent Company 2023 RO'000	Group 2022 RO'000	Parent Company 2022 RO'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	18,557	6,721	13,181	7,115
Right of use assets	1,397	738	956	864
Good Will	1,690	0	0	-
Intangible assets	76	17	70	26
Investments in subsidiaries	0	15,492	0	1,992
Investments in associates	907	812	3,911	2,812
Fair Value through other comprehensive income	11,797	11,530	11,797	11,797
Investment properties	2,090	2,098	2,090	2,090
Biological assets	4,005	4,005	4,316	4,316
Deferred tax asset	97	97	101	96
Other non-current assets	69	0	0	-
Total non-current assets	40,418	41,501	36,422	31,108
Current assets				
Inventories and biological assets	15,685	9,025	12,714	9,838
Accounts and other receivables	14,363	5,957	5,168	5,216
Bank balances and cash	1,404	466	592	277
Total current assets	31,532	15,438	18,474	15,331
Total assets	71,950	56,939	54,896	46,439
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	17,431	17,421	8,085	8,085
Legal reserve	2,599	2,599	2,599	2,599
Voluntary reserve	3,712	3,712	3,712	3,712
Revaluation reserve	525	0	525	-
Fair value reserve	3,493	3,492	3,759	3,759
Retained earnings	614	2,511	1,650	1,420
Equity attributable to SShareholders of the Parent Company	28,374	29,745	20,330	19,575
Non-controlling interest	(85)	-	21	-
Total equity and non-controlling interest	28,288	29,745	20,351	19,575
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Non-current portion of term loans	5,798	4,170	1,868	822
Employees' end of service benefits	1,337	648	938	628
Non-current portion of lease liability	1,153	412	600	511
Deferred tax liability	426	-	14	-
Total non-current liabilities	8,715	5,230	3,429	1,961
Current liabilities				
Bank borrowings	17,482	8,649	18,834	14,065
Current portion of term loans	827	241	1,534	852
Accounts and other payables	16,123	12,704	10,231	9,586
Current portion of lease liability	381	370	415	400
Income Tax Payables	164	0	111	-
Total current liabilities	34,947	21,964	31,125	24,903
Total liabilities	43,662	27,194	34,545	26,864
Total equity and liabilities	71,950	56,938	54,896	46,439
Net assets per share (RO)	0.144	0.150	0.251	0.242

Note : The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any share- holder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request .



THINK BEFORE YOU CLICK

With online marketplaces proliferating, the public is grappling with new forms of fraud and disinformation regarding services and products sold on the Internet. Recent Consumer Protection Authority statistics indicate an increase in e-commerce complaints. What measures should be taken to curb e-commerce violations? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said -

Qasim Irfan Dar
Sales manager

E-commerce platforms should conduct regular audits. Their systems and transactions must be monitored employing advanced technologies, like artificial intelligence and machine learning, to detect and prevent fraudulent activities in real-time. Implementing secure payment gateways and educating consumers about safe payment practices, like using credit cards or secure online pay-



ment methods, can minimise financial risks associated with e-commerce transactions.

Saleem Mohammad Balushi
Private sector employee

The authorities must ensure that e-commerce platforms comply with data protection laws to safeguard consumers' personal and financial information. There must be implementation of strong cybersecurity measures to protect customer data and every

platform must be encouraged to invest in fraud detection and prevention systems.

Prabhas Singh
IT professional

I always recommend secure payment options. We must encourage the use of secure payment methods, such as credit cards and reputable online payment gateways, to protect consumers from fraud. One should never use cards for any unknown payment

option. People must be made aware of these facts, for which the use of secure and encrypted connections during online transactions must be promoted.

Ali Imran
FMCG procurement head

We need to enhance consumer education and awareness programmes, implement stricter regulations and penalties for e-commerce violations, conduct regular audits and

inspections of e-commerce platforms, and promote the use of secure payment methods and customer reviews to build trust and confidence in online transactions.

Shakila Javed
Lecturer

Make consumers aware of consumer rules and online businesses of the penalties for violations.

Nasser al Adawi
Brand manager

To minimise e-commerce risks and complaints, use well-known sites and gather feedback from other users. Ensure that a secure lock symbol is displayed in your browser for secure data exchange. Avoid sharing personal information and employ specialised online commerce protection programs for added security. Refrain from using public computers, exercise caution when making purchases via mobile phones, and avoid public Wi-Fi for commercial transactions to prevent password theft. Create a strong and complex password to enhance security. Consider using Shopping Visa for transactions with a specific amount to prevent overdraft. Additionally, implement a triple protection system on websites, confirming purchases through a mobile message for identity verification.

**NEXT ON YOUR SAY**

On the occasion of the 53rd National Day, what type of development would you like to see in Oman in the next five years? What aspect of the sultanate do you find most endearing?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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Study shows potential of repurposing EV batteries for sustainable energy storage

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A groundbreaking study has brought to light the significant potential of repurposing retired electric vehicle batteries (REVB) to bolster the reliability of clean energy technologies and cutting costs of new storage systems.

The research, underscoring the versatility of REVB in applications like energy storage, energy arbitrage and frequency regulation, marks a significant leap in sustainable energy solutions.

The study - titled 'Techno-economic feasibility of retired electric vehicle batteries repurpose/reuse in second-life applications: A systematic review' - was conducted by Mohammed Khalifa al Alawi, a PhD candidate at Canterbury Christ Church University.

The study exemplifies the high calibre of Omani scholars in the field of sustainable technologies.

Alawi's research delved into the state-of-art modelling and experimental studies focusing on second-life applications of REVB. The findings revealed that



The insights provided are invaluable for the research community, industry players and policymakers, supporting the advancement of sustainable energy storage solution

MOHAMMED KHALIFA AL ALAWI

these retired batteries could play a crucial role in stabilising cleaner energy technologies and reducing the financial burden of new storage systems.

In particularly, the study highlighted the integration of photovoltaics (PV) with REVB, showcasing promising results in grid services. Nonetheless,

Alawi pointed out that some applications, such as frequency regulation, present technical hurdles that could accelerate battery degradation, an area needing further research.

The study also brought to light the absence of market regulations and standardisation in the resale of REVB, particularly in parameters like State of Health (SoH) and State of Charge (SoC).

According to Alawi, this gap is impeding the full potential of REVB repurposing, while emphasising the urgent need of market regulations and testing standards.

The study suggests that 35% of the cost of a new lithium battery could serve as a benchmark for pricing REVBs in the market. This pricing strategy holds relevance despite potential decrease in battery prices, ensuring the economic feasibility of repurposing REVB.

For the research community, this study is a treasure trove of information, consolidating existing knowledge and paving the way for future innovations in REVB utilisation. Industry stakeholders, too, stand to gain from

these insights, which could inform investment and business strategies, fostering confidence in the market for repurposed batteries, Alawi said.

Authorities in the EV and energy sectors can also derive significant benefits from this study. As highlighted by it, policy intervention is crucial in establishing an environment conducive for the repurposing sector, aligning with sustainability goals and promoting a circular economy.

In conclusion, Alawi emphasised the multifaceted impact of the study. It not only sheds light on the potential of repurposing REVBs but also underscores the importance of market regulation and standardisation for second-life batteries. "The insights provided are invaluable for the research community, industry players and policymakers, supporting the advancement of sustainable energy storage solutions."

The study was published in the *Energy and Climate Change* journal by Elsevier as open access. The research team included Dr James Cugley and Dr Hany Hassanin, besides Alawi.

Dhofar - Arabia's third most sustainable place

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhofar has been awarded the third place in the 14th edition of the prestigious Sustainable and Resilient City Prize.

Presented by the Arab Towns Organization, winners were announced recently in Doha.

The award recognises the governorate's commitment to environmental protection, cultural preservation and fostering a dynamic community.

In a statement, Dhofar Municipality shared details of the competition. Among 11 cities contending for the award, the municipality of Greater Amman in Jordan claimed the first place, followed by the city of Laâyoune in Western Sahara.

'Dhofar's third place ranking stands as a testament to its proactive efforts in sustainable development.'

The governorate has embarked on several initiatives aimed at reducing its environmental footprint. These measures include extensive tree planting, creating verdant spaces, advancing renewable energy sources, and promoting energy efficiency. Additionally, significant emphasis has been placed



on preserving Dhofar's natural treasures, including its coastline and mountainous regions.

The Arab Towns Organization instituted the award to inspire Arab cities to embrace innovation while maintaining the Islamic architectural essence and the identity of Arab urban landscapes.

Established in 1967, the Arab Towns Organization now encompasses over 650 cities. Its primary objective is to bolster and amplify joint Arab initiatives, fostering collaboration and development across the region.

Recognition of Dhofar in this esteemed platform highlights the governorate's role in leading sustainable urban development and its commitment to a resilient and culturally rich community.

4 cruise ships arrive with 11,195 passengers in Salalah, boost Dhofar tourism

Our Correspondent
Salalah

In a bustling start to the winter tourism season, Salalah Port has received four cruise ships that brought in a total of 11,193 passengers. The arrival of these tourists is a testament to the governorate's growing appeal as a cruise destination.

On November 11, the port welcomed the cruise ship *Silver Spirit*, carrying 779 passengers.

Arriving from Jeddah Islamic Port, the ship was en route to Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat.

A day earlier on November 10, Salalah Port greeted a vessel carrying 2,885 people, including 1,932 tourists. The ship arrived from the Egyptian port of Safaga on the way to Colombo. Passengers had an opportunity to explore Dhofar's renowned archaeological sites, beaches and traditional markets in Salalah.

November 9 saw the arrival of two cruise ships at Salalah Port, bringing 5,189 passengers. Over half of these passengers, numbering 2,514, disembarked to enjoy the sights of Salalah. Their cruise started in Egypt and will end in Mauritius.

Earlier in the month, on November 6, the cruise ship *Zuiderdam* docked at the port with 2,340 passengers, over 1,500 of whom stepped ashore to explore Salalah. Originating from the

Egyptian port of Safaga and sailing to Victoria, Seychelles, the tourists were treated to tours of Dhofar's famous archaeological sites.

Oman, with its strategic location overlooking the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman, has become a popular stop for many cruise ships.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism data, 99 cruise ships visited the sultanate in the 2021-2022 season.



MARKET WATCH

MSX30 4,560.44
Sensex 65,259.45

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India	217.43
Pakistan	736.29
Bangladesh	286.73
Philippines	145.96
Sri Lanka	851.82

*Rates as on November 12
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US nears govt funding deadline

Less than two months since the US federal government narrowly avoided running out of funding, the deeply divided Congress once again faces a tight deadline to approve a new budget – just one week.

Neither the Democratic-controlled Senate or the Republican-led House of Representatives has passed a bill to extend government funding, which expires at midnight next Friday into Saturday.

Without an agreement by November 17, the world's largest economy will instantly begin pumping the brakes: 1.5mn government employees will go without pay, most federal facilities including national parks will be closed, and sectors such as air travel could be forced to slow down.

GCC real estate value likely to cross \$5tn mark by 2028

Dubai, UAE – The value of GCC real estate as a whole is expected to reach \$4.43tn this year and show a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.65% through 2028 to achieve a market volume of \$5.05tn, according to Select Property, the UK-based leading property developer.

Moreover, the GCC's residential real estate value is on pace to grow at a CAGR of 2.85% from \$2.98tn this year to \$3.43tn by 2028.

Select Property cites that rental prices in the UK are projected to grow by 15.9% between now and 2027. The developer attributes this growth to several factors including increased investment interest from the GCC countries.

From June 2022 to June 2023, average rental prices throughout the UK increased by 5.1%. According to Select Property, rental demand in prime city centre locations like Manchester is at an all-time high with rental yields of up to 8% being achieved annually. This promising investment potential has contributed to a forecast of more than \$3bn from the Middle East being invested in the UK's real estate sector in 2024.



GCC's residential real estate value is on pace to grow at a CAGR of 2.85% from \$2.98tn this year to \$3.43tn by 2028

Adam Price, CEO of Select Property, said, "With its resilience during economic uncertainty in recent years, the UK has maintained its long-standing position as one of the world's

smartest choices for property investment. The GCC has played a key role in spurring this growth as intelligent investors have taken notice of the market's increasing property prices and

competitive rents to capitalise on both short- and long-term returns."

He said, "With the GCC's strong economic performance holding steady, the UK's real estate sector appears poised to remain a beneficiary for the foreseeable future."

With an expected 8.9% increase in overall prices in the UK by 2027, Manchester and Birmingham are anticipated to ob-

serve the highest growth at above 19% each; these cities are also predicted to experience the highest rental price growth at 21.6% and 19.3% respectively, according to JLL's Big Six Residential Report July 2023. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution for investing in real estate, given the current market dynamics, Select Property recommends a buy-to-let strategy as a profitable approach.

Russia to further cut oil exports in November

Moscow, Russia – Russia's exports of oil and oil products will fall by more than 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) in November compared to the average for the May-June period, the Russian Energy Ministry announced.

The country has already reduced its oil production by 500,000 barrels per day in April and oil exports by 300,000 barrels per day in September.

According to a statement made by the Russian Ministry of Energy, the country has limited its supply of oil and petroleum products to ensure market stability.

The statement further emphasised that Russia remains completely committed to the voluntary action undertaken by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and non-OPEC oil-producing nations, known as the OPEC+ group.

However, Russian supplies of oil and petroleum products, including storage, to the domestic market have increased.

Agencies

Saudi says climate policy should not 'crush' less powerful countries

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Saudi Arabia said that policies to address climate change should not "crush the bones" of countries grappling with energy poverty, ahead of the COP28 climate talks in Dubai.

