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Oman most improved nation in food security in last decade

Sultanate ranked 35th in the world, 4th in MENA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In the last decade, Oman's food security situation improved the most in the world, according to the latest Global Food Security Index (GFSI). The sultanate is ranked 35th in the world in the index in 2022 and fourth in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Oman's score increased by 13.8 points since 2012 to 71.2 in 2022, which gives it the distinction of being the most improved country in the world, followed by China (+13.7), Vietnam (+13.4), Bolivia (+12.2), the United Arab Emirates (+12) and Saudi Arabia (+11.8) among others.

The 11th edition of GFSI was published by Economist Impact and supported by Corteva Agriscience. The index measured food security in 113 nations, based on food affordability, availability, quality and safety, and sustainability and adaptation. Since its launch in 2012, GFSI has become a valuable tool



across all sectors, serving as a policy benchmark for governments and a country diagnostic tool for investment for both the private and public sectors.

The 2022 index revealed a fragile global food system ill prepared to weather shocks like the war in Ukraine and the summer's heat waves. The GFSI report found that insufficient investments and increasing volatility continued to drive the

deterioration of the global food environment. 'This year's skyrocketing food prices and rising global hunger are not just the product of conflict and extreme weather; they are also the reflection of a worrying trend of declining resilience in our food system,' it stated.

The MENA region is led by the UAE (world rank 23rd), followed by Israel (24th), Qatar (30th), Oman (35th), Bahrain

(38th), Saudi Arabia (41st), Jordan (47th), Turkey (49th) and Kuwait (50th) among others. Oman scored 88.6 in the affordability category (out of 100), 64.3 for availability, 73.2 for quality and safety, and 53.6 for sustainability and adaptation.

Finland is ranked first in the world, followed by Ireland, Norway, France, the Netherlands, Japan, Canada, Sweden, the

United Kingdom and Portugal, making the top ten.

"The 2022 GFSI highlights the crucial impact of structural issues and risks to food security such as volatility in agricultural production, trade and supply-chain disruption, scarcity of natural resources, and increasing economic inequality," said Pratima Singh, principal of Policy and Insights at Economist Impact.

Oman's pledge to net zero emissions gets a nod from John Kerry

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's announcement pledging to reach net zero emissions by 2050 has been appreciated by John Kerry, Special US Presidential Envoy for Climate.

The announcement was made by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, when he presided over the Council of Ministers meeting on Tuesday.

"I welcome Oman's announcement of a 2050 net zero target and the establishment of the new Oman Sustainability Centre to help deliver on it. A good signal for deepening our cooperation on climate in the days to come," Kerry tweeted.

In response, Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, Foreign Minister, tweeted, "Oman's net zero 2050 target is at the heart of our transition strategy. We look forward to engaging at COP 27 (in Egypt) and thereafter."

As part of the Royal attention to improve environment performance and alleviate the impact of climate change, the year 2050 has been set as a date for net zero carbon emissions.

A national plan has been drafted to achieve this goal, besides setting up the Oman Sustainability Centre to supervise and follow up on zero carbon emission plans and programmes.

His Majesty the Sultan gave



I welcome Oman's announcement of a 2050 net zero target. A good signal for deepening our cooperation on climate in the days to come

JOHN KERRY

directives to all units of the State's Administrative Apparatus to cooperate to ensure the success of this national plan.

Oman is committed to a low carbon economy and reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, according to the sultanate's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

NDCs are at the heart of the Paris Agreement, which Oman ratified in 2019, and the achievement of these long-term goals. NDCs embody efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Salma al Hashmi awarded Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Salma Ali al Hashmi, board member of Omani-Italian Friendship Association, has been conferred the prestigious 'Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy'.

The prestigious order of chivalry is awarded by decree of the President of the Italian Republic on the recommendation of Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs in acknowledgment of those individuals who have achieved extraordinary results in the preservation and promotion of bilateral relations between Italy and other nations.

H E Federica Favi, Italian Ambassador to Oman, presented the knighthood, on behalf of the Italian President on Thursday, saying, "We are delighted to recognise the significant and en-



(Supplied photo)

during contribution Salma Ali al Hashmi has made to strengthening the social, cultural, sporting and business ties between Italy and the sultanate."

Salma, vice president of marketing at Al Mouj Muscat and a

board member of Mazoon Dairy Company, has drawn on her considerable business acumen to create new networking, information exchange and investment opportunities for the benefit of both nations. Beyond

her work with Omani-Italian Friendship Association, Salma has been instrumental in establishing several successful initiatives, ranging from youth exchange programmes to fundraising for pandemic research at an institute in Rome, and establishing opportunities for bilateral trade.

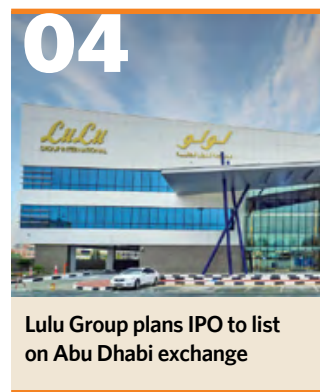
Commenting on the award, she said, "I am deeply honoured to have been awarded the decoration of the Order of the Star of Italy. It has been a great privilege to be able to contribute to the commercial and cultural exchange and fruitful cooperation between our two great nations."

"I look forward to building on this valuable relationship, as we continue to foster beneficial opportunities for our youth, our business communities and our cultural institutions."

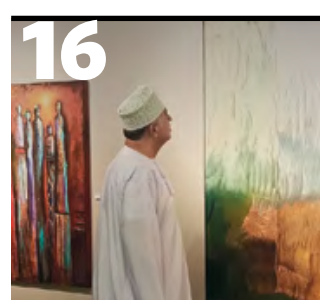
41 PEOPLE KILLED IN TURKEY COAL MINE EXPLOSION



Local residents react as they wait outside a coal mine after an explosion in Amasra, in Bartin Province, Turkey, on Saturday. Oman expressed its sympathy with Turkey for the fatal explosion which killed at least 41 people and trapped dozens of others underground. The sultanate extended its condolences to the Turkish government, the people and the families of the victims besides wishing speedy recovery to the injured (AFP) See also [page 10](#)



Lulu Group plans IPO to list on Abu Dhabi exchange



'People Need People' art show at Matti Sirvio Art Gallery

Expatriates now eligible to sit on OCCI's Board of Directors

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has added new seats on its board that will be reserved for expatriate investors and representatives of public share holding companies.

The decision is part of an expansion of the board based on the new OCCI bylaw. "Expat candidates are now welcome on the OCCI board. There will be one seat for an expatriate investor and five seats for public share holding companies that have expatriate chief executives," an official of OCCI told *Muscat Daily*.

Earlier this month, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued a Royal Decree (56/2022), that



promulgated the bylaw of OCCI.