Speaking at a conference on economic cooperation with Africa, the Gulf kingdom's energy minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said more must be done to help the estimated 800mn people globally who don't have steady access to electricity.

Climate change is "relevant and important" but "should not be attended to by crushing the bones and the future of the less (powerful) people," Prince Abdulaziz said.

"Why do we sit on our hands and do nothing about this population?"

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest crude oil exporter, an-



Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman

nounced in 2021 that it was targeting net zero emissions by 2060.

However Saudi officials also argue that continued new investments in hydrocarbons are necessary for energy stability.

Prince Abdulaziz said on Thursday that attempts to pro-

vide financial support to countries affected by climate change had so far delivered poor results.

The agreement to set up a dedicated fund to help vulnerable countries cope with climate "loss and damage" was a flagship achievement of last year's COP27 talks in Egypt.

But countries left the details to be worked out later.

Richer countries promised in 2009 to provide \$100bn a year to finance both adaptation and emissions cuts in developing countries by 2020.

It only reached \$83bn that year, according to the most recent figures available from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Failure to meet the target on time has damaged trust in international climate negotiations.

Prince Abdulaziz said Saudi Arabia was "choosing a different approach" to climate finance.

"We have our own tools..." He wanted to do it bilaterally," he said.

"We want to make sure that we become accountable for what we promise and we want to see the deliverables of what we have promised."

AFF

British economy stalls in Q3

London, US – Britain's economy stagnated in the third quarter, official data showed, weighed down by elevated inflation and interest-rate hikes.

Gross domestic product showed no growth in the July-September period, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

That beat market expectations for a contraction of 0.2%, but followed 0.2% expansion in the second quarter.

The data comes one week after the Bank of England froze interest rates at a 15-year high of 5.25% to tackle high inflation,

and forecast the economy would flatline next year.

Reacting to Friday's data, UK finance minister Jeremy Hunt warned that "high inflation was the single greatest barrier to economic growth".

Hunt added that his budget statement on November 22, would "focus on how we get the economy growing healthily again".

"UK economy woes continue," noted KPMG economist Yael Selfin.

"Economic activity is continuing to slow as high interest rates are weighing on consumer

sentiment and disposable incomes.

"While real incomes have started to grow as inflation eases, this is being offset by higher mortgage rates feeding through into housing costs."

The ONS added Friday that activity grew 0.2 percent in September after downwardly-revised expansion of 0.1 percent in August and zero growth in July.

"The economy is estimated to have shown no growth in the third quarter," said ONS economic statistics director Darren Morgan.

AFF

ECB chief signals no interest rate cuts soon

Frankfurt, Germany – The European Central Bank is not set to cut interest rates for the "next couple of quarters", president Christine Lagarde signalled, while also warning of a potential resurgence in inflation.

The central bank hiked rates 10 times in a row to tame runaway consumer prices but held them steady for the first time in over a year at its October meeting.

With eurozone inflation falling to 2.9% last month and higher borrowing costs weighing on the single currency area, speculation has intensified about when the ECB may start cutting rates.

Speaking at a Financial Times event, Lagarde sought to douse hopes this could happen any time soon.

If rates were held at their current levels for "long enough",



If rates were held at their current levels for long enough, then it will make a significant contribution to bringing inflation back to our two per cent target in the medium term

CHRISTINE LAGARDE

then it will "make a significant contribution to bringing inflation back to our two-percent target in the medium term", she said.

Pressed on how long this might be, she said: "Long enough is long enough. It's not something that (means) in the next couple of quarters we'll be seeing a change."

Last month's slowdown in inflation brought the indicator to the lowest level since July

2021.

Consumer price rises in the 20 countries that use the euro had peaked at 10.6 percent in October last year, driven mainly by surging energy costs after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Lagarde acknowledged that "inflation has come down massively", adding that "one could argue... monetary policy has done its job".

But she added that heavy falls in energy prices in particu-

lar had helped drive the fall, and suggested another energy shock could prompt the figure to jump again.

"We should not assume that this respectable 2.9 headline number is something that should be taken for granted," she said.

"There will be a resurgence of probably (a) higher number going forwards and we should be expecting that."

AFF

صناعة قرطاسية الكمبيوتر ش.م.ع.ع. Computer Stationery Industry S.A.O.C. Report of the Board of Directors for the period of nine months ending on 30th of Sept 2023 On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the honorable shareholders with the un-audited results of Computer Stationery Industry SAOG and its subsidiary for the nine months period ending 30th of September 2023. During the first nine months, the Group's turnover amounted to Rial Omani 1.07 million, which represents a 17.7% decline from the same period last year when turnover was recorded at Rial Omani 1.30 million. The Group's net loss for the current period has decreased by 5.31% compared to the same period last year, now standing at Rial Omani 207k. This represents an improvement from the net loss of Rial Omani 218k recorded during the corresponding period in the previous year. The company continues its efforts towards improving operational cost through continuous review the cost of raw materials and monitor the overall expenses. With reference to the company's disclosure on the Muscat Stock Exchange website on October 17, 2023 about the merger, we would like to point out that the Board of Directors is currently studying a number of options to improve the company's financial position, and the necessary measures will be taken as required by the option adopted by the Board of Directors. As Oman's economy shows signs of improvement, the printing industry is still encountering challenges posed by intense competition. While there has been a decline in paper prices compared to last year, market news indicates that they are expected to rise again. Nevertheless, we are fully committed to overcoming these obstacles by focusing on enhancing efficiency, implementing effective cost control measures, and exploring potential merger opportunities. These strategic steps are vital in our quest to stay competitive amidst the stiff market competition. On behalf of the Board and all employees, I wish to express our highest gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman for His Majesty's wisdom and guidance which has ushered in peace, prosperity, and progress to Oman and its people. Ammaar Maqbool Al Saleh Chairman Notes :- 1) Previous year figures have been regrouped wherever necessary. 2) Complete Accounts are available with Capital Market Authority. However the same will be sent by mail to any Share Holder who requests them, either in Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request. Request shall be forwarded to the following address: P.O. Box: 13, Postal Code: 124, Rusayl, Sultanate of Oman E-mail : info@csioptions.com			
UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023			
Particulars	As on 30-09-2023 Rials	As on 30-09-2022 Rials	
ASSETS			
Property Plant & Equipment	1,797,360	1,104,211	
Right of Use Assets	81,685	103,483	
Deferred Tax Asset	68,757	74,283	
Total non current assets	1,947,802	1,281,977	
Current Assets	848,973	2,150,069	
Less : Current Liabilities			
Short term maturity of Long term Loan	--	--	
Other current Liabilities	1,492,592	1,868,313	
Net Current Assets	(643,619)	281,756	
TOTAL ASSETS	1,304,183	1,563,733	
LIABILITIES			
Share Holders' Funds:			
Share Capital	1,000,000	1,000,000	
Reserves & Retained Earnings	304,183	563,733	
Long Term Loan	--	--	
TOTAL LIABILITIES	1,304,183	1,563,733	
UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE NINE MONTHS ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2023			
Particulars	9 months ended 30 09 2023 Rials	9 months ended 30 09 2022 Rials	
Sales	1,071,513	1,301,955	
Gross Profit	184,501	154,628	
Depreciation	(134,246)	(104,018)	
Admin & General Expenses	(258,652)	(266,734)	
Operating Profit / (Loss)	(208,397)	(216,124)	
Finance Charges	(23,187)	(14,626)	
Other Income	24,959	12,404	
Balance	(206,625)	(218,346)	
Prior year tax payment	(127)	--	
Profit / (Loss) before taxation and minority interest	(206,752)	(218,346)	
Provision for Taxation	--	--	
NET PROFIT/(LOSS) AFTER TAX	(206,752)	(218,346)	

Visit Oman, Attraction World Group sign pact

At this year's World Travel Market (WTM), Visit Oman, the Sultanate of Oman's trusted B2B travel booking platform, proudly announced a dynamic new partnership with the Attraction World Group (AWG), a leading distributor of high-quality travel experiences and attractions.

This alliance comes on the heels of Visit Oman's recent collaboration with digital enabler Prioticket and represents a significant step in the nation's digital tourism strategy.

The signing, which took place amidst the buzz and global networking of the WTM from November 6 to 8, sets the stage for a transformative collaboration aimed at digitising and diversifying Oman's travel offerings.

The signing ceremony was attended by the esteemed presence of dignitaries, including H E Azzan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Chairman of Oman Tourism Development Company (Oman Group);



Dr Hashil al Mahrouqi, CEO of Oman Group; and Olly Nicholls, Group CEO of Attraction World Group (AWG).

This partnership aims to expand the digital footprint of Oman's tourism sector, harnessing the synergies of both collaborations to enhance the

country's global tourism appeal and further support the growth of Omani SMEs. AWG is known as a prominent global leader in delivering tours, excursions, and exceptional travel experiences. Their emphasis is on advanced technology solutions customized for travel and tourism industry

partners.

Visit Oman will leverage AWG's robust digital infrastructure and industry standing, to significantly amplify the reach and accessibility of the products offered by Omani ventures, especially those offered by small and medium enterprise.

"The alliance with Attractions World Group marks a significant leap in integrating state-of-the-art technology with our tourism initiatives," asserted Omran CEO Dr Mahrouqi. "It is a move that aligns with our unwavering commitment to cultivate novel opportunities that stimulate tourism in

Oman through innovative digital platforms. This partnership stands out as a pioneering effort to position Omani tourism businesses on the global map, enabling them to be accessible to an international audience at the click of a button. It is about simplifying the path to global visibility, minimising marketing overheads, and driving the growth and development of local enterprises."

Group CEO of Attraction World Group, Olly Nicholls, echoed this vision, stressing the strategic importance of connecting global tourists with Oman's unique experiences.

"We are absolutely thrilled to announce our latest partnership with Visit Oman. This collaboration marks the beginning of an exciting journey, not only to provide unparalleled distribution opportunities for attractions, experiences, tours, and other captivating activities within Oman but also to afford Visit Oman's partners immediate access to our extensive global net-

work. This spans retail travel agents, airlines, cruise lines, tour operators, and loyalty schemes.

"Together with Visit Oman, we're embarking on a mission to empower Omani SMEs, enabling them to put their exceptional products on the international stage."

Visit Oman seeks to ensure that the benefits for the entire Omani tourism ecosystem are fully realised, keeping it agile and poised to meet the demands of the modern traveller.

"In an age where most travellers arrange their trips online, digitisation means putting Oman on the map, quite literally, in the digital world that modern tourists navigate," explains Shabib al Maamari, Managing Director of Visit Oman. "We're ensuring that with just a few clicks, every Omani tourism entrepreneur and service provider can gain direct advantages from the international exposure to our vibrant culture and the diverse beauty of our landscapes."

Sohar Aluminium plants over 10,000 trees in Musandam

Complementing its constant efforts towards preserving the environment and its sustainable natural resources, Sohar Aluminium Company (SA) organised a voluntary campaign, in cooperation with the Environment Department in Musandam governorate, to plant 10,100 wild native trees in the Khor Al Najd in the wilayat of Khasab.

This campaign stemmed from the national initiative for the plantation of 10mn trees, which was launched by the Environment Authority in January 2020.

This campaign comes within an integrated project launched by the company about six months ago, which included levelling and fencing the site as well as developing the irrigation system to water the trees planted during the campaign.

This project reflects Sohar Aluminium's contribution and support to the efforts of the government of the Sultanate of Oman to achieve Zero Neutrality by 2050.

Likewise, it proves the Company's social responsibility as the



tree planting campaign is aimed to increase the green spaces in rural natural areas, combat desertification, and raise public awareness about the importance of preserving the environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

In addition to nurturing the environment, planting various plant species brings economic benefits to society and serves to maintain the ecosystem balance

as an essential environmental component for many natural organisms.

Furthermore, through this campaign, Sohar Aluminium seeks to support the efforts and partnership between various government and private bodies with regards to preserving the environment and achieving environmental sustainability.

The campaign included plant-

ing different types of wild trees, such as Al Ghaf, and Sidr, trees, due to their suitability to the local natural environments and climates. The trees were planted over an area covering around 84,500sqm, with the support of more than 450 participants from the company's employees and some government entities in Musandam governorate.

School students and a group of volunteers from local associations and community members in the governorate took part in the campaign too.

It is worth noting that the National Campaign for the Plantation of 10mn trees aims to urge community participation in preserving wild plants and its diversity by planting trees over a period of ten years from 2020 to 2030 with one million trees annually.

The campaign's focus has been on well-known wild trees in the Sultanate of Oman, including Al Ghaf, Al Samar, Sidr, Shua, Al Alal and others, as these are the most suited to Oman's environment and climate.



Bank Muscat extends support to Sayyid Abbas Golf Tournament

In line with its commitment to promoting sports and community-centric activities, Bank Muscat extended its support to the prestigious Sayyid Abbas Golf tournament, which was recently held at the Ghala Golf Club.

This year's tournament participation reached 116 of the top golfers in the country. It is held annually in memory of the club's former chairman, the late H H Sayyid Abbas bin Faisal.

Speaking on the occasion, Saleh Mohammed al Maaini, Deputy General Manager - Capital Regions, Bank Muscat, said,

"The bank attaches great importance to supporting initiatives that contribute to the country's progress and development in all areas. We are delighted with the great success achieved by the Sayyid Abbas Tournament, which is one of the most well-known sports tournaments in the country. It is my great pleasure to thank the organisers and the participants for the splendid results that have been achieved this year."

Bank Muscat places great emphasis on supporting initiatives aimed at contributing to the

sultanate's progress and development across different spheres, particularly sports activities for the youth. As part of this strategy, Bank Muscat supports many sports activities.

Bank Muscat has previously extended strong support to different sports activities in the country as part of its social responsibility initiatives. The bank's Green Sports programme is one of the leading CSR programmes in Oman, which provides support to local sports teams as part of the bank's efforts to develop sports infrastructure.

Bestune B70 premium sedan excels in design, technology

Mid-size sedan Bestune B70 impresses with its stunning design, cutting-edge technology, radar safety features and top-notch performance.

Available in two variants; 1.5Turbo Engine and 2.0Turbo Engine; the 1.5 Turbo engine delivers 165 HP and 258 torque paired with 7-Speed Dual Clutch Transmission whereas 2.0T Engine produces 220 HP and 340 HP is mated with 6-Speed Automatic Transmission, the B70 has dimensions of 4,810 mm in length, 1,840mm in width and 1,455mm in height, along with a 2,800mm wheelbase.

In line with Bestune's design ethos, the B70 features a hexagonal grille at the front, adorned with the distinctive raindrop pattern. Its Y-shaped headlights incorporate downward-pointing, boomerang-style LED daytime running lights, and the lower bumper enhances the car's sporty appearance.

The B70 boasts a sloping roofline that lends it a coupe-like aesthetic, complemented by a straight waistline that accentuates the sedan's streamlined

look. Adding to its allure are the flush-mounted hidden door handles, which enhance the overall appeal of the Bestune B70.

The interior features a driver-oriented dashboard that enhances accessibility and overall driving experience. A 12-inch display, comprising an LCD instrument panel linked to the central screen, showcases a newly designed user interface.

A spokesperson for GGS LLC said, "The Bestune B70 luxury sedan makes an instant and lasting impression. This remarkable car distinguishes itself with its luxurious appointments, sumptuous interior and enjoyable driving experience."

The premium variant's exterior comes equipped with LED headlights, LED daytime running lights, 18-inch alloy wheels, electrically folding heated door mirrors, a panoramic sunroof, rhythmic rear LED lights, a square tailpipe, intelligent high beam control and welcome/puddle lamps. Inside, the car offers leather seats, six-way electric adjustment for the driver's seat, heated front seats, a seat cour-



tesy function, door ambient lighting, a multifunction steering wheel and dual-zone automatic air conditioning.

For safety, the vehicle provides lane-keeping assist, traffic sign recognition, a blind-spot information system, lane-change decision aid, adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning, forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking, a 360-degree camera system with 3D view, lane-change assist indicator, electronic parking brake, auto hold, anti-lock braking system, electronic brakeforce distribution, brake assist, electronic stability

control, front and curtain airbags, and rear sensors. Entertainment and information features include a 7-inch LCD instrument cluster, a 12.3-inch infotainment screen and six speakers.

Bestune B70: Limousine

The limousine variant has all the premium variant attributes with 2.0Turbo Engine with 6AT and additional exterior includes 19" alloy wheels, rear rhythmic led light and hidden door handle. The extra interior features are

ambient lighting with starry sky lighting trim. Additional safety features include front parking sensors, infotainment features include wireless charger and digital key.

Gulf Great Sands (GGS) LLC launched Bestune, a popular automotive global brand, in Oman last year, BESTUNE Brand is owned by the Chinese automaker FAW Group which is ranked 66 among global fortune 500 companies. Bestune is positioned as a mid-to-high-end brand in the mainstream automobile market.

Founded in 1953, FAW Group employs 175,000 people around the world and sells products in over 70 countries and has five production bases and 14 factories. FAW is a diversified maker of quality automobiles with total sales in excess of seven million vehicles worldwide. FAW maintains the lead market position within China while continuing to expand into new international markets, executing a carefully planned strategy to build a comprehensive global organisation. FAW takes advantage of the latest cutting-edge technologies, process, and management practices to bring customers the latest in automobile world.

Adhering to FAW Group's long history of automobile manufacturing, Bestune brand is representative of high-quality performance. Bestune brand is present in 30 countries including Latin America, Middle East, Europe, Asia and Africa. Bestune has won several prestigious automobile awards which demonstrates its strong comprehensive strength in performance, research and development.

Bestune's factory covers an area of 270,000 square meters, with a construction area of 200,000 square meters. The production capacity can reach 200,000 vehicles per year. The factory includes four workshops of stamping, welding, painting, and assembly. Most of the internal production equipment is imported from Europe. With a highly automated production line, it's a Chinese automobile production base of leading high quality and high level.

Following the principle of "developing original and innovative technologies", FAW Group has continuously infused powerful technology vitality into new BESTUNE brand and established a global R&D.

FAW established a global R&D layout and organised a global R&D team with more than 5,000 top technologists. The R&D system is seen in nine regions of three countries, focusing on innovations and breakthroughs in pioneering design, new energy vehicles, artificial intelligence, 5G application, new materials and process.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Dire conditions in Gaza hospitals

Repeatedly hit by strikes, Al-Shifa hospital's cardiac ward was destroyed on Sunday

Jerusalem - Intense fighting raged around Gaza's biggest hospital on Sunday where doctors said thousands of Palestinians were trapped in dire conditions, as Israel pledged to help evacuate babies from the crippled facility.

Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital is caught in Israel's ground offensive aimed at destroying Hamas, and the compound has been repeatedly hit by strikes, one of which Hamas health officials said destroyed the cardiac ward on Sunday.

The Israeli military has denied deliberately targeting the hospital and has accused the Islamist group of using medical facilities or tunnels under them as hide-outs - a charge Hamas denies.

Fears have intensified for patients and people taking refuge in Al-Shifa and other healthcare facilities in Gaza, and medical aid group Doctors Without Borders warned that without a ceasefire or evacuation the hospital 'will become a morgue'.

Other buildings serving as shelters have also been hit, including a strike on a UN compound in Gaza City that the



Rescuers and civilians stand amid the rubble of a destroyed building following an Israeli bombardment in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Sunday, amid the ongoing battles between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas (AFP)

United Nations Development Programme said late on Saturday caused 'a significant number of deaths and injuries'.

The bloodiest ever Gaza war broke out after Hamas fighters smashed through the militarised border with Israel on October 7, killing around 1,200 people, according to the most

recent Israeli figures.

Israel's relentless campaign in response has killed more than 11,000 people, also mostly civilians and including thousands of children, according to the latest figures from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza.

The ministry has not updated tolls for two days citing

the collapse of hospital services.

Witnesses inside the Al-Shifa hospital told AFP by phone on Sunday that 'violent fighting' had raged around the hospital the whole night.

No water, power, food, internet

Inside Al-Shifa hospital, Doctors Without Borders surgeon Mohammed Obeid said there was no water, power, food or internet access for about 600 post-operative patients, 37-40 babies and 17 people in intensive care.

The surgeon said in an audio message posted on Saturday on social media that two babies

died in the Al-Shifa neonatal unit after power to their incubators was cut off and a man also died when his ventilator shut down.

The Israeli military pledged on Saturday to aid the evacuation of babies from the hospital, noting that 'staff of the Al-Shifa hospital has requested that to-

morrow'. Military spokesman Daniel Hagari said that 'we will help the babies in the paediatric department to get to a safer hospital. We will provide the assistance needed'.

A 'safe passage' was to be opened from Al-Shifa to allow people to flee toward the south, The Israeli military said on Sunday. Twenty of Gaza's 36 hospitals are 'no longer functioning', according to the UN's humanitarian agency.

Very little aid has made it into Gaza in the five weeks of war, with the densely populated coastal territory effectively sealed off by a total blockade that Israel has vowed to maintain until the hostages are freed.

The Israeli military confirmed that a Jordanian plane dropped medical equipment and food to the Jordanian Hospital in the Gaza Strip. The army declined to elaborate further, and Israel's Foreign Ministry also made no comment. As the fighting raged, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday ruled out a role for the current Palestinian Authority government in Gaza once the war is over.

"There will have to be something else there," he said, when asked whether the Palestinian Authority (PA), which has partial administrative control in the occupied West Bank, may govern Gaza after the war.

Netanyahu, in an interview earlier this week, said that Israel would assume 'overall security' over Gaza 'for an indefinite period' after the war.

AFP

Peacekeeper hit by gunfire in south Lebanon, says UN

Beirut, Lebanon - The United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon said gunfire from an unidentified source hit a member of its contingent early on Sunday, adding that the peacekeeper was in a stable condition.

The statement from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) did not indicate whether the incident was linked to ongoing exchanges of fire on the Lebanese border, mainly between Hezbollah and Israel.

"Shortly after midnight last night, peacekeepers in a UNIFIL position near Al-Qawzah reported hearing gunfire nearby," force spokesperson Andrea Tenenti said in a statement.

"One peacekeeper was hit by a bullet and underwent surgery. He is recovering and currently stable," the statement said, adding that the origin of the fire was unknown and the force had launched an investigation.

Late last month, shelling lightly wounded a UN peacekeeper near the border village of Hula, just hours after UNIFIL said a shell hit its headquarters in Naqura near the Israel-Lebanon border.

"Attacks against civilians or UN personnel are violations of international law that may amount to war crimes," the UNIFIL statement said.

"We continue to urge all parties involved to cease their fire," it added.

On Sunday morning,

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said Israeli aircraft and drones had carried out raids on border areas and also reported artillery shelling after midnight targeting sites including near Al-Qawzah, where the peacekeeper was wounded.

It said an Israeli drone strike targeted near a restaurant in the Tal Nahas area, without reporting casualties.

Attacks against civilians or UN personnel are violations of international law that may amount to war crimes

UNIFIL

Since Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip, Lebanon's southern border has seen intensifying tit-for-tat exchanges, mainly between Israel and Hezbollah, an ally of the Palestinian group, stoking fears of a broader conflagration.

Israeli fire, some on targets in Syria, has killed at least 70 Hezbollah fighters since hostilities broke out, according to an AFP tally based on statements from the group.

At least 12 other combatants have also been killed, as well as 11 civilians in Lebanon.

AFP

Turkey's Erdogan calls for pressure on US

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday called for pressure on the United States to stop Israel's offensive in Gaza, but said there would be no agreement unless Washington accepted the enclave as Palestinian land.

Erdogan returned from a summit on Saturday of Arab and Muslim leaders in the Saudi capital Riyadh, which condemned Israeli forces' 'barbaric actions' in Gaza without approving concrete punitive measures.

He is due to visit Germany on Friday and plans to travel to Egypt and host Iran's president in the coming weeks.

"We should hold talks with Egypt and the Gulf countries,



Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaking during a meeting of the Arab League and the OIC, in Riyadh on Saturday (AFP)

and pressure the United States," Erdogan told Turkish reporters on board his return flight from Riyadh.

"The US should increase its pressure on Israel. The West should increase pressure on Israel... It's vital for us to secure a ceasefire," he said.

Erdogan, who was on a trip to a northeastern Turkish village when US Secretary of State

Antony Blinken was in Ankara on November 5, did not rule out a meeting with President Joe Biden.

"The most important country that needs to be involved is the United States, which has influence on Israel," Erdogan said.

But he said he would not call Biden.

Blinken 'has just been here (in Turkey). I guess Biden will host us from now on. It would not be suitable for me to call Biden', he said.

Erdogan said the US must accept Gaza as Palestinian land.

"We cannot agree with Biden if he approaches (the conflict) by seeing Gaza as the land of occupying settlers or Israel, rather than the land of the

Palestinian people," he said.

Turkey has been an increasingly vocal critic of Israel's offensive in Gaza.

In another speech in Istanbul on Sunday, Erdogan vented fury at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in comments broadcast live on Turkish television.

"Hey Netanyahu, these are your good days, more different days are awaiting you... Netanyahu you should know that you're leaving," Erdogan said, after previously labelling the Israeli leader 'no longer someone we can talk to'.

Erdogan will meet German Chancellor Olaf Scholz next week.

AFP

Displaced Gazans live in dust, fear and hunger

Khan Yunis, Palestinian Territories - At first Youssef Mehna thought the war would quickly be over. Then he was wounded, his house was destroyed, and he was forced to survive '25 days without anything'.

So like thousands of others, Mehna finally fled north Gaza for the south.

Perched on trucks, crammed into cars, pulled by donkeys on carts, and on foot, tens of thousands of Palestinians are fleeing Israeli army strikes on the territory squeezed between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean.

At the Bani Suheila crossroads in Khan Yunis, on the immense Salah Al-Din road that threads Gaza top to bottom, the processions are growing still.

People fleeing Gaza City are joined by those leaving Khan Yunis heading further south, towards Rafah, the last city before



Displaced Palestinian children gather for breakfast at a refugee camp in Rafah on Sunday (AFP)

Egypt.

Mehna left the Jabalia refugee camp at seven in the morning, in the north of Gaza City, also hoping to reach Rafah.

But his journey finished in Khan Yunis, after eight hours of travel covering only 25km (15 miles).

"I already paid 500 shekels (US\$130) to come from Jabalia and so I have nothing more to carry on to Rafah," he said with a drawn face, surrounded by his six children.

Around him, hundreds of families were waiting.

Children sleep on the floor beside parents wondering how they will live in a territory where more than 1.5mn people are displaced and nearly one house in two has been destroyed, according to the United Nations.

In southern Gaza, overflowing with displaced from the north, rents of US\$150 a month are now up to US\$500 to US\$1000.

"I don't even have a morsel of bread to feed my kids," said Umm Yaaqub. "Since six in the morning I have been looking everywhere."

AFP

18 sentenced to death in Vietnam drug bust: State media

Hanoi, Vietnam - Two South Koreans were among 18 people sentenced to death on drug smuggling and trafficking charges in Vietnam, state media said.