Under the new bylaw, OCCI's Board of Directors will consist of five members from Muscat governorate, heads from the remaining ten governorates, five representatives of public share holding companies

listed on Muscat Stock Exchange or their chief executives, and one expat investor benefiting from the Investors Residency Programme.

According to the new bylaw, board members must have a Bachelor's degree or practical ex-

There will be one seat for an expatriate investor and five seats for public share holding companies that have expatriate chief executives

perience in conducting business in the private sector of not less than ten years. The total number of members on the OCCI board is 21, including five representing Muscat and one each from the ten remaining governorates.

According to the bylaw, the

chairman of the Board of Directors should have work experience of minimum 15 years in the private sector and is not permitted to run for chairmanship for more than two consecutive terms.

Ali bin Salim al Kasbi, director of OCCI's Legal Affairs Department, informed that Royal Decree No 56/2022 has detailed the prerogatives and powers of OCCI, including a general strategy regulating the activities of the private sector and setting a plan necessary for execution of the strategy.

The decree has added an article which gives authority to OCCI to classify companies and establishments based on set criteria and standards, Kasbi added.

According to Dr Mohammed bin Rashid al Badi, director of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion's Legal Affairs Department, registration of voters for the board's elections was held from September 29 to October 13.

"Voters should be holders of Riyadh Cards or have at least one Omani employee registered with the Public Authority for Social Insurance, besides having paid the OCCI membership fee up to October 31, 2022. Regulations stipulate that the candidate should be an Omani, with the exception to the representatives of the joint stock companies registered with Muscat Stock Exchange and foreign investors having investment residency," he added.

MAFWR invites investment in five fisheries projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) will offer suitable land for investments in the sectors within its ambit.

As per its programme to boost the economy linked to fisheries, the ministry is planning to set up three fish collection centres in South Sharqiyah and Dhofar governorates and two fish markets in Sinaw in North Sharqiyah and Buraimi in Buraimi governorate.

It called for tenders from Omani companies for setting up the fish collection centres and fish markets in those governorates. The last date for submission of bids is November 10, the ministry added.

A fish collection centre will come up in the Al Saqla area in the wilayat of Jalan Bani Bu Ali in South Sharqiyah. The two other centres will be at Hadbeen area



and Sadah area in the wilayat of Sadah, in Dhofar.

The ministry has also appealed to investors to bid for investing in five stores in the central fish market in Al-Fulaj in Barka and to manage and operate the retail fish market in Wadi Al Ma'awel in South Batinah governorate.

Oman's fish production

dipped 22.6 per cent to 346,391 tonnes, until the end of May this year, compared to 447,391 tonnes during the same period last year, according to data released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

NCSI's data show that the total value of fish production increased by 1.9 per cent to reach

RO168.8mn at the end of May this year, compared to the same period last year.

The artisanal fishing sector, which constitutes the bulk of fish production in the sultanate saw a decrease of 24.3 per cent at 324,004 tonnes at the end of May this year compared to 428,041 tonnes during the same period in 2021.

Al Wusta governorate topped the sultanate's list of landed fish at 126,937 tonnes, registering a fall of 32 per cent in May this year compared to the same period last year, followed by South Sharqiyah at 101,303 tonnes and Dhofar at 32,646 tonnes.

Muscat governorate's artisanal fishing increased by 21 per cent at the end of May to reach 13,403 tonnes compared to 11,081 tonnes during the same period last year. The coastal and commercial fishing sectors registered an increase by 16.7 per cent and 8.5 per cent, respectively, according to NCSI.

OBFA LOOKS INTO INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES



The Oman British Friendship Society (OBFA) held its annual reception in London on Saturday in the presence of a number of officials and businessmen from the sultanate and the United Kingdom. Oman's delegation was led by H E Said bin Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, who focused on Oman's logistics sector as an enabler for rapid growth in the sultanate. The meeting reviewed the available opportunities in the fields of transport, aviation, logistics, communications and information technology, and discussed ways to enhance cooperation and trade exchange between Oman and the UK by finding investment opportunities (ONA)

Oman lifts ban on catching kingfish

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The seasonal ban on fishing and trading of kingfish in Oman is coming to an end on Sunday with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) allowing fishermen to embark on their regular activities related to kingfish trade.

The annual two-month ban

on fishing, trading and possession of kingfish came into effect on August 15. This ban aims to protect kingfish stock from overfishing.

In a statement on Thursday, the ministry said, 'Fishermen will be allowed to embark on catching and trading kingfish in the sultanate from Sunday, October 16, 2022'.

MAFWR thanked fishermen for their commitment during

the ban period, as the ministry officials continued their regular operations in the coastal areas to implement the ban.

In preparation for the ban, the ministry - represented by the directorates and fisheries departments in the coastal governorates of the sultanate - carried out guidance and awareness activities among fishermen, transporters and businesses.

FORESIGHT



SYED ADIL ABBAS

Abbas, an MBA graduate from Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK), is currently based in Muscat, and has over 20 years of international experience working with the public and private sectors in the Middle East, Far East, Africa and India.

Can you send green energy via networks that stretch over several thousand kilometres? The dream of global green energy faces obstacles on the way, but many experts maintain that super grids are the future.

An ambitious solar-power sharing link between Gujarat in India and Oman, nearly 1,000 kilometres to the west, could become the first phase of an electricity network that may one day cover the entire world. This link is a part of the One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG) initiative planned by the International Solar Alliance (ISA) that has currently 90 member countries including Oman.

According to the ISA, the next phase of the network would stretch over 3,000 kilometres east from India and through Bangladesh, Myanmar and Vietnam. Additional connections between already existing networks in the Middle East, Europe and Africa could create a network that spans 10 time zones and supplies energy from one part of the globe to another. The goal is to have a fully connected network ready by 2050. The sun never actually sets - when it sets in one place, it rises in another and if we can connect the entire network, then we have green electricity everywhere - voila!

The idea of the giant network has been around for decades and has often met with huge technical, economic and political obstacles. Most recently, the turbulence surrounding the war in Ukraine has changed the energy market in a short span of time and highlighted the challenges associated with transnational projects.

Nevertheless, many energy experts

maintain that the time for super grids is now. Technological advances, lower costs and increasing ambitions of governments to switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy to address global warming are driving the change.

The member countries have already given the green light to the OSOWOG initiative, the World Bank has signed up as a partner, and the French energy company, Électricité de France (EDF) is carrying out studies to determine how it can be successfully realised. If more governments and development banks can be persuaded to take on the risk of building various parts of the project, private investors will also bid in.

WORLDWIDE POWER GRID

Delivery of energy across national borders in limited quantities is quite common, for example between the USA and Canada or internally in Europe, but the prospect of being able to scale it up to the so-called super networks is becoming increasingly important because it can help to reduce the supply uncertainty from energy sources that are dependent on weather.