The communist country has some of the toughest drug laws in the world, and is notoriously secretive about its executions.

South Korean ex-police officer Kim Soon-sik, 63, and compatriot Kang Seon-hok, 30, were sentenced to death following a four-day trial in Ho Chi Minh City, state media said late on Saturday.

Chinese citizen Li Tian Guan, 58, and alleged Vietnamese ring-leader Le Ho Vu, 36, were also handed death sentences.

Fourteen other people were also handed death sentences in connection with the case, following the trial in the Family and Ju-

venile Court, under Ho Chi Minh City People's Court.

The group 'illegally stored, trafficked and traded more than 216kg of drugs' between May and June 2020, state media news site Cong an Nhan dan reported. More than 168kg (370 pounds) of 'all kinds of drugs' were confiscated, it reported, without specifying what type.

The narcotics were trafficked from Cambodia to Ho Chi Minh City, according to Vu, where some were 'consumed domestically' while others were transported to South Korea, Cong an Nhan dan said.

Officers busted the operation on July 19 in Ho Chi Minh City, according to the reported indictment, when they searched a container truck preparing to complete customs clearance for shipment to South Korea.



This photo released by the Vietnam News Agency (VNA) on Sunday shows defendants (in blue) standing during their trial for drug trafficking in Ho Chi Minh (AFP)

Inside they found '40 plastic packages containing white crystals, with a total of 39.5kg of methamphetamine'.

State media reported Vu was convicted of 'illegal transportation of drugs' and 'using fake seals or documents of organisa-

tions'. The other 17 people were convicted of 'illegal possession of drug', 'illegal trading of drugs', 'illegal drug trafficking' and 'organisation of illegal use of drugs', state media said.

Three defendants were also sentenced to life imprisonment

for 'illegal drug trafficking', Cong an Nhan dan reported.

It added that one person, who was under 18 years old, was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment.

There was no indication when the executions would be carried out.

Highly secretive

Vietnamese courts routinely hand out death sentences for drug convictions, and the country is a leading executioner globally, according to Amnesty International.

The country is close to the lawless 'Golden Triangle' region that covers parts of Laos, Thailand and Myanmar, with Vietnamese police saying Ho Chi Minh City is increasingly becoming a hub for drug gangs as transport infrastructure has improved in recent years.

Anyone caught with more than 600 grams (21 ounces) of heroin or more than 2.5kg of methamphetamine can face the death penalty.

A 2021 Amnesty International report said partial disclosures by authorities 'indicated that hundreds of people continued to be

sentenced to death yearly'.

More than 100 people were sentenced to death in Vietnam last year, according to the international monitoring NGO the Death Penalty Information Center. Many face long spells in detention before they are executed, with information about their trials and deaths scarce.

However, Vietnamese authorities declassified some data in 2017, with state media running stories that 429 people had been executed in the country between 2013 and 2016.

In 2017, Vietnam's courts handed down death sentences to eight drug traffickers for smuggling heroin to China.

Since 2013, Vietnam has carried out death sentences by lethal injection, replacing executions by firing squads.

AFP

US Speaker unveils stopgap bid to avoid government shutdown

Unusual play will see some bills needed to keep the government open passed through a short-term bill



This file photo shows Mike Johnson speaking after being nominated Republican speaker of the US House of Representatives at Capitol Hill, in Washington, DC on October 24 (AFP)

Washington, US - The Republican party on Saturday revealed an unconventional temporary plan to fund the US government, with little room to manoeuvre it through a deeply divided Congress just days ahead of a potential shutdown.

Mike Johnson, the new Speaker of the House of Representatives, said the two-part move was 'a necessary bill to place House Republicans in the best position to fight for conservative victories'. US media reported that unusual play would see some bills needed to keep the government open passed via a short-term bill until January 19, while the rest would be rolled over until February 2.

It is aimed at buying Congress time to pass individual spending

bills - and does not provide funding for Israel, Ukraine and border security, according to the reports.

But with some Republicans already complaining that the plan does not make the funding cuts they seek it was unclear if the party, which has only a narrow majority in the House, would be able to pass it, much less the Democrat-controlled Senate.

"The bill will stop the absurd holiday-season omnibus tradition of massive, loaded-up spending

The bill will stop the absurd holiday-season omnibus tradition of massive, loaded-up spending bills introduced right before the Christmas recess

MIKE JOHNSON

bills introduced right before the Christmas recess," Johnson posted on X, formerly Twitter, without offering details.

"Separating out the CR from the supplemental funding debates places our conference in the best position to fight for fiscal responsibility, oversight over Ukraine aid, and meaningful policy changes at our Southern border," he continued.

Fellow Republican Chip Roy, of Texas, was among those quickly

voicing dissent from the party's right, posting on X that his opposition to the plan 'cannot be overstated' and complaining that it does not cut spending enough.

The White House slammed the proposal as 'a recipe for more Republican chaos and more shutdowns'.

"House Republicans are wasting precious time with an unserious proposal that has been panned by members of both parties," Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in the statement.

Federal government funding expires at midnight next Friday into Saturday. Without an agreement by November 17, the world's largest economy will instantly begin pumping the brakes: 1.5mn government employees will go without pay, most federal facilities including national parks will be closed, and sectors such as air travel could be forced to slow down.

Washington is now well-acquainted with these last-minute battles over funding, and often finds a compromise just before the deadline, or shortly after.

But Johnson faces a delicate juggling act, balancing the demands of hardline Republicans, with Democrats who control both Senate and White House.

AFP

Australia ports firm to restore operations after cyber incident

Sydney, Australia - Ports operator DP World said on Sunday it had made 'significant strides' towards resuming normal freight trade at major gateways into Australia, which have been crippled for two days by a cyber incident.

Government agencies held crisis talks over the weekend in response to what Home Affairs and Cyber Security Minister Clare O'Neil described as a 'serious and ongoing' breach that has disrupted operations at key ports.

"DP World manages almost 40 per cent of the goods flowing in and out of our country," she added in a post on X.

The port operator halted internet connectivity at its terminals in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Fremantle on Friday to prevent 'any ongoing unauthorised access' to its network, a company spokesperson said.

The disruption has not prevented containers from being taken off vessels but trucks needed to transport them have not been able to drive in or out of the terminals, DP World senior director Blake Tierney said.

In a statement, Tierney said the company had made 'sig-

nificant strides' working with cybersecurity experts and was testing key systems 'crucial for the resumption of regular freight movement'.

The company was seeking to restore normal operations 'as quickly and safely as possible', he said, and was investigating 'the nature of data access and data theft'.

"DP World Australia is working hard to assess whether any personal information has been impacted," Tierney added.

Australian Federal Police have said they are investigating the incident.

National Cyber Security Coordinator Darren Goldie said on X on Sunday that the company has told the government any disruption to port operations is 'likely to be a number of days, rather than weeks'.

"DP World's IT system remains disconnected from the internet, significantly impacting their operations," he added.

Despite the disruption, the port operator is able to 'access sensitive freight if necessary - for example, in a medical emergency,' Goldie also said.

AFP

Dogs soothe nerves at 'cursed' airport

Schönefeld, Germany - Benny waddles up to eight-year-old Maya, performs a cheerful pirouette on his short hind legs and then nuzzles in for a cuddle.

Already a little cranky from the long wait for her flight to Turkey with her family, Maya is instantly besotted with the four-year-old dachshund and her father Michael Uth a bit less harried.

Berlin's massively delayed, absurdly over-budget, far too small international airport BER, which opened in 2020 to heaps of scorn, has had to get creative to try to win over weary passengers.

A pilot programme is dispatching three particularly good-natured pooches along with two human trainers as on-the-ground stress relief ambassadors.

At the start of the autumn school holiday rush, Benny along with black Labrador Emi and Pepper, a terrier mix, were on their impish mission at Germany's third busiest airport.

Patrolling the shiny floors of the terminal on long leashes, it doesn't take long to find travellers who could use a little comfort or entertainment.



Comfort Dog Benny, is pictured during its mission at the Berlin Brandenburg Airport BER in Schoenefeld on October 20 (AFP)

Uth arrived at BER with Maya and five-year-old son Vincent three hours early for a three-hour flight to Antalya.

"This gives them something fun to do," Uth, 38, said as his children played catch with the pups.

"It's keeping their minds off the wait and the stress with all the crowds here. Happy kids is a great start to a trip."

Social media storm

BER airport had been called 'cursed' by local media after the opening was delayed by nine

years amid incessant technical difficulties and allegations of corruption. Its six-billion-euro (US\$6.4bn) cost was three times more than planned and BER finally opened just as air travel collapsed with the coronavirus pandemic.

The facility needed a hefty bailout to stave off bankruptcy, with taxpayers asked to pump in nearly two billion euros by 2026.

Passengers often report huge check-in queues and big delays for baggage retrieval due to staff shortages.

BER is Germany's second-

least popular airport, according to a poll by claims management company AirHelp, after former military airfield Frankfurt-Hahn.

Although conditions have generally improved, a recommendation that passengers allow at least 2.5 hours to reach their flights sparked a storm on social media.

There were bitter comparisons with the capital's decommissioned airport Tegel, which was famed for direct access to check-in gates from a taxi drop-off point.

Airport spokesman Jan-Peter Haack admitted BER had a rocky start but touted now 'very stable' operations with nearly 20mn passengers served last year.

He said innovations like an option to book a time slot at the security gates at no extra cost and self-service check-in and bag-drop machines had cut the crush at various chokepoints.

But on busy days, tempers can run high. The stress relief dogs, an idea from Los Angeles's international airport, have drawn 'very good feedback' from BER passengers, Haack said.

AFP

AUTUMN COLOURS



People visit Meiji Shrine Outer Garden as ginkgo trees start changing to autumn colours, in Tokyo on Sunday

Pope Francis dismisses US bishop

Joseph Strickland, a prominent conservative, had been repeatedly criticising his papacy

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis on Saturday dismissed US bishop Joseph Strickland, a prominent conservative who had repeatedly criticised his papacy, following concerns over the clergyman's leadership and governance.

The Vatican did not explain the move, a rare sacking in the Catholic Church, where troublesome senior clerics are normally encouraged - or told - to resign.

But a US cardinal said it was linked to an inquiry ordered by Francis into 'all aspects of governance and leadership' of Strickland's Tyler diocese in Texas.

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, also of Texas, said the so-called apostolic visitation in June had reported back that it was 'not feasible' that the bishop stay in office.

He revealed that Strickland, 65, had been asked on Thursday to resign, but refused - prompting Francis to step in.

"The Holy Father has relieved from the pastoral governance of the diocese of Tyler (US) Joseph E. Strickland," the Vatican said in a statement.

It said the bishop of Austin, Joe Vasquez, had been named as apostolic administrator of the diocese, but gave no further details.

"I stand by all the things that were listed as complaints against me," Strickland told a conservative Canadian Catholic website in an article published on Saturday, adding that he did not implement some of Francis's reforms because 'I can't



Pope Francis greets people at the end of an audience to the participants of the International Meeting for Shrine Rectors and Shrine Workers on Saturday at Paul-VI hall in The Vatican (AFP)

I stand by all the things that were listed as complaints against me... I can't starve out part of my flock... I'd do it the same way again

JOSEPH STRICKLAND

starve out part of my flock'.

"I'd do it the same way again," he was quoted by LifeSiteNews as saying.

'Reactionary attitude'

Strickland was appointed by Benedict XVI in 2012, and became one of the most prominent critics of his successor,

Pope Francis.

The Argentine pope, 86, has sought since taking office 10 years ago to forge a more compassionate Church, open to different views.

But he has faced intense opposition from critics - particularly in the United States - who accuse him of causing confusion and failing to uphold key

Catholic beliefs.

In a message earlier this year on X, formerly Twitter, Strickland said that while he recognised Francis as the pope, 'I reject his programme of undermining the deposit of faith'.

Many of Francis' critics complain he is not outspoken enough on abortion and too compassionate towards homosexuals and divorcees.

Francis, in turn, lamented earlier this year the 'strong reactionary attitude' of some Catholics in the US, who he said do not understand the 'evolution in the understanding of matters of faith and morals'.

'Speak His truth'

The Vatican has not commented on its inquiry into the Texas diocese, but Joseph Strickland previously said that two US bishops spent a week conducting interviews - including with him - about the situation there.

In a blog post in September, he addressed rumours that he would be asked to leave voluntarily. 'I cannot resign as bishop of Tyler because that would be me abandoning the flock' under his care, he wrote.

"I have also said that I will respect the authority of Pope Francis if he removes me from

office as Bishop of Tyler."

He added that he loved Jesus Christ and the Church, and 'my only desire is to speak His truth and live God's will to the best of my ability'.

Commentators say it is extremely rare for a bishop to be directly relieved of their position - but not unprecedented.

Francis dismissed a bishop in Puerto Rico, Daniel Fernandez Torres, in similar fashion in March 2022, with the Vatican again giving no reason.

Torres claimed he had been told he had not been 'obedient' to the pope and did not have sufficiently good relationships with fellow bishops.

Media reports at the time noted he had supported those who refused compulsory coronavirus vaccinations.

In a statement published on Saturday, Cardinal DiNardo, who is also Archbishop of Galveston-Houston in Texas, explained the process with Strickland.

After the visit to the Tyler diocese, 'the recommendation was made to the Holy Father that the continuation in office of Bishop Strickland was not feasible', he said.

The decision to ask Strickland to resign - and ultimately dismiss him - followed 'months of careful consideration', he added.

There are more than 120,000 Catholics in the diocese of Tyler, out of a total population of more than 1.4mn people, according to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. AFP

40 Indian workers trapped in tunnel collapse

Dehradun, India - At least 40 construction workers were trapped on Sunday after the road tunnel they were building collapsed in northern India, with rescuers scrambling to reach them beneath piles of debris. The collapse occurred early on Sunday morning in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand when a group of workers were moving out and replacement workers were going in.

"About 200 metres (218 yards) of the tunnel have collapsed," Durgesh Rathodi, a state disaster response official, told AFP from the site.

"About 40 to 41 workers are trapped inside. Oxygen is being supplied through the debris, but more rubble is coming down as rescuers try to remove the obstruction."

The 4.5km (2.7-mile) tunnel is being constructed between Silkyara and Dandalgaon to connect two of the holiest Hindu shrines of Uttarakashi and Yamnotri.

Photographs released by the government rescue teams showed huge piles of concrete blocking the wide tunnel, with twisted metal bars on its broken roof poking down in front of the rubble.

AFP



Britain's King Charles III attend the National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph on Whitehall in central London, on Sunday (AFP)

King Charles III leads silence for British war dead

London, UK - King Charles III on Sunday led Britain in a two-minute silence to honour its war dead in his first remembrance service since being crowned, a day after violence marked commemorations.

The memorial was the scene of ugly scenes on Saturday, Armistice Day, when police scuffled with a group of counter-protestors - opposed to a huge pro-Palestinian march - as they attempted to reach the site.

Almost 10,000 veterans marched past the Cenotaph memorial in central London, while thousands more members of the public gathered in tribute to British and Commonwealth servicemen and women who have died in battle.

The king, along with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer, laid wreaths on the Cenotaph shortly after the nation fell silent at 11am. "The courage and commitment shown by our servicemen and women, both today and throughout the generations that came before them, is humbling and I know many across the

country will be honouring their memory today in quiet reflection," said Sunak.

"Recent events have served as a stark reminder that we cannot take the hard-earned peace we live in for granted.

"I am determined to ensure we never forget the ultimate sacrifice they have made," he added.

Marchers included 100-year-old Second World War veterans and children of servicemen and women who have died in conflict. Remembrance Sunday is an annual commemoration held on the closest Sunday to Armistice Day, November 11, the anniversary of the end of the First World War to remember servicemen and women who have fallen in the line of duty since WWI.

It comes after the march on Armistice Day saw hundreds of thousands of pro-Palestinian supporters march through London calling for a ceasefire in Israel's war in Gaza.

The march went ahead after a week of tensions, which saw the government call for it to be scrapped.

AFP

US, S Korea, Japan to share North Korea missile warning data

Seoul, South Korea - The defence chiefs of the United States, South Korea and Japan agreed on Sunday to activate a real-time data-sharing operation on North Korean missile launches next month, the allies said.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who is in Seoul for annual security talks, met with his South Korean counterpart Shin Won-sik while Japanese Defence Minister Minoru Kihara joined the meeting online.

The top officials also agreed to put in place a multi-year plan for regular trilateral drills.

AFP

ALL UPHILL FROM HERE



Afghan refugees sit on a hilltop outside the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) office as they wait for registration upon their arrival from Pakistan near the Afghanistan-Pakistan Torkham border in Nangarhar province on Sunday (AFP)

Bangladesh garment worker dies after protests

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Hundreds of Bangladeshi garment workers rallied on Sunday demanding fair wages after dismissing a pay offer as too small, as the death toll from the violent protests that erupted last month rose to four.

Bangladesh has been rocked by the worst labour unrest in a decade with tens of thousands of workers clashing with police, demanding a near-tripling of the minimum wage to 23,000 taka (US\$208). Scores of factories have been damaged.

Bangladesh's 3,500 garment factories account for around 85 per cent of its US\$55bn in annual exports, supplying many of the world's top brands including



Garment workers block a key intersection as they protest in Dhaka on Sunday, demanding hike in minimum wages (AFP)

Levi's, Zara and H&M.

But conditions are dire for many of the sector's four million workers, the vast majority of

whom are women whose monthly pay, until recently, started at 8,300 taka (US\$75).

A government-appointed

panel raised the sector's wage by 56.25 per cent on Tuesday to 12,500 taka, but garment workers have rejected the hike. Since the pay offer, their protests escalated with at least 70 factories ransacked.

Police said Jalal Uddin, 42, a garment worker who was injured in clashes with officers earlier this month in Gazipur, north of the capital Dhaka, died from his injuries on Saturday.

Uddin's death takes the number killed in the protests to four, police said.

"He died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. He was injured during a protest several days ago," Bacchu Mia, a police inspector, told AFP.

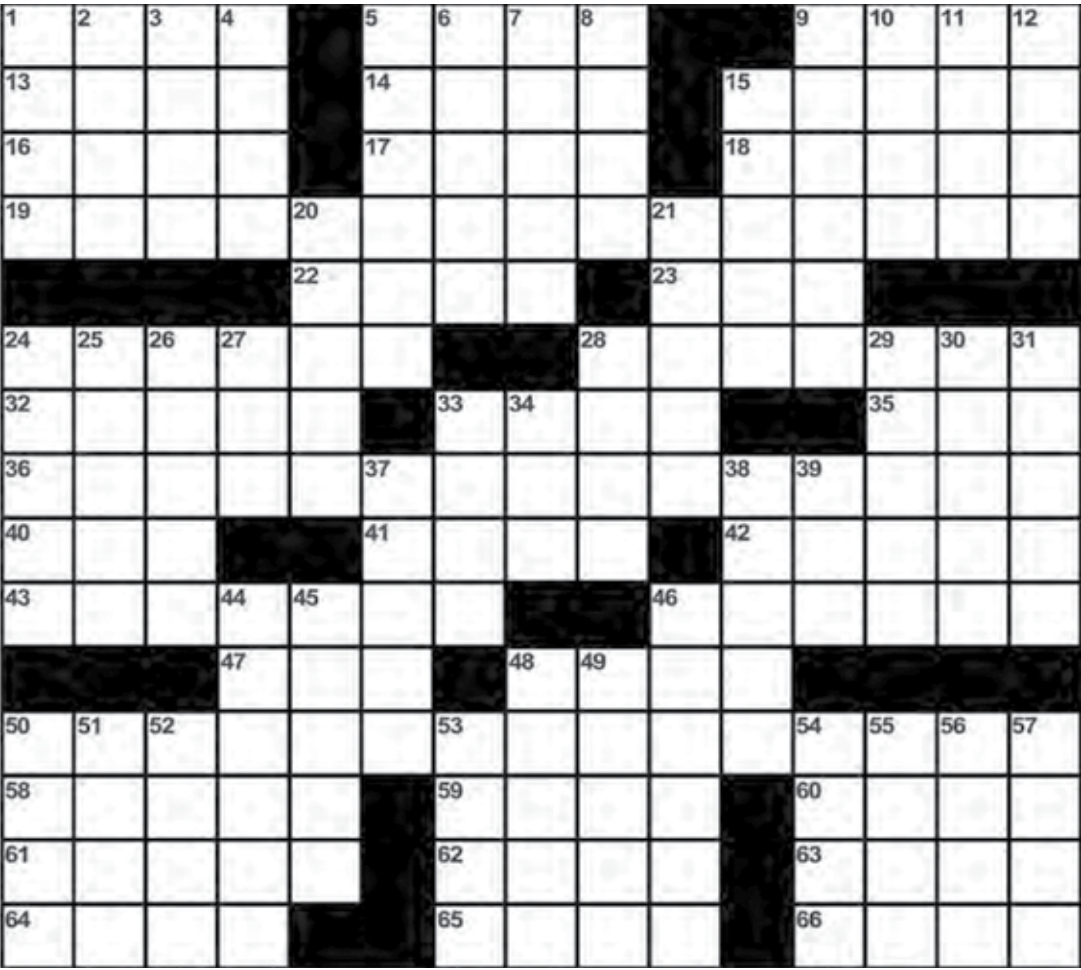
Uddin's brother-in-law Rezaul Karim told reporters he had been shot in the stomach by a shotgun, and had been brought to Dhaka for treatment.

Police said over 10,000 workers left their shifts when at least nine factories were shut down for the day in Dhaka's northern Mirpur neighbourhood on Sunday morning.

"Some 500 of these workers tried to block a road as part of the minimum wage protests. There was no violence," police inspector Masud Sarker told AFP. Unions have accused the government of launching a crackdown against protesters and of targeting grass-roots organisers.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Cook in a cauldron
5) Wet bar
9) Availed oneself of
13) Forelimb bone
14) "Keep quiet!"
15) In a fitting manner
16) Not as great?
17) Elevate
18) Decided upon
19) Three glassy things
22) Like roughly half a team's games
23) Moray, e.g.
24) Meals fit for a king
28) Nonserious jokesters
32) To whom Muslims pray
33) Mongolia's_ Bator
35) Doo-wop syllable
40) Word after "goose" or "nest"
41) Mixed bag of things
42) Perform well beyond expectations
43) Exploits of TV's Carrington family

46) State, long ago
4 7) Spike cheering on the Knicks
48) Attack, as with snowballs
50) Three glassy things
58) Eclipse type
59) Cotton bundle
60) Cause of some shivers
61) Follows instructions to the letter
62) Short cut?
63) Set of socks
64) "Dick Tracy" role
65) Flower in a pocketful?
66) Bald eagle's kin

DOWN

1) Socket insert
2) Tub spread
3) "Meet Me Louis"
4) Survive
5) Burrowing animals
6) Medium board?
7) Ore analysis
8) "Boy, am I glad that's over!"
9) Defend, as the law
10) Put in the overhead bin
11) "If all_ fails ..."

12) Hue changer
15) Felt some pain
20) Police club used in India
21) It flows in Paris
24) Stood directly before
25) Mournful poem
26) Arrange properly, as wheels
27) 47-Across's pizza shop owner
28) Stunning boxing victory
29) Bring forth
30) Deceptive maneuvers
31) Silvery fish
33) Far from fetching
34) Luau souvenir
37) One who keeps minutes
38) Puts in the oven
39) Moron's prefix?
44) Eternally
45) Nostradamus and others
46) A Disney dwarf
48) Schroeder's play thing?
49) New York's_ Island
50) Reputation blemish
51) Job for a mechanic
52) Some wallet stuffers
53) 1/16 of a cup (abbr.)

54) Mocking remark
55) Petri dish substance
56) Totally botch
57) Sun-cracked

NOTE PAD

M	E	L	T	S		S	I	G	N		A	L	B	S
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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your energy is practically bursting out of you today, shining a bright light and positivity on everyone you encounter. To make the best use of all of this contagious enthusiasm, dive into projects or adventures that involve a lot of other people, and the more diverse the group the better! You're especially well tuned toward other cultures and beliefs, and your mind is wide open to new concepts. There are important insights out there that you're finally ready to understand. Go find out about them!

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Being modest is all well and good, but it must be the first thing you toss aside today when you see an opportunity to get what you want. Whether it's some face time with the boss or that certain someone's phone number, don't be shy. Present yourself in all your glory, uninhibited and prepared. When you lead with your strengths, you're sure to get noticed and the results you want. Let your light shine so bright it's blinding!

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

It might not be your first choice to work with a partner today, but you should put your best foot forward and try to maintain a good attitude. There could be one or two conflicts between the two of you, but if you can put aside your ego for the day, you'll soon see that this other person has a lot of intelligent and creative ideas. Be humble and don't get in your own way. There is no need to feel threatened by this person.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Whatever advice you give today will have more importance for its recipient than you might think, so be careful about how adamant you are that they follow it. They already feel like you have all the answers and know exactly what they should do. Their attachment to you is growing, and pretty much whatever you say goes. If this makes you feel uncomfortable, say so. Make it clear that you think they're capable of making the right decisions.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Beware of people who boast about their achievements today. You don't brag about how great you are because you choose to let your actions and behavior speak for you. When people resort to tooting their own horn all the time, it's because they don't have any other way to show people what they're capable of. These people lack substance and should be avoided at all costs. They're a waste of your time, especially on a busy day like today.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

This is a good day to have some fun. There aren't any real work problems plaguing you, and your schedule is wide open. Get in touch with someone you've been missing and see if they have the time to hang out with you. If they don't, find out how you can help them do whatever they need to do. Join them on their errands, help them cram for a test, or give them moral support through a challenge. It would be a great way to reconnect and make yourself feel like the good friend you are.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you're trying to solidify a relationship with someone, try picking a fight with them today. It might sound nuts, but sometimes conflict can create a stronger bond. You two can have a lot of fun debating the issues of the day, and in doing so you'll learn a lot more about each other than you would if you were getting along perfectly all the time. Today, make sure when you start a conversation that you don't focus just on safe small talk. Push the envelope a little bit.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If every little detail of your life hasn't been lining up quite as neatly as you'd like, have no fear! Take heart in the fact that you see the bigger picture. You know that by making small but consistent efforts to keep things on track, you'll eventually get to where you need to be. Sure, there might be an unexpected detour or two (or five) on the way, but isn't that what makes life interesting? If you get derailed today, try to relax and enjoy the new experience.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

There are clues being tossed about you today, but it won't take long for you to complete the picture and solve the mystery. Try not to laugh when everyone around you is still stumbling around while you're finishing up early and off doing something more enjoyable. Their problem is that they have fixed ideas about everything. They can't see that things could be done in a different and more efficient way. Don't ever take your open-mindedness for granted. It's your best tool now.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's wonderful to be giving and generous with other people, but your extravagant nature could be out of control right now. Could it be putting your bank account in jeopardy? Today, cut back on giving gifts and spending your money on others. Do you really need to pick up the tab every time you go to lunch with someone? Try letting someone else pay now and then. Give them the chance to show you how generous they can be too.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It might not be your first choice to work with a partner today, but you should put your best foot forward and try to maintain a good attitude. There could be one or two conflicts between the two of you, but if you can put aside your ego for the day, you'll soon see that this other person has a lot of intelligent and creative ideas. Be humble and don't get in your own way. There is no need to feel threatened by this person.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Making choices based on your emotions wouldn't be wise today. Your feelings are important to you and your life, but they aren't relevant to everyone else. Don't mistake your personal goals for group objectives. It's important for you to think things through with other people in mind. Be empathetic and try to see things from other perspectives. You could be called upon to act selflessly, and it would be a good idea to be prepared for that.