A utility network that spans local weather systems has the potential to provide electricity to disaster-stricken areas. It could capture excess energy from an area with many wind farms on a day when the wind is strong and utilise the large network to supply energy to the same area when the wind turbines are idle. This flexibility becomes more and more important as the share of renewable energy in the

total energy supply increases.

The ability to transport electricity over long distances is also important in order to utilise the resources in often-remote areas that have the best conditions for the production of renewable energy, e.g. uninhabited, windswept plains that have room for many windmills or scorching deserts that are suitable for solar panels. Countries with this kind of topography and small populations, such as Mongolia, see the growing global demand for green energy as an export opportunity.

Places that have very high-energy consumption but no space for solar panels, such as Singapore, are interested in importing the energy.

In the past, transporting electricity over hundreds of kilometres via conventional AC cables has not been profitable due to energy losses that grew proportionally with the distance. Now, improvements in technology and hardware and lower costs for the special cables that can handle the high voltage with far less transmission losses have meant that transporting energy across continents became far more economically viable than in the past.

The current forces behind the so-called super networks argue that the large networks can be built using the networks that already exist. Many of the electricity networks in South Asia are already connected, the same applies to the countries in the Middle East, and Africa, where they have a number of regional networks. If we add supply lines strategically between local regions and strengthen the networks where the connections are weak, we can potentially put something very large together.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

Tender

University of Technology and Applied Sciences

Electronic Local Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender Committee at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences announces the offering of the practices shown in the following table:

M	Tender number	Subject	Companies that are eligible to participate	Document's Fee	Last date for electronic purchasing	Last date bid submission
1	35/2022	Supplying network equipment and computer laboratories, University of Technology and Applied Sciences (Salalah Technical College)	Companies and institutions specialized in this field and registered with the Tender Board excellent degree, first, second, third and fourth	(25) Twenty Five Riyal Omani	24/10/2022 14:30 pm	30/10/2022 at 10:00 am

- You can purchase the tender documents electronically from Monday 16/10/2022, starting from (7:30 am) through the link below:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- All bidding companies must attach with their bids electronic temporary tender bond in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, not less than (1%) of the bid value, addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission. The bid must be submitted sealed by the authorized person, and submitted with the electronic bidding system of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the name and number of the tender only.
- Preference in awarding will be given to small and medium enterprises registered with the Authority for SME development and whose bid includes the biggest percentage of Omanisation and a biggest purchase percentage of national products.
- The University shall not be bound to accept the highest or any other bid.

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Sumaiya makes Oman proud, wins 'Stars of Science' TV show

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani innovator Sumaiya Said Sulaiman al Siyabiya was crowned winner of *Stars of Science*, Season 14, on Friday.

Arab innovators compete to develop tech solutions for their communities in the popular Qatari edutainment reality TV show.

Sumaiya took home US\$300,000 in prize money for her environment-based project titled 'Bio-analysis of microplastics from the perspective of biology and nanotechnology'.

Sumaiya beat 30,000 competitors from the MENA region with her innovative project and outstanding performance in the qualification rounds, which lasted three months.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Sumaiya said, "I am proud of winning this title and the opportunity to apply this important scientific innovation in conservation of environment and human health."

"I thank every one from Oman, the GCC and Arab countries who voted for me."

Following her success, Sumaiya is expecting support for commercial production of her device. "I hope to see local and international investment in my project, which will open new vistas for environmental protection.



I am proud of winning this title and the opportunity to apply this important scientific innovation in conservation of environment

SUMAIYA SAID SULAIMAN AL SIYABIYA

I urge the authorities concerned in Oman to support my project to achieve its goals. The sultanate and the world need this project because it will help get rid of

plastics."

Sumaiya's remediation and marine microplastics disposal device can help serve as an invaluable tool to address the issue

of marine plastics, which account for at least 85 per cent of the total marine waste, according to the UN Environment Programme report From Pollution to Solution.

Free of chemicals and environmentally friendly, the device is a floating sphere comprising of microbial mats and nanomaterials that dissolve microplastics it comes into contact with converting these into carbon dioxide and water.

The device floats among patches of plastic garbage in oceans, trapping and disposing of microplastics.

Congratulatory messages poured in from all quarters after she was declared the winner. Wishing her the best, H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, said, "We wish Sumaiya all success in continuing her scientific efforts in the service of her country and the world."



Online science quiz fest from Oct 21

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to cultivate an environment conducive to scientific learning, Indian Social Club (ISC) officially launched Indian Science Forum (ISF) on Thursday.

The group has been specifically formed to organise science related programmes for children and to identify, encourage and inspire youth having aptitude in science and technology to pursue a career in science.

Additionally, it aims to guide the younger generation and equip them to face new challenges in their studies as well as their day-to-day lives.

ISF's first event will be an online quiz from October 21 for all students of Indian schools in Oman. Each team will consist of two students, both from the same school. Called ISF Igniter 2022, the event will be conducted over a span of three days by Hala Jamal, a popular quiz-master of Oman

Introducing ISF Igniter 2022,

Dr J Retnakumar, coordinator of the forum, said, "In the age of science and technology, it is time to focus on our future on a scientific level. This knowledge hunt gives an opportunity for the youth to explore the world of science, technology and innovation. ISF Igniter 2022 will be a flagship event organised and hosted by ISC where we celebrate the knowledge of science of the past, present and future."

Babu Rajendran, honorary general secretary of ISC, said, "Various competitions related to science, including debates, digital symposia, on-the-spot presentations and science skits are planned as part of the science fests in the coming sessions."

The event will be open to participation for students from Grade 5 to 12 currently enrolled in Indian schools in Oman. Teams can register online through bit.ly/RegisterISF

Suresh Akkandathil and Latha Sreejith are the administrative coordinator and co-coordinator respectively of ISF.

Oman, Zanzibar ink 4 pacts in research, digital empowerment

Muscat - Oman and Zanzibar signed three memoranda of understanding (MoU) and an executive programme in the fields of research, innovation and digital empowerment on Thursday.

The pacts were signed in the presence of Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi, President of Zanzibar.

The first MoU was signed between the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Zanzibar's Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. The MoU is aimed at cooperation in the fields of higher education, research, innovation, vocational training, knowledge and technology transfer, and establishing a knowledge-based economy.

It was signed by H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Saada Mkuya, Zanzibar's Minister of Finance and Planning.

The second MoU was signed between Oman Data Park and Zanzibar's Ministry of Infrastructure, Communications and Transport. It deals with establishing, managing and operating a data centre in Zanzibar. This comes within the framework of Zanzibar's plans of automating tendering systems, transforming



into an e-government, storing data and information for the public and private sectors, as well as enhancing data security in Zanzibar.