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

T	S	P	C
L	E	E	E
A	I	E	R
G	U	A	S

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.

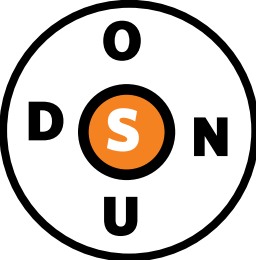
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

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

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

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



KL Rahul (R) and Shreyas Iyer both his centuries as India defeated the Dutch by 160 runs on Sunday (AFP)

PERFECT NINE

Iyer, Rahul tons help India beat Dutch as Kohli, Rohit take wickets

Bengaluru, India - Centuries from Shreyas Iyer and KL Rahul powered India to a 160-run World Cup win over the Netherlands on Sunday as they completed the group stage with a perfect nine wins in nine games.

Iyer (128 not out) and Rahul (102) put on 208 runs to guide India to 410-4.

India then employed nine bowlers, including part-timers Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, to dismiss the Dutch for 250 in the tournament's concluding league match in Bengaluru.

The hosts will face New Zealand in the first semi-final in Mumbai on Wednesday followed by the second last-four clash between Australia and South Africa the next day in Kolkata.

"We focused on one game. We are playing in (nine) different venues and play accordingly and that's what we did," Rohit said of the perfect league stage.

"Very pleased at how we've played in these nine games. Very clinical from game one to today."

He added: "We are playing in India, there will be expectation. We wanted to do the job at hand. It's one thing to talk about it but for everyone to buy into it is very

important."

Iyer smashed his first World Cup ton in a match where all the top-five Indian batsmen went past the fifty mark on a batting-friendly pitch.

He reached his hundred -- his fourth in ODI cricket -- off 84 balls. He ended with 10 fours and five sixes.

Bengaluru-born Rahul raced to his ton with two sixes for the

Africa.

Skipper Rohit, who hit 61, and Shubman Gill laid the foundations for the total in an opening stand of 100 with the pair hitting regular boundaries.

Gill fell for 51 off Paul van Meekeren and fellow quick Bas de Leede dismissed Rohit after the captain reached his fourth 50-plus score including a ton in the tournament.

Quinton de Kock (591) as the leading batsman of the 2023 tournament with 594 runs.

Iyer kept up his blazing form to register his fourth successive score of 50 and above in the tournament and received support from the other end with Rahul joining the charge.

In reply, the Dutch were never in the chase and kept losing regular wickets including Kohli striking with the his gentle medium-pace to claim a first ODI wicket in nine years.

With the Dutch crawling in their reply, Rohit threw the ball to Kohli who sent back opposition captain Scott Edwards, caught behind in his second over off a ball drifting down the leg side.

It was only Kohli's fifth career ODI wicket from his gentle medium-pace and first since 2014.

Sybrand Engelbrecht made 45 and Teja Nidamanuru hit 54 before the innings folded in 47.5 overs with Rohit ending using his part-time off spin to send back Nidamanuru.

Rohit last picked an ODI wicket in 2012 and this was only his ninth career wicket.

AFP

We focused on one game. We are playing in (nine) different venues and play accordingly and that's what we did. Very pleased at how we've played in these nine games

ROHIT SHARMA

Part-time success

Bas overtook his father Tim de Leede, who took 14 wicket for the Dutch in the World Cup, and claimed one more to finish as the highest World Cup wicket-taker for his nation with 16 scalps.

The in-form Kohli reached the 71st ODI fifty of his career only to be bowled four balls later by Roelof van der Merwe's left-arm spin.

Kohli surpassed South Africa's

fastest Indian hundred in World Cups off 62 balls.

He departed four balls later as India fell short of their highest ever World Cup total of 413-5 v Bermuda in 2007.

Kohli reached his half century but fell for 51, silencing the crowd who had been anticipating the star batsman's 50th ODI ton after he equalled Sachin Tendulkar's record of 49 in the team's previous win over South



England's David Willey (2R) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Agha Salman on Saturday (AFP)

Willey bows out, happy not "be a third wheel"

Kolkata, India - England fast bowler David Willey said he was confident he had made the right decision to quit international cricket, insisting he didn't want to continue playing only to be left "running the drinks".

Left-arm seamer Willey brought the curtain down Saturday by starring with the ball in England's 93-run win over Pakistan in Kolkata in the team's last group game at the World Cup.

He claimed 3-56, completing 100 wickets in his 73rd ODI, as England bowled out Pakistan for 244 after scoring 337-9.

"I'm very confident in my decision that today was my last game of cricket for England," he said. "Do I want to go to the Caribbean (for a ODI series in December) and run drinks and not know where I stand and just feel like a third wheel again...being the only one without a contract, probably not so I'm done."

Willey announced his retirement during the World Cup

when he was the only player in the 15-man squad not to be offered the security of a central contract.

"I called time with deep regret," added Willey who has also played 43 Twenty20 internationals for England.

"I'm 33, as fit as I've ever been. So, one of the reasons that I wasn't offered a contract was them going in a different direction after the World Cup."

Willey is from respected cricket stock. His father Peter played 26 Tests and 26 ODIs for England before moving into umpiring. "Looking back to being a kid I could only have dreamt of playing as many games of cricket for England, so I'm immensely proud of that," added Willey.

He added: "The timing of my announcement was so I can enjoy my last three games and I've very much done that. On the phone my wife this morning she said go on - just get to 100 wickets, it'd be a nice way to finish."

AFP



Babar Azam

'Not crime to make mistakes': Pakistan's Azam under pressure

Kolkata, India - Pakistan captain Babar Azam was described as "depressed" and under pressure to save his job Sunday after the team crashed out of the Cricket World Cup, failing to make the semi-finals for a second successive tournament.

A 93-run loss to England sealed Pakistan's fate, ending the 1992 champions' already slim hopes of squeezing into the last four.

Former Pakistan captain and ex-chairman of the country's cricket board Ramiz Raja said that 29-year-old Azam was "depressed" over the reaction at home.

Fans' anger would have been made more acute by seeing arch-rivals India sweeping to nine wins out of nine, becoming the first team to reach the semi-finals.

Azam's team lost five of their nine games including a seven-wicket mauling by India in front of more than 100,000

fans in Ahmedabad.

That was India's eighth victory in eight World Cup games against their neighbours.

Pakistan also lost to Afghanistan for the first time.

Azam made 320 runs at the

Pakistan media consistently accused him of favouring his friends in selection.

"I get behind Babar. Babar is very, very close to me. He's a young guy that needs to be taken on the journey, he needs to be shown the ropes," said Pakistan's director of cricket Mickey Arthur.

'Time to grow'

Azam has been captain of the Test and ODI teams since 2020.

"He's still learning all the time. We know he's a very, very fine batsman. He learns every day with his captaincy," added Arthur.

"We have to allow him the time to grow. And in order to do that, you make mistakes. It's not a crime to make mistakes as long as you learn from those mistakes."

Despite the despondency of fans at home, Azam and his team found sympathy in India.

AFP

We know he's a very, very fine batsman. He learns every day with his captaincy

MICKEY ARTHUR

Najmul says he's 'ready' for Bangladesh captaincy

Pune, India - Najmul Hossain Shanto said he felt "ready" for the Bangladesh captaincy after standing-in as skipper for the injured Shakib Al Hasan during the World Cup.

The 25-year-old led the Tigers for the second time at the tournament as they bowed out with an eight-wicket defeat by already-qualified semi-finalists Australia in Pune on Saturday.

Najmul was in charge after veteran all-rounder Shakib suffered a broken finger while batting in a win over Sri Lanka.

This was Shakib's fifth World Cup and the Bangladesh star will be 40 by the time of the 2027 edition in southern Africa.

Najmul, speaking about captaincy, told a post-match press conference: "I've been doing it for a while now and personally, I think I'm ready (to lead Bangladesh). And if I get the opportunity, definitely, I'm ready."



Najmul Hossain Shanto

Bangladesh's 306-8 against Australia was their highest total of the tournament, yet they still suffered a seventh defeat in nine matches as Mitchell Marsh led the five-time champions to victory with an unbeaten 177.

autonomously and to ensure that there is no government interference."

The suspension came a day after Sri Lanka's parliament asked the board to resign over allegations by sports minister Roshan Ranasinghe that it had syphoned off millions of dollars.

"As players we had no control over that," Mendis said. "As the captain I only hope for its (the ban's) removal so that we can resume our game."

It was not immediately clear if the indefinite suspension would affect Sri Lanka hosting the U-19 World Cup in January.

Sri Lanka cricket skipper pleads for ICC suspension to end

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka skipper Kusal Mendis appealed Sunday for the governing International Cricket Council to lift its suspension of the country over alleged political interference in the local board.

"This is our profession and we can't be staying at home doing nothing," Mendis told reporters in the capital Colombo.

"We want to start practising as there are a few tours to happen next year."

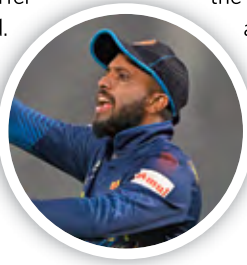
The ICC said on Friday that Sri Lanka Cricket was "in serious breach" of its obligations as a member, highlighting "the requirement to manage its affairs

independently and to ensure that there is no government interference."

The suspension came a day after Sri Lanka's parliament asked the board to resign over allegations by sports minister Roshan Ranasinghe that it had syphoned off millions of dollars.

"As players we had no control over that," Mendis said. "As the captain I only hope for its (the ban's) removal so that we can resume our game."

It was not immediately clear if the indefinite suspension would affect Sri Lanka hosting the U-19 World Cup in January.



Kusal Mendis

ROAR OF 'THE BEAST'

Bastianini wins Malaysian MotoGP; Bagnaia extends title lead

Sepang, Malaysia - Ducati's Enea Bastianini won the Malaysian MotoGP on Sunday as Francesco Bagnaia came third ahead of title rival Jorge Martin to extend his narrow world championship lead with two races left.

The Italian Bastianini cruised home at Sepang more than 1.5 seconds ahead of Alex Marquez in second, with Bagnaia third and Martin a distant fourth.

Reigning world title-holder Bagnaia of Italy now has a 14-point lead on Spain's Martin heading into the race in Qatar next weekend.

The factory Ducati rider Bagnaia is favourite to retain his crown but the championship looks set to go right down to the final race of the season in Valencia at the end of the month.

"I tried to close the gap to Alex and Bastia but I was struggling a lot on the braking," said the 26-year-old Bagnaia.

"But I'm happy we managed to open a bit of a gap in the championship."

He said that an advantage of 14 points was "not too much" but still "better than nothing".

"If it was a normal season with one race it's a good gap to man-



Ducati Lenovo Team's Italian rider Enea Bastianini competes in the MotoGP Malaysian Grand Prix at the Sepang International Circuit on Sunday (AFP)

I tried to close the gap to Alex and Bastia but I was struggling a lot on the braking. But I'm happy we managed to open a bit of a gap in the championship.

FRANCESCO BAGNAIA

age, but 37 points each weekend (including sprint races) means

there's (only) a small gap," he cautioned.

Bagnaia made a sluggish start from pole and was swallowed up right away by rival Martin, who had begun second on the grid on his Ducati, and Bagnaia's teammate Bastianini.

But Pramac's Martin immediately ran wide and Bastianini, who started third on the grid, emerged at the front.

Bastianini led Malaysian MotoGP sprint winner Marquez

through a third of the 20 laps, with Martin and Bagnaia squabbling over third. Bagnaia won that tussle, to cheers from the Sepang crowd.

In fierce heat, the race settled into a groove from there as Bastianini pulled out into a clear lead on Gresini Racing's Marquez, with Bagnaia third and Martin struggling for pace in fourth.

It was to remain that way to

the end.

Bastianini has suffered an injury-hampered campaign but the Italian nicknamed "The Beast" held his nerve at the front to cruise home for an ultimately comfortable victory, his first of the season.

"I'm tired and I have given 100 percent today," said the 25-year-old.

AFP



Alex Noren

Noren clings to one-shot lead at PGA Bermuda Championship

Miami, United States - Sweden's Alex Noren closed in on a first US PGA Tour title with a bogey-free four-under par 67 on Saturday for a one-stroke lead over Camilo Villegas in the Bermuda Championship in Southampton.

Noren, who won the most recent of his 10 DP World Tour titles at the French Open in 2018, was delighted to emerge from a testing round still atop the leaderboard, even though his lead was reduced by one shot.

"This is what you dream of, having a chance to win and being up in the final group on a Saturday, Sunday," said Noren, who got up and down for his fourth birdie of the day at 17 and saved par at the last to stand on 19-under par 194.

"I really enjoyed it today," he said. "I came off maybe a little colder start, but I played good enough to kind of get that four-

I played good enough to kind of get that four-under in the end. I'm very happy

ALEX NOREN



Emily Kristine Pedersen of Denmark putts on the 13th green during the third round of The ANNIKA on Saturday (AFP)

Pedersen extends lead as Vu makes charge at The Annika

Miami, United States - Denmark's Emily Kristine Pedersen extended her lead at the LPGA Tour's The Annika tournament to three strokes after shooting a six-under par 64 in Saturday's third round.

But South Korean Amy Young pushed herself into contention with a brilliant nine-under-par round of 61, leaving her in second place alongside American Lilia Vu, who shot 62.

The event is named after Swedish legend Annika Sorenstam, who won 72 LPGA titles, including 10 major crowns, and has attracted a strong field to the Pelican Golf Club in Bel-leair, Florida.

After rounds of 63 and 65, Pedersen maintained her consistency with a bogey-free round, gaining momentum with birdies on the second and

third holes. But she turned on the style on the back nine with four birdies, including on the par-4 18th.

"Pretty solid today. Was my first day without a bogey. I think I hit it really well. I had a lot of chances. Felt like I missed quite a few birdie putts out there," said the 27-year-old from Copenhagen.

But the round of the day came from Yang, who made seven birdies plus an eagle on par-4 fourth where she holed out from the fairway.

"Had a great driver, middle of the fairway. I had about 120 yards slightly into the wind. Hit a 9-iron, just soft 9-iron, one bounce in. It was great to see. Yeah, it was fun," she said.

The 34-year-old Yang has claimed four career victories on the LPGA Tour but has yet to win in the United States.

Canada beat Czechs to set up Italy BJK Cup final clash

Seville, Spain - Canada reached the Billie Jean King Cup final for the first time in their history with a thrilling 2-1 win over the Czech Republic on Saturday, setting up a championship match against Italy.

Four-time champions Italy beat Slovenia 2-0 earlier on in Seville in the first semi-final, winning both singles rubbers.

Canada, who were competing in the semi-finals for the first time in 35 years, knocked out the fancied Czechs, who have won the competition 11 times - behind only record 18-time winners the United States.

Canada's Leylah Fernandez beat Marketa Vondrousova 6-2, 2-6, 6-3 to level the tie at 1-1 after Barbora Krejcikova defeated Marina Stakusic 6-2, 6-1.

Then Fernandez and Gabriela Dabrowski defeated Krejcikova and Katerina Siniakova 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) in the deciding doubles.

"It's been a great day for us, for Team Canada," said Fernandez.

"Gaby was always there to attack and take it to them... I'm just happy I have a great partner out



Canada's Gabriela Dabrowski and Leylah Fernandez (L) celebrate their victory against Czech Republic's Barbora Krejcikova and Katerina Siniakova (AFP)

there (Dabrowski) who can show me how to do it."

Rookie Stakusic, 18, who recorded career-highlight wins over Spain's Rebeka Masarova and Poland's Magdalena Frech in the group, was swept aside in straight sets by world number 10 Krejcikova in the opening singles rubber.

However world number 35 Fernandez, who has enjoyed a fine week at the tournament, triumphed over 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova to take the tie to the deciding doubles.

World number seven Vondrousova converted only four out of 13 break points in the clash

which Fernandez took in three sets.

The Canadian returned to play in the gripping doubles encounter which followed, and with Dabrowski took a tight first set.

The second was even closer and they clinched with a tie-break victory.

AFP

under in the end. I'm very happy, happy with that and happy to be in the lead still."

Colombian veteran Villegas surged into contention with a six-under par 65 that featured seven birdies and a bogey.

Campbell wins Hong Kong Open

The 635th-ranked New Zealander Ben Campbell beat "frustrated" major winner Cameron Smith by one stroke for a stunning triumph at the \$2 million Hong Kong Open on Sunday.

Campbell roared to his first title on the Asian Tour with back-to-back birdies on the last two holes to card a final-round four-under-par 66 at a sunny Fanling.

The unheralded Kiwi finished on 19-under overall to snatch a famous victory in the LIV-supported International Series event.

"I was battling all day," said Campbell, whose career has been stymied by injuries.

"I've had quite a few injuries and bulged discs in the back and things like that, so I had to change the swing quite a bit, especially in the last two or three years.

Cavaliers hold off Warriors as Green ejected, Celtics romp

San Francisco, United States - The Cleveland Cavaliers held off Golden State 118-110 on Saturday in a fiery NBA clash that saw Warriors forward Draymond Green ejected in the third quarter after a skirmish with Donovan Mitchell.

Six Cavs players scored in double figures as Cleveland beat the Warriors for the second time in a week.

They had seized control with a 38-point second quarter, and



Darius Garland of Cleveland Cavaliers dribbles the ball during the game against the Golden State Warriors on Saturday (AFP)

were up by 10 after Caris LeVert's layup over Klay Thompson midway through the third.

Green knocked Mitchell out of bounds on that play and soon after Mitchell ran straight into Green, prompting Green to drop the ball and step toward him.

The two were held back from each other, but Green was handed his second technical foul of the game after video showed him elbowing Mitchell "a couple of plays before," War-

riors coach Steve Kerr said.

Kerr said he didn't know such a retroactive technical could be called.

"It was bizarre," he said.

In Boston, Jaylen Brown scored 29 points and Jayson Tatum added 27 as the Celtics romped to a 117-94 victory over the Toronto Raptors.

Kristaps Porzingis added 21 points and seven rebounds for the Celtics, who made it look easy.

DANCE OF SAMBA BOYS

Vinicius and Rodrygo keep Real Madrid on Girona's tail

Barcelona, Spain - Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo Goes struck twice each as Real Madrid thrashed Valencia 5-1 on Saturday to stay hot on the heels of shock La Liga leaders Girona.

Dani Carvajal opened the scoring for Los Blancos before the Brazilian duo took the reins as they romped to victory, to trail Girona by two points after they won 2-1 at Rayo Vallecano.

Madrid were without key player Jude Bellingham, watching on from a box at the Santiago Bernabeu alongside his mother after he suffered a shoulder injury last weekend from which he has not fully recovered.

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said it was his team's finest performance of the campaign to date.

"It was the best game, Valencia were not able to show their best level because we played very well," Ancelotti told reporters.

"In the last two matches we've been a complete team, playing good football, with quality, sacrifice, commitment, we've done well."

Vinicius, who toyed with Valencia's defence, was facing them for the first time since he was racially abused in the east coast club's stadium in May, sparking worldwide outrage.

Rodrygo set up his Brazilian compatriot's goals before scoring two himself on a superb night



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior (R) celebrates with Eduardo Camavinga after scoring against Valencia (AFP)

for a duo who had struggled for form until this week.

"Now we are in our best moment (of the season)," Rodrygo told Real Madrid TV.

"We are back to being the Rodry and Vini that the fans want to see... if they are happy then I am happy too."

Spain's top scorer with 10 league goals, Bellingham's absence

increased worries about Madrid's attacking prowess, but they were rapidly quelled.

Carvajal dispelled doubts with a superb left-foot strike from outside the area in the third minute. Andriy Lunin, starting in goal again for Madrid after Kepa Arrizabalaga joined Thibaut Courtois on the sidelines, denied Valencia forward Hugo Duro

twice in the early stages with fine stops at the other end.

Then Vinicius and Rodrygo lit up the Bernabeu.

Vinicius extended Real Madrid's lead with a unique strike, diving to chest the ball home after Rodrygo fizzed a low cross into the box for him.

He grabbed his second soon after the break, beating Giorgi

It was the best game, Valencia were not able to show their best level because we played very well. In the last two matches we've been a complete team, playing good football

CARLO ANCELOTTI

Mamardashvili at the near post from outside the box.

The Valencia goalkeeper erred badly almost immediately after to hand Madrid their fourth on a plate, passing the ball straight to Rodrygo, who stroked home. Rodrygo and Vinicius stepped up again in Bellingham's

absence, as they did in midweek when he was benched against Braga.

Rodrygo jinked into the area and finished well for Madrid's fifth, before Duro grabbed a consolation at the third time of asking for Valencia.

AFP



Raphael Dwamena

Ghanaian footballer Dwamena dies during match in Albania

Tirana, Albania - Former Ghana striker Raphael Dwamena died on Saturday after suffering a heart attack during an Albanian league match between KF Egnatia and FK Partizani, according to a statement by the Albanian football federation.

"Paramedics on the pitch rushed him to hospital, where he died at the age of 28," said the federation.

Dwamena earned eight caps for Ghana and was once considered one of the country's rising stars but encountered several cardiac problems over the course of his career.

In 2017, the attacker was unable to join Brighton due to these health issues, and he eventually moved to Spain.

Four years later, the Ghanaian collapsed during a cup match in Austria between his side Blau-Weiss Linz and Hartberg, but recovered and continued his playing career.



Fabio Miretti of Juventus heads the ball during their Italian Serie A match against Cagliari on Saturday (AFP)

Juve climb top as Milan blow two-goal lead

Rome, Italy - Juventus went provisionally top of Serie A Saturday thanks to a 2-1 home win over Cagliari after AC Milan let slip a two-goal lead and were relieved to cling on for a draw at Lecce.

This was a fifth straight win for Massimiliano Allegri's Juventus who top Serie A on 29 points with their early season title rivals Inter Milan, on 28, playing Frosinone on Sunday.

Juventus play Inter in Turin in late November.

Juve's powerfully built central defender Gleison Bremer was

unmarked in the middle of the box when he headed home on the hour to break the deadlock.

Another defensive player Daniele Rugani forced home in equally simple fashion from a corner on 70 minutes to make it 2-0. Alberto Dossena pulled one back with a bullet header on 75 minutes to break a run of seven clean sheets for Juventus, who then managed to see out the game.

Earlier, Milan blew a two-goal lead at Lecce but sighed in collective relief as a last-gasp won-

der goal for the hosts was disallowed in a 2-2 draw.

Garcia on the brink

Rudi Garcia is reportedly on the verge of being sacked after his Napoli team fell on Sunday to a shock 1-0 home defeat to Empoli which left the Serie A champions already well off the pace in this season's title race.

Napoli were loudly booed off by fans at the Stadio Maradona after Viktor Kovalenko's superb last-minute strike snatched the points for Empoli.

Mbappe hat-trick takes PSG top of Ligue 1

Paris, France - A clinical Kylian Mbappe scored a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain won 3-0 away at high-flying Reims on Saturday to move to the top of the Ligue 1 table, although coach Luis Enrique was still not satisfied with the France captain's performance.

Mbappe opened the scoring in the third minute in Champagne country and then netted twice more in the second half to give PSG a win which moved the reigning champions to the summit a point above Nice, who drew at Montpellier on Friday.

PSG were also grateful to goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma who denied Reims a route back into the game with a string of superb saves, as Luis Enrique's team recovered from their midweek Champions League loss away to AC Milan.

Mbappe is Ligue 1's leading scorer with 13 goals in 11 appearances this season, with the France captain also having netted twice in European competition.

Yet his coach was not entirely delighted with his superstar's display.

"We know Kylian Mbappe's worth, but he can do better. I want even more from him," the Spaniard said.



Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring against Reims on Saturday (AFP)

"He is one of the world's best players, but he still has a lot of room to get better. I don't want him to rest on his laurels."

Mbappe had earlier indicated that he was not completely pleased with his own game as he spoke to broadcaster Amazon Prime.

"In all modesty I don't need to be playing well to score goals, but I want to do both, score goals and play well. That is my objective, to always help the team as well as I can," Mbappe said.

Asked about bouncing back from the setback in Milan, Mbappe added: "It is a different competition and all we wanted to do was win. Nice drew and we wanted to take top spot. It's job done and we are happy with that."

"We will have time to think about the Champions League but Ligue 1 is a different competition and that means a different mindset and a different way of playing."

That 2-1 defeat in Milan on Tuesday left PSG's hopes of reaching the Champions League knockout phase in the balance with two group games still to go, but they do finally appear to have found their rhythm domestically after a stuttering start to the campaign.



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring against Brentford in their English Premier League match on Sunday (AFP)

Salah extends scoring streak to send Liverpool joint top

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Liverpool moved level on points with Manchester City and Arsenal at the top of the Premier League as Mohamed Salah extended his scoring streak at Anfield with a double in a 3-0 win over Brentford on Sunday.

The Egyptian took his tally for the season to 12, nine of which have come at Anfield, as Liverpool continued their perfect

record at home this season.

Nine of Salah's goals have come from Darwin Nunez assists and the Uruguayan played provider to break the deadlock after being frustrated in front of goal earlier in the first half.

Twice Nunez had the ball in the net only to be ruled offside.

But his clever pass into Salah was met with a calm finish into the far corner to open the flood-

gates on 39 minutes. Salah is the first player ever to score in each of Liverpool's first six home league games of a season.

Brentford had their chances as Allison Becker was needed to make great saves to deny Ethan Pinnock and Bryan Mbeumo.

However, there was no way back for the Bees once Salah was left unmarked to head in Kostas Tsimikas' cross to the back post

on the hour mark.

Diogo Jota then fired in the third 16 minutes from time as Liverpool made it nine wins and 27 goals from nine games at Anfield in all competitions this season. City can restore their three-point lead at the top of the table when they travel to Chelsea later on Sunday.

Aston Villa made it 13 consecutive home wins in the Pre-

mier League as Unai Emery's side eased past Fulham 3-1.

Antonee Robinson's own goal and a sweet strike from outside the box by Villa captain John McGinn put the hosts in command by half-time.

A superb counter-attack, rounded off by Ollie Watkins, secured the points midway through the second half, before Raul Jimenez pulled a goal back.