The MoU was signed by Maqbool Salim al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, and Dr Khalid Salum Mohammed, Zanzibar's Minister of Infrastructure, Communications and Transport.

A memorandum of understanding was also signed between Target Information Solutions and Zanzibar's Ministry of Finance and Planning. This MoU deals with automation

and digital empowerment by providing new programmes that contribute to expanding revenue sources. It will also develop the digital infrastructure in Zanzibar.

The MoU was signed by Ali Ahmed al Mujaini, CEO of Target Information Solutions, and Saada Mkuya, Zanzibar's Minister of Finance and Planning.

An executive programme was also signed between the National Records and Archives Authority and Zanzibar's National Archives. This programme is in the field of historic documentation and managing documents

with the aim of exchanging copies of documents, research and scientific studies. Additionally, it targets exchanging expertise and training in the field of repairing documents and scientific periodicals.

The programme was signed by Dr Hamad Mohammed al Dhoyani, Chairman of NRAA, and Zanzibar's Saada Mkuya, Minister of Finance and Planning.

Dr Mwinyi concluded his trip to Muscat on Friday. He was seen off at the airport by H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister.

CPA recovers over RO567,000 for customers in Q3 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has recovered over half a million rials for customers in the July-September period of 2022.

A report issued by CPA showed that the total amount recovered was RO567,132 in the third quarter of 2022. "These recoveries were done through the efforts of CPA to resolve complaints submitted to it by consumers against businesses," it stated.

The CPA report also indicated that it received 8,215 complaints and 2,023 reports of violations across several sectors that fall under the authority's jurisdiction, including automobiles and auto services, building materials, electronic appliances, and furnishings and furniture workshops.

"The authority continues to spread consumer awareness among members of the community," a CPA official said.

He added, "On August 23, the authority launched a national campaign to recall faulty vehicles, called 'It is not possible to delay.'"

The two-month campaign aims to enhance integration of work between various government and private agencies to re-



(Supplied photo)

The authority has prepared a clear action plan to discourage overpricing in all markets, especially of items that are not taxed

CPA OFFICIAL

duce traffic accidents resulting from vehicle manufacturing defects, and introduce articles in the Consumer Protection Law regarding vehicle recall.

He added that the campaign targets vehicle owners, authorised dealers and road users, in addition to government agencies, the business sector, and school and college students.

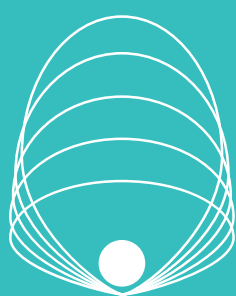
According to the official, the authority has prepared a clear action plan to discourage overpricing in all markets of the sultanate, especially of items that are not taxed, besides forming field work teams to inspect shops and commercial centres. "Any violation recorded will be dealt with according to applicable legal procedures," the CPA official added.

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.49am
Sunrise	6.04am
Duhr	11.58am
Asr	3.17pm
Maghrib	5.46pm
Isha	6.56pm

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Bank Muscat profit rises to RO148mn in nine months of 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat, the largest financial institution in Oman, posted a net profit of RO148.29mn for the first nine months of this year compared to RO140.16mn reported during the same period of 2021, recording an year-on-year increase of 5.8 per cent.

The bank on Thursday announced its preliminary unaudited financial results for the nine months ended September 30, 2022.

Net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing stood at RO254.93mn for the January - September period of 2022 compared to RO252.48mn for the same period in 2021, an

increase of 1.0 per cent.

Bank Muscat in a press statement said that its non-interest income rose to RO117.1mn for the nine months period ended September 30, 2022 from RO105.85mn in the same period a year ago, mainly due to higher income from sale of investments.

The bank's operating expenses for the first nine months of 2022 stood at RO156.18mn as compared to RO144.33mn for the same period in 2021, an increase of 8.2 per cent.

Net impairment for credit and other losses for the nine months period decreased to RO41.58mn in 2022 as against RO46.77mn for the same period of 2021. The decrease is mainly attributed to the precautionary and collective provisions created by the bank

during 2021, Bank Muscat said.

The bank's net loans and advances (including Islamic financing receivables) marginally increased by 0.8 per cent to RO9.229bn as of September 30, 2022 compared to RO9.158bn a year ago.

Customer deposits (including Islamic customer deposits) increased marginally to RO8.709bn as of September 30, 2022 as against RO8.698bn a year ago.

Bank Muscat said its full results for the nine months period ended September 30, 2022 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the board of directors at its meeting scheduled later during October.

Lulu Group plans IPO to list on Abu Dhabi exchange in 2023

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Lulu Group International is forging ahead with its plans to get listed on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) in 2023, according to V Nandakumar, director of the marketing and communications at the Abu Dhabi-based group.

In a statement to the Emirates News Agency (WAM), Nandakumar said that the conglomerate is making steady progress with its initial public offering (IPO) plans to list shares on the Abu Dhabi bourse next year.

Since the start of the year, financial markets have been witnessing increased IPOs and new listings, he said, stressing that



the group's listing on the UAE financial markets is a major opportunity to contribute to the sustainable growth of the UAE economy. As per the UAE media reports, Lulu Group International has hired investment bank

Moelis & Co to advise it on its upcoming IPO.

Lulu Group is a highly diversified conglomerate with successful business entities in strategic locations worldwide. Founded by the acclaimed business visionary

Yusuff Ali MA, LuLu Group has become a key contributor in the Gulf region's economic standing with an annual turnover worth US\$8bn.

Lulu Group operates around 239 supermarkets and hypermarkets in 23 countries and employs more than 60,000 people.

Headquartered in Abu Dhabi, Lulu Group is a world-renowned purveyor of an international business portfolio that ranges from hypermarket operations to shopping mall development, manufacturing and trading of goods, hospitality assets, and real estate.

(With input from WAM)

Al Mouj Muscat wins three titles at International Property Awards

Muscat - Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier oceanfront lifestyle and leisure destination, has won three titles at the highly prestigious International Property Awards affirming its reputation and profile as a global leader within the real estate industry.

The International Property Awards is an annual event that recognises the highest levels of achievement in real estate where companies from all over the world compete for the prestigious mark of excellence. Divided into four areas of Architecture, Development, International Design and Real Estate, the winners were announced last week at a glittering ceremony in Dubai.

Two of Al Mouj's title wins are in the Best Residential Development 20+ Units category and relate to its exclusive collection of villas Golf Beach Residences which is adding 51 exceptional contemporary five and six-bedroom oceanside villas to its impressive property portfolio. It achieved best Residential Development for 20 Plus Units both for Oman and Arabia.

Al Mouj also won Best Development Marketing award. The award in recognition of Beyond Dreams, an innovative and unique campaign that supported the launch of Golf Beach Residences.

This is the second international win for Beyond Dreams as



in July it scooped the Real Estate Asia prize for Marketing and Brand Initiative of the Year.

The Beyond Dreams campaign captured the imagination of prospective buyers, with the retelling of a fairy-tale about a gentle-yet-bold female protagonist and a mythical unicorn who find a home within each other.

Featuring a film, it became the most watched viral advertisement in Oman, with around 38mn views contributing to 90 per cent of the first phase being sold within four weeks. Al Mouj has also won the best Marketing Brand Creation at international level. Nasser bin Masoud al

Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said, "I am delighted that these International Property Awards recognise what sets Al Mouj Muscat apart and we welcome the global profile that they will bring.

They reflect both the extraordinary talent of our people and the outstanding quality of our homes as we continue to have a positive economic impact for Oman."

"Our oceanside setting and first-class dining, leisure and retail amenities, along with an award-winning golf course which is in the region's top two plus an elegant 400-berth ma-

rina, has earned Al Mouj a reputation as our country's finest and most vibrant lifestyle destination. And in addition to attracting close to 4mn visitors a year which helps boost opportunities for local businesses, our residents experience a true sense of belonging," he added.

Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier community of 8,000 residents from 85 nationalities, continues to deliver a positive economic impact for the sultanate. It has already secured US\$884mn in foreign direct investment and asset growth of 777 per cent since it was established in 2006.

Russia-Ukraine war 'most important' factor slowing global growth: IMF

Washington, US - Russia's war in Ukraine is the "single most important element" slowing economic growth and generating global instability, the chair of a key IMF committee said on Friday.

Nadia Calvino's remarks came as finance ministers and central bankers gathered in Washington for the IMF and World Bank annual meetings, which focused on the war, soaring inflation and the climate crisis.

There has been a "very strong call" throughout the week for Russia to stop its war against Ukraine, said Calvino, who is chair of the International Monetary and Financial Committee and also Spain's economy minister.

"The war is the single most important element slowing down growth and generating inflation, volatility, energy and food insecurity and uncertainty," she told a press conference, de-



scribing peace as a key economic policy tool.

But the committee, which Russia is involved in, failed to reach an agreement on a communique as Russia blocked a consensus, Calvino added.

Instead, she issued a chair's statement recognizing that the pandemic and war were "weighing heavily on economic activity" with significant impact on livelihoods.

The statement also said countries welcomed voluntary contributions to facilitate financial assistance to Ukraine.

On Thursday, the Group of 20 major economies closed talks in Washington without issuing a joint communique either, as in its last two gatherings, with the group also divided over Russia's invasion and as a US-Saudi feud intensified.

"Stop the war... Wouldn't you

be thinking that this is a more straightforward way to get the world economy in better shape?" IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva asked at the Friday press briefing.

This week, the International Monetary Fund said more than a third of the global economy is headed for contraction this year or next, cautioning that the three biggest economies will continue to stall.

The fund trimmed its world growth forecast to 2.7 per cent in 2023, and its chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas cautioned that the next year would feel like a recession for many people.

Throughout its meetings of financial chiefs this week, the crisis lender stressed that the priority was for central banks to continue tightening monetary policy to rein in inflation, and for governments to keep their budgets tight.

AFP

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MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX posts marginal decline as financial stocks drop

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) posted a marginal decline last week, mainly due to selling pressure in financial sector stocks.

MSX30 Index ended the week down by 0.35 per cent. All the sectoral indices closed up for the week except Financial Index which dropped 0.81 per cent. Services Index and Industrial Index ended the week higher by 0.08 per cent and 0.22 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index also closed up by 0.46 per cent.

Earnings season was in full swing on MSX last week, with most companies reporting their first nine-month financial results for 2022 by the end of the week. Our analysis reveals that the combined net profit of companies listed on the MSX rose by 10 per cent to RO434mn for January- September period. It must be noted that holding companies still have time to disclose their initial financial results for this period.

Local news

►Sohar International Bank announced the completion its rights issue for RO160mn that is expected to support its ongoing merger talks with HSBC Oman and Bank Nizwa. The issued share capital post-issuance of new shares will be RO455mn. ►BankDhofar announced that it has successfully raised RO115.5mn Basel III compliant Additional Tier 1 (AT1) bond listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange. This is the largest local

currency AT1 single tranche offering by any bank in Oman. The issue attracted a high-quality order book with strong participation from local investors that allowed BankDhofar to set the yield at 6.75 per cent. This issue will benefit BankDhofar's already strong Tier 1 capital base. The offering was well received by a diverse set of investors consisting of pension and sovereign wealth funds, corporates, family offices and high net worth individuals.

►Invest Easy, Oman government's one-stop window to facilitate the clearance of registrations licensing and permits, has so far issued over 286,000 licenses since it was launched about 18 months ago, according to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef. He said the Invest Easy portal, coupled with other initiatives currently in various stages of implementation, are designed to help enhance the investment and business environment for local and foreign players in Oman. "Since the launch of the new licensing service in April 2021, over 286,000 licenses have been issued — 38,000 of them to international investors," he said.

►The digital economy of Oman accounted for 2.0 per cent of the country's GDP in 2021, according to Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. He said this during his



presentation on the official session of talks between Oman's Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. Dr Shadhani said that there are 4,502 companies operating in the digital economy sector, employing about 30,000 in which 18 per cent are university graduates with degrees related to the field.

►Institutional and individual investors in Oman can invest in an initial public offering (IPO) of The Pearl REIF through the secondary sale of units. Earlier this year, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Omantel together announced the formation of The Pearl REIF, a real-estate investment fund approved by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) aimed at offering a unique opportunity to invest in large-scale, income-producing real-estate assets.

The promoters intend to sell 49 per cent of their stake in the fund through the IPO and on the successful completion of the transaction The Pearl REIF will be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange. Sohar International Bank is providing financial advisory, investment management and placement services of The Pearl REIF.

►With regards to the announcement made by The Peal REIF, Omantel announced in a disclosure that they have an initial public offering of 208,137,400 units at a price of 112bz. The offer opens on October 16, 2022. Omantel is expecting to sell 136,752,563 units that it holds in The Pearl REIF. Omantel will hold the remaining 142,334,304 units of The Pearl REIF, translating into a 33.51 per cent ownership.

Regional markets

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) confirmed its economic growth forecast for Saudi Arabia for 2022 and 2023 at 7.6 per cent and 3.7 per cent, respectively, compared to its July forecasts. Saudi Arabia's projected growth is the highest among developed, emerging, developing countries, the fund said in its World Economic Outlook report. Saudi Ministry of Finance expected the kingdom's economy to grow by 8 per cent in 2022 and 3.1 per cent in 2023, according to its 2023 pre-budget statement.

In its latest report, the Institute of International Finance (IIF) said the Kuwaiti economy is expected to grow to 7 per cent this year on the back of a 10 per cent increase in oil production, with the current account surplus likely to widen mainly due to the rise in oil exports, Al-Rai Daily reported. As for the fiscal deficit, excluding investment income, the IIF expects it to turn into a surplus equal to 8.3 per cent of GDP.

Saudi Arabia's consumer price index (CPI) rose 3.1 per cent in September from a year earlier, official data showed on Thursday, picking up further from a 3 per cent increase in August. Food and beverages and transport prices were again the main drivers of inflation, both rising 4.3 per cent in September, the General Authority for Statistics said in a statement. The sub-index was pushed higher by food and beverages prices, that rose 4.6 per cent, in particular meat prices which jumped 6.5 per cent. On a monthly basis, prices were up

0.3 per cent, slightly lower compared with the 0.4 per cent month-on-month rise in August.

Global news

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has cut its global economic growth forecast for next year, warning that "the worst is yet to come." The IMF reduced its 2023 outlook from a gain of 2.9 per cent in July to 2.7 per cent now, with a 25 per cent probability it could fall below 2 per cent. That's the weakest estimate since 2001, except during the global financial crisis and the outbreak of COVID-19.

The IMF indicated that the global economic activity is experiencing a broad-based and sharper-than-expected slowdown. It said the "cost-of-living crisis," tightening financial conditions in most parts of the world, the impact of the war in Ukraine, and lingering effects of the pandemic are weighing on expansion. IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said "For many people, 2023 will feel like a recession." He added that as the global economy heads for "stormy waters," financial turmoil may erupt, leading investors to flock to so-called safe haven assets, such as US Treasuries.

The IMF kept its growth estimate for this year at 3.2 per cent, about half of what it was in 2021. It predicted worldwide inflation will soar to an annual rate of 8.8 per cent, although drop to 6.5 per cent in 2023 and

4.1 per cent in 2024.

The US consumer prices advanced more than expected last September, underscoring forecasts that the Federal Reserve would continue to raise interest rates in order to tame inflation. Data released by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics on October 13 showed that the broader headline consumer price index (CPI) measure surged year-on-year by 8.2 per cent in September, exceeding the projected 8.1 per cent uptick, albeit slowing from August's 8.3 per cent rate. The core CPI, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, saw a 6.6 per cent year-on-year hike in September, marking the fastest price growth since 1982.

Recommendations

US equities continued its volatility to end a wild week of trading. Stocks fell to session lows after a consumer survey from the University of Michigan showed inflation expectations were increasing, a sentiment that the Federal Reserve is likely watching closely. The tech-heavy Nasdaq led declines as growth companies are most sensitive to interest rate hikes.

Regionally, all markets closed the week down, as data showed higher inflation, and the current market is at a very high volatility. This triggered sell-off in the region. Locally, earnings season for the listed companies companies ended last week. We advise investors to analyse the initial disclosures and find attractive investment opportunities accordingly.

By special arrangement with U Capital

China's economy slows as Xi plans for historic third term

Beijing, China – As China's leaders gather for a crucial party congress, the country is expected on Tuesday to announce some of its weakest quarterly growth figures since 2020, its economy hobbled by Covid restrictions and a real estate crisis. The figures for the third quarter, along with a salvo of other economic indicators, will be unveiled in the middle of the week-long political meeting that is expected to grant President Xi Jinping a historic third term in charge.

A group of experts interviewed by AFP said they expected an average GDP increase of 2.5 per cent on last year's July-September quarter.

In the previous quarter, growth in the world's second largest economy collapsed to only 0.4 per cent compared to the previous year, the worst performance since 2020. The country posted 4.8 per cent growth in the first quarter of 2022. Many economists think China will struggle to attain its growth target this year of around 5.5 per cent, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has lowered its GDP growth forecast to 3.2 per cent for 2022 and 4.4 per cent for 2023.

AFP's panel of experts predicted average growth of three percent in 2022, a long way off the 8.1 per cent seen in 2021.

That would be China's weakest growth rate in four decades, excluding 2020 when the global economy was hammered by the emergence of the coronavirus.

"The big policy challenge is accepting that the economy has reached a state of maturity that means growth numbers are



Visitors stand in front of a screen showing Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Beijing Exhibition Center on Wednesday, ahead of the 20th Communist Party Congress meeting (AFP)

likely permanently reset to the zero to 4.5 per cent range for the coming decade," Clifford Bennett, chief economist at ACY Securities, told AFP.

Another factor that has had an enormous impact is Beijing's zero-Covid policy.

China is the last of the world's major economies to continue to follow the strategy, which imposes tight travel restrictions, mass PCR testing and obligatory quarantines.

It also involves sudden and strict lockdowns – including of businesses and factories – which has disrupted production and weighed heavily on household consumption.

But despite the impact on the economy, "there is no clear sign of a significant easing of the zero-Covid strategy", Nomura's Ting Lu said, noting that so far the opposite had happened.

In the week leading up to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress, state media have published multiple editorials warning the policy should not be relaxed, and officials have

pounced on outbreaks across the country over the last week

with increased curbs.

Some lockdown restrictions have returned to major financial hub Shanghai, prompting some to fear a repeat of earlier this year when the city was shut down for two months. Meanwhile, China is also battling an unprecedented crisis in its real estate sector – historically a driver of growth in the economy and representative of more than a quarter of the country's GDP when combined with construction.

Following years of explosive growth fuelled by easy access to loans, Chinese authorities launched a crackdown on excessive debt in 2020.

Property sales are now falling across the country, leaving many developers struggling and some owners refusing to pay their mortgages for unfinished homes. Despite the problems, "many economic indicators have actually recovered reasonably well from the mass lockdowns of March and April", according to analyst Thomas Gatley from Gavekal Dragonomics. AFP

Broader coalition not needed for Russian oil price cap, Yellen says

Washington, US – The G7 is still working on setting a price cap on Russian oil but enrolling more nations to the scheme is not necessary for it to succeed, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Friday.

Australia recently joined the Group of Seven wealthy democracies and the European Union in backing the move aimed at depriving Moscow of a key source of cash for its war in Ukraine as well as cooling



Janet Yellen

soaring energy prices.

Yellen said a broader coalition was not needed as the cap would be set by requiring Western financial services and insurance firms to abide by a maximum price in contracts for Russian oil shipments.

"We are not trying to sign up additional countries to a coalition," Yellen told a news conference at the IMF's annual meetings in Washington.

The United States has im-

posed an embargo on Russian oil while the European Union will ban most imports from December.

"None of the coalition countries are buying Russian oil or will buy Russian oil," Yellen said.

"And none of the countries outside the coalition are really important suppliers of any of these financial services," she added.

AFP

Britain's new finance minister admits taxes to rise as PM reels

London, UK – Britain's new finance minister Saturday warned of looming tax hikes as he admitted to "mistakes" made in a disastrous budget that still threatens to bring down Prime Minister Liz Truss.

"Truss fights for survival," The Times newspaper headlined a day after she forced chancellor of the exchequer Kwasi Kwarteng to carry the can for market turmoil sparked by their budget on September 23.

The Times, Telegraph and other newspapers reported that senior Conservative members of parliament were still plotting to unseat Truss, possibly within days, aghast at the party's collapse in opinion polls since she replaced Boris Johnson on September 6.

New chancellor Jeremy Hunt indicated he would be tearing up the strategy that brought Truss to 10 Downing Street.



Jeremy Hunt

"There were mistakes," acknowledged Hunt, a former foreign secretary who is seen as a Tory centrist.

He said Kwarteng and Truss had erred in trying to cut taxes for the highest earners, and in presenting their budget without independent forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility.

"The prime minister's recognised that, that's why I'm here,"

Hunt told Sky News.

In one of his first acts on taking office late Friday, the new minister spoke to Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey, who has had to stage costly interventions to calm febrile bond markets.

"They discussed the importance of tackling global inflation, and their commitment to economic growth and fiscal discipline," the Treasury tweeted.

Tax cuts were the centrepiece of the ill-starred budget announced by Kwarteng and Truss.

But they were financed through billions in more borrowing, causing panic on financial markets, which has fed into higher costs for British households in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis.

"We will have some very difficult decisions ahead," Hunt said, warning that "all government departments" face spend-

ing restraint.

"And some taxes will not be cut as quickly as people want. Some taxes will go up."

Hunt confirmed he would deliver a new fiscal statement on October 31, telling BBC radio he had a "clean slate" to start afresh – underlining that Truss has considerably weakened her own position after coming to power on a hard-charging platform of reform.

Truss dismissed Kwarteng hours after he had rushed home early from international finance meetings in Washington, and staged another U-turn in acquiescing to a significant rise in profits tax levied on companies.

At a subsequent Downing Street news conference, her first since succeeding Johnson, the prime minister gave a widely panned performance which did nothing to calm market nerves. AFP

Joyalukkas adds sparkle to Diwali with festive offer

Joyalukkas is offering their patrons an exclusive festive offer to add to their Diwali festivities. Customers can enjoy RO5 gift voucher on purchase of gold jewellery worth RO250 and RO20 gift voucher on purchase of diamonds, polki and pearl jewellery worth RO250 and more.

In addition to the exciting offers, customers can now pay just ten per cent advance and get assured gold rate protection from Joyalukkas. The gold rate protection ensures that the booking rate prevails in case gold rates increase on day of purchase or if gold prices drop. This enables patrons to enjoy jewellery shopping at the lower gold rate.

Announcing these offers, Joyalukkas Group chairman Joy Alukkas said, "We always aim to make every celebration special. Our offers are designed to delight our consumers. This Diwali, our customers can enjoy Gift vouchers and assured gold rate protection. Simply put, our customers save big and celebrate big with Joyalukkas."

The festive offers are available at all Joyalukkas showrooms in the Oman from October 13 to 25.

Mazoon partners with PDO to exchange HSE expertise



Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in Oman, and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) held a joint event for their health, safety and environment (HSE) departments to exchange knowledge and experience from subject specialists on key HSE information.

The full day programme held at PDO's Learning Development Centre covered topics such as Electrical Safety and Safe Systems of Work, HSE Strategy and Planning, HSE Data Management and Reporting System, HSE Management System, HSE Training and Competency Development, HSE Culture and Behavioural Safety.

A spokesperson for Mazoon Electricity said, "We were pleased to partner with PDO and exchange knowledge about HSE. The programme illustrated that we are committed to supporting open communication, engagement, and consultation about HSE thus enabling a positive attitude to health and safety issues. We encourage employees to maintain a safe working environment and integrate best practices into daily activities."

PSM appoints goodwill ambassador for its centre



Pakistan School Muscat has appointed Shaznane Akbaraly - Hiridjee, the manager of Blossom Company, as a goodwill ambassador of the Centre for Special Education run by the school.

She has provided her valuable services and cooperation in the accomplishment of the project of placing special students at McDonald's. She has also played a vital role in projecting the students of the Centre for Special Education at such an exuberant platform which proved to be significant for their practical insight and professional phase of life.

It's due to her guidance that these students got optimum exposure to social interaction. She further vowed to keep playing her role in this regard even in future for special students of the Centre for Special Education Pakistan School Muscat. In recognition of her services, she was honoured with a souvenir by Ameer Hamza, the chairman of the Board of Directors.



President of Zanzibar visits Qurun Shrimp Aquaculture Farm in Jalan Bani Bu Hassan

Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi, President of Zanzibar and his accompanying delegation visited Qurun Shrimp Aquaculture Farm in Jalan Bani Bu Hassan, South Sharqiya governorate, as part of his official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During his tour of the farm, Fisheries Development Oman showcased how their aquaculture developments focused on sustainability, competitiveness, in-country value, supporting national food security objectives, creation of employment opportunities, diversification of aquaculture sector production streams.

The President's tour at the Shrimp Aquaculture Farm in Qurun included going through different farming process stages starting from the hatchery, nursery to the grow out ponds. The farm includes 220 grow out pods of 5000sqm each. The farm has a great economic potential and high impact in Oman's fish production, said a press release.

The President of Zanzibar expressed in a statement his happiness to visit the Sultanate of Oman, describing it as 'fruitful'.

Dr Mwinyi said that his visit to Quroon shrimp farm gave him an opportunity to explore many areas of cooperation with the Oman Investment



Authority, whether they are investments in Tanzania or Zanzibar in particular. He expressed his admiration for the farm - what he saw amongst many projects during his visit to the Sultanate of Oman. He stressed on working with Oman to ensure that the knowledge he acquired here could be used to develop similar projects in Zanzibar.

Bank Muscat celebrates success of Green Sports programme with gala event

In line with its commitment to youth empowerment and its pioneering role in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility, Bank Muscat has recently hosted a gala event in Muscat to felicitate the 20 winners of the 2022 edition of the bank's flagship CSR programme.

The ceremony was attended by Sheikh Waleed K al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer, Bank Muscat, the bank's management team members, a number of dignitaries from the government and private sectors, and journalists from the top media houses in the country.

Since its inception in 2012, the landmark Green Sports programme has been supporting Omani youth, strengthening the role of sports teams in various governorates and developing new sports-related infrastructure across Oman over the years. Year after year, the programme sees excellent participation by



sports teams from across the sultanate confirming its tremendous success and popularity with Omani youth.

Speaking at the event, Hamza Abbas al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager - Credit, Bank Muscat, expressed his happiness with the success and achievements of the Green Sports programme.

"Bank Muscat pays special attention to all programmes focusing on developing the youth as it is the best investment in Oman's future," Ajmi said. "The programme is truly one of its kind and we are really proud with all the achievements so far, which are very much in line with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik's directives on taking care of the aspirations of Omani youth and providing them with a suitable environment to fully develop their skills and talents. The importance of this programme is evident in its positive results and participation of a large number of teams annually. It is a matter of great pride that Green Sports has

further enhanced Bank Muscat's leading role in implementing sustainable programmes to support Omani youth in various fields."

Ajmi added that the programme has so far benefitted 163 teams with over 50,000 members across Oman since its launch in 2012. "Encouraged by the overwhelming response to

the programme over the years, the bank increased the number of annual winners to 20 on the occasion of the programme's tenth anniversary in 2021. This year too, the winning teams will benefit from the bank's support in providing natural/artificial grass football pitches, lighting systems and water desalination equipment." He thanked the teams for their contributions for making the programme a grand success.

During the event, Hashar commended the 20 winners, which are from different governorates. The winners include: Al Shabab Sports Team from the wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, Al Sooad Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Dima Wa Taieen, Al Yahmadi Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Ibra, Falaj Al Ouh Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Sohar, Al Abyad Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Nakhl, Al Istqlal Sports Team from the

wilayat of Yanqul, Al Ma'ali Sports Team from the wilayat of Qurayyat, Ittihad Al Awabi Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Al Awabi, Azaiba Cultural and Sports Team from the wilayat of Bawshar, Al Haram Sports Team from the wilayat of Barka, Batha Al Oud Sports, Cultural and Social Team from the wilayat of Al Suwayq, Al Hail Team from the wilayat of Ibri, Al Rabi Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Al Buraimi, Al Shabab Sports Cultural Team from the wilayat of Saham, Al Wadiyat Sports Team from the wilayat of Shinas, Al Tadamun Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Al Rustaq, Al Ittihad Sports Team from the wilayat of Bahla, Al Ain Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Wadi Al Maawil, Al Afifa Sports and Cultural Team from the wilayat of Sohar, and Al Owaid Team from the wilayat of Al Mussannah.

ISG hosts eighth annual mobile robotics workshop

Indian School Al Ghubra recently organised the eighth Annual ISG Robotics workshop titled 'Mobile & Fire Fighting Robotics' in the school auditorium. The workshop was conducted by the Department of Physics in association with Innovians Technologies, Noida headed by the CEO and founder Prateek Gupta. Rahul Bansal, Bhoomika Bansal and Mohammed Mukhtar were the assistant trainers.

School principal Papri Ghosh delivered the inaugural address. The vice principals G Sreekumar and Pyarija Cidar also addressed the gathering, said a press release. Lata Saju, Head of Department of Physics welcomed and introduced the trainers. The ten-hour long workshop was spread over two days. Two-hundred-and-seventeen students from classes 6 to 12 enthusiastically participated in the workshop. The event commenced on September 30 with a brief introduction to electronics and robotics.

The participants then went on to successfully complete the project of building four different robots.



Kempinski Hotel Muscat signs with Oman Food Bank



As part of Kempinski Hotel Muscat's continuous corporate social responsibility initiatives, the hotel officially signed with Oman Food Bank: Dayma to minimise the wastage of food and help create better awareness on the importance of food management, especially within hotels.

It is at the core of Kempinski Hotels to create a sense of responsibility towards a sustainable yet luxurious guest experience that is respectful of the environment. One of the partnerships that Kempinski hotels has formed is with BE Health, which brings hotels under one corporate social responsibility vision: A world where health is contagious. BE Health's mission is to care for people's health from the workplace to the local community by establishing individual hotel health prevention programmes. Kempinski Hotel Muscat's general manager Carsten Wiegandt said, "Through this partnership and many other similar projects that the team has been involved in, we hope to raise better awareness on how local businesses can contribute to the community."

Snow Oman confirms December launch

Expect the unexpected soon as Majid Al Futtaim brings you Snow Oman! From the same operators who first brought snow to the desert 15 years ago, Majid Al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa and Asia, is excited to launch an all-new entertainment experience at the Mall of Oman.

Snow Oman is the third and newest brand to join Global Snow, the indoor snow and ski entertainment arm of Majid Al Futtaim. In 2005, Majid Al Futtaim pioneered a one-of-a-kind, sub-zero leisure offering in its flagship shopping mall the Mall of the Emirates: Ski Dubai. The award-winning brand has been recognised as the 'World's Best Indoor Ski Resort' by the prestigious World Ski Awards for six consecutive years. In 2017, Ski Egypt opened in the Mall of Egypt and set an all-new record for being the first of its kind in the African continent. Following the footsteps of its sister companies Ski Dubai and Ski Egypt, Snow Oman will soon open its doors for family and friends to create unforgettable moments that last a lifetime.



Royal Academy of Management implements first educational module for developing leaders

The Royal Academy of Management has begun implementing the first educational module of 'The National Program for Developing Leaders and Future Foresight'.

This is designed to develop leadership skills in middle management departments within the state's managerial apparatus, in line with Oman Vision 2040, and to prepare staff to face a world of increasing complexity and change.

The programme is being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance (Offset), and Lenco Armored Vehicles Company, US. Eller Executive Education of the University of Arizona has designed the programme and joined hands with the academy as co-implementer.

The programme's first cohort comprises 30 participants who hold positions including assistant general manager, department director, assistant director of a department, and the equivalent in the state's managerial apparatus, each nominated by their employer and who will have passed various stages of evaluation. Participants will undergo a learning journey that consists of five educational modules for a period of six months.

These modules offer a variety of leadership skills and knowledge that can help candidates refine their abilities to face a variety of workplace challenges and develop work systems within middle management in the state's managerial apparatus. This, in turn, will enable the candidates to maximise opportunities in the Omani economy, and to build bridges between the public and private sectors to advance Oman competitiveness in the wider world.



H E Dr Ali Qassim al Lawati, president of the Royal Academy of Management, said that the programme would play an important role in improving the government performance of units within the state's managerial apparatus. This is in pursuit of the lofty directives of His Majesty the Sultan, which emphasise the need to improve the government work system to provide better services that keep pace with world developments and benefit public interest.

This programme will provide participants with the skills of systematic institutional thinking and leadership methods, driving change and innovation based on critical thinking, modern decision-making methods, and strategic thinking.

Dr Yasmin Shanan al Bulushi, project manager of the programme, explained that the project will provide educational modules based on blended learning. This

includes the experience