Muscat CT's Shoaib Khan, Akash Mohite and Aiyappa CR

Muscat CT, VLCC win in Premier Division

Muscat - Muscat CT defeated Zawawi Powertech by nine wickets in the Premier Division League 2023-24 powered by Muscat Pharmacy LLC on Friday.

Batting first, Zawawi Powetech were all out for 164 with Akash Mohite taking five wickets and Afriedh KT picking three. Kalarasan N top-scored with 46 for Zawawi and had fine support from Mohamed Raheem who made 31.

In response, Aiyappa CR and Shoaib Khan scored fifties as Muscat CT reached the target with nine wickets in hand.

In another Premier Division match, VLCC defeated IAS Engineering by six wickets. VLCC bundled out IAS Engineering for 116 runs as Sachindu Colombage and Sohail Khan took four wickets each. Muzahir Raza picked the other two.

Kasun Liyanage (45) was the top-scorer for IAS Engineering. In response, Sahil Dias (45*) and Sultan Ahmed(32) guided VLCC to a six-wicket victory.

BRIEF SCORES:
Zawawi Powertech 164/10 in 47.3 overs (Kalarasan N 46 (75) Akash Mohite 5/32, Afriedh KT 3/44) lost to Muscat CT 165/1 in 26.3 overs (Aiyappa CR 69(70), Shoaib Khan 52(68) by 9 wickets.
IAS 116/10 in 34 overs (Kasun Liyanage 45(63); Sohail Khan 4/19, Sachindu Colombage 4/29) lost to VLCC 118/4 in 25.2 overs.

'I'M ENJOYING IT'

Kane scores brace as Bayern go top of Bundesliga, Dortmund lose at Stuttgart

Berlin, Germany - Harry Kane scored two first-half goals as Bayern Munich beat promoted Heidenheim 4-2 on Saturday, sending the Bavarians to the top of the table.

Heidenheim replied with two goals in three second-half minutes to equalise and Bayern needed late goals from Raphael Guerreiro and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting to secure victory.

Bayern finish Saturday atop the table but Bayer Leverkusen - who have won 15 and drawn one of their 16 matches in all competitions this season - can return to the top with a win on Sunday over Union Berlin.

"It was a changing match," said Thomas Mueller. "At one point we had it in our grip, then we didn't, then we did again.

"What was nice is that we were able to react, that we managed to switch to a higher gear.

"It brought us to the top of the table and I hope that Leverkusen drop points sometime."

Kane now has 17 goals in 11 league games since joining the German champions from boyhood club Tottenham in the summer.

"I'm enjoying it," said Kane after the match, calling the result "an important victory that probably not many people are going to remember in a few weeks but these are the games you have to make sure you win."



Bayern Munich's Harry Kane (L) celebrates with Leroy Sane and Aleksandar Pavlovic after scoring against Heidenheim on Saturday (AFP)

Kane wasted no time in getting on the scoresheet, collecting the ball with his back to goal and scoring on the turn for the opener after 14 minutes.

Kane doubled up shortly before half-time, heading in unmarked from a corner.

With Bayern cruising, manager Thomas Tuchel made three changes shortly after half-time and within 10 minutes the visitors were level.

Tim Kleindienst and Jan-Niklas Beste scored in a three-minute period, the latter after a

mistake from Kim Min-jae, bringing the score to 2-2 with 20 minutes remaining.

With Bayern wobbling, former Dortmund defender Guerreiro struck his first goal for the German champions, before Choupo-Moting scored with five minutes

remaining to seal the win.

Borussia Dortmund lost 2-1 at Stuttgart, the returning Serhou Guirassy giving the home side victory with a late penalty, his 15th goal of the season to stay hot on Kane's heels.

Dortmund manager Edin

Terzic selected the same XI who managed a hard-fought 2-0 win against Newcastle in the Champions League on Tuesday and it showed, with the lethargic visitors struggling to contain the home side.

Visiting goalkeeper Gregor Kobel gave away an early spot-kick but stopped Chris Fuehrich's tame effort, becoming the first Dortmund stopper in a decade to save a penalty in the league.

The visitors did open the scoring with their first shot on target, Niclas Fuellkrug tapping in a ball which former Dortmund defender Dan-Axel Zagadou allowed to run through his legs.

Stuttgart struck back shortly before half-time, Jamie Leweling threading the ball perfectly for Brighton loanee Deniz Undav to score.

Guirassy, who missed two league games with a hamstring complaint, came off the bench late and converted the penalty for the win. Dortmund have lost two and drawn one of their past three league games and sit eight points behind Bayern with just 11 matches played.

"You have to admit that we're being shown our limits by some opponents at the moment," Fuellkrug told Sky. "We lacked a lot, on a number of levels."

Terzic hit back, saying "far too often we try and sort things out later on the mic rather than doing so on the pitch."

US star Rapinoe departs football with injury and defeat in NWSL final

San Diego, United States - US women's football icon Megan Rapinoe limped out of the final game of her storied career Saturday, suffering a suspected torn Achilles tendon less than three minutes into the National Women's Soccer League Final which her OL Reign team lost to NJ/NY Gotham FC.

No other players were near Rapinoe when she went down on the pitch, a stunned crowd at

Snapdragon Stadium holding their breath as medical staff attended her. fter several minutes, the dejected OL Reign star limped off the field, fans giving her a massive ovation as she was replaced by Bethany Balcer.

The 38-year-old American had vowed the match was "really the last one," in a career that included World Cup titles in 2015 and 2019 and gold at the 2012 London Olympics. Despite her

many achievements, Saturday's defeat means Rapinoe retires from the game without an NWSL championship title.

"It was a tough one. Definitely not how I envisioned this last one going," a tearful Rapinoe said after the game. "I am pretty sure I tore my Achilles. "Just thank you to everyone who's been on the journey for all this time. It's been amazing, maybe besides this, I couldn't have written it any

different," she added.

Celebrated for her off-field activism as well as her success on the pitch, Rapinoe announced earlier this year it would be her final season.

The 2019 FIFA Women's Player of the Year ended her epic national team career with 63 goals, earning 203 caps over more than 17 years and played her final international game in September.



OL Reign's US midfielder Megan Rapinoe waves to the crowd after their match against Gotham FC on Saturday (AFP)

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DADIA PARK

CHARRED TO ASHES

Desolation prevails in Dadia park after Europe's biggest fire

This aerial view shows a burnt forest in the Evros region

Perched atop a metal ladder, Athanassia Pistola helps her husband nail the roof of a temporary pen for their farm animals that survived a gigantic fire that ravaged northeastern Greece in August.

Next to it, all that remains of their previous sheepfold is a pile of melted iron and other materials, the rest of it swept away by the flames that also destroyed part of the important Dadia national park, situated near the Greek-Turkish border.

Out of the Pistola family's nearly 80 goats, only three survived, their backs still charred. Unprecedented in Greece in its intensity, the Dadia fire has been classed by the European Commission as the largest ever recorded in the EU.

"We did not expect the fire to spread so quickly... it crossed 40km in eight hours," said Kostas Pistolas, 63, whose family has grown cattle in the area since the early 20th century.

APOCALYPTIC LANDSCAPE

His eyes are fixed on a dozen surviving cows wandering among charred trees in a now-apocalyptic landscape. Burning for three weeks, the fire consumed more than 90,000 hectares of woods and crops in an area protected by the European Natura network, and renowned for its biodiversity.

In the park itself, the fire killed hundreds of animals including deer, reptiles and turtles, according to Dora Skartsi, head of the Thrace biodiversity protection association. It was 'a severe blow to a rich ecosystem', Skartsi told AFP.

The smell of burning still permeates this area in southwest Evros, where a first fire broke out on August 19 before linking up with another on the heights of Dadia.

On the hills above, blackened pines and oaks alternate with olive groves and pastures gone up in smoke, in stark contrast to the white wind turbines in the background.

A pair of deer rushes up the slopes where charred turtle shells still lie. The loss of farm animals is acutely felt in a mainly agricultural area that relies on pasture breeding.

Kostas Dounakis, head of the breeders' union in the Evros capital of Alexandroupolis, said almost half of the



Athanassia Pistola (R) and Thanassis Pistolas rebuild their burnt sheepfold after wildfire in a forest in the Evros region, near the village of Dadia



The worst thing is that there are no more pastures. Surviving animals are having trouble finding something to eat

KOSTAS DOUNAKIS, LIVESTOCK BREEDER



The survivors - goats of Kostas Pistolas, 63, livestock breeder, in a burnt forest of the Evros region



This photograph shows a burnt house after wildfires in the village of Kirki, near Alexandroupolis town, in the Evros region

region's farmers have been affected - either their livestock has been burned or their facilities have been damaged.

"The worst thing is that there are no more pastures. Surviving animals are having trouble finding something to eat," said the 53-year-old, who lost 150 goats, half his herd. His warehouse, containing 150 tonnes of animal feed, also burned down.

Athanassia Pistola's thoughts wander back to the first days after the disaster. "We were both devastated, we wanted to give up everything. Then, we thought about the remaining animals, we told ourselves to continue at least for this winter," the breeder said.

Some of the locals have blamed the disaster on drought, climate change, and poor coordination among firefighters. But above all, they bemoan the drastic fall in the number of livestock breeders, which has led to the land being abandoned in recent decades.

"The forests have become very dense," said Dounakis, explaining that without cattle forest grazing, the accumulation of vegetation and fallen leaves and branches create a biomass that is 'worse than a powder keg'.

WILD SPECIES

In the heart of the Dadia park, which houses 360 species of plant and 200 different species of bird, long tree trunks have been placed horizontally as a bulwark against soil erosion. It is a necessary emergency measure to facilitate the rebirth of the forest, specialists say.

"Mediterranean ecosystems tend to regrow," said Sylvia Zakkak, 39, a biologist with the local Environment and Climate Change Agency. "We will observe the evolution of the fauna and flora and intervene if necessary," she said.

Most importantly, the park also shelters 36 of Europe's 38 raptor species including the emblematic black vulture. Fortunately, the vultures have reappeared after the fire.

"Special platforms will be installed to help them rebuild their nests," Zakkak said. But other birds of prey including hawks and owls, in addition to other species that need thick foliage to nest, are more vulnerable to the fire damage because the forest could take decades to repair.

AFP



Climate activists hold banners and chant slogans as they march to demand drastic reduction in global plastic production during the Break Free From Plastic Movement.

Battle looms over renewed plastic treaty negotiations

UN TREATY

PACT TO QUASH PLASTIC

Representatives from 175 nations are meeting in Nairobi from today (November 13) to negotiate for the first time what concrete measures should be included in a binding global treaty to end plastic pollution.

In 2022, it was agreed to finalise a world-first UN treaty by 2024 to address the scourge of plastics found everywhere from mountain tops to ocean depths, and within human blood and breast milk.

Negotiators have met twice already but Nairobi is the first opportunity to debate a draft treaty published in September that outlines the many pathways to tackling the plastic problem.

The material made from fossil fuels is pervasive in the modern world, sparking growing alarm in recent years.

The meeting to debate its future comes just before crucial climate talks in the oil-rich United Arab Emirates later this month, where discussions over fossil fuels and their planet-heating emissions are due to dominate the agenda. There is broad consensus that a plastics treaty is needed, though different opinions about what should be in it.

"That's the big battle we will see now," said Eirik Lindebjerg from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), who will be among thousands of attendees at the high-

stakes talks at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) global headquarters in Nairobi.

A number of countries and environment groups want the treaty to ban single-use products and impose strict rules limiting how much new plastic can actually be made, among other so-called 'high ambition' measures.

Industry bodies and major plastic-producing economies have been advocating for years for measures that focus on improving waste management and reusing and recycling their products, rather than addressing their origin.

MAKE OR BREAK

The 'zero draft' underpinning the weeklong talks puts all options on the table and negotiations are expected to get heated as competing positions finally go head-to-head.

The treaty could be a pact for nature or 'a cosy accommodation with the plastic industry' depending on what direction the negotiations take, Peter Thomson, the UN secretary-general's special envoy for the ocean, said last month.

Bottles and shopping bags choke waterways while tiny pieces of microplastics show up in food and throughout the bodies of animals and humans.

Plastic also contributes to global warming, accounting for 3.4% of global emissions in 2019, according to the OECD.

Despite growing awareness of the problem, the amount of new plastic being made is exploding: annual production is on track to triple within four decades, though less than 10% is recycled.

Ahead of Nairobi, around 60 nations voiced collective alarm about this trend and called for 'binding provisions in the treaty to restrain and reduce the consumption and production' of plastic.

Graham Forbes from Greenpeace USA, who is also part of the Nairobi meet, said, "The treaty will succeed or fail based on how it restricts upstream plastic production. You can't stop the bathtub from overflowing until you turn off the tap."

EMOTIONAL IDEOLOGY

Many countries are reluctant to back absolute cuts in production, including China, the United States, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC countries, which all have large petrochemical industries.

The EPS Industry Alliance, a North American trade association for expanded polystyrene businesses, said the treaty had suffered a 'lack of independent scientific review' and warned of 'unintended consequences' from some proposals.

"There is a tremendous amount of rhetoric surrounding plastic that is riddled with emotional ideology aimed at inanimate objects," said alliance executive director Betsy Bowers, who will be in Nairobi.

The week long meet aims to conclude negotiations next year so the treaty can be adopted by mid-2025. At the last talks in Paris, campaigners accused large plastic-producing nations of deliberately stalling after two days were lost debating procedural points.

This time around, the sessions have been extended by two days but there are still concerns a weaker treaty could emerge if time for detailed discussion is swallowed up going in circles.

"If they can't make progress here, it will be a very intense 2024 if they are to agree to a meaningful treaty by the end," said Lindebjerg.



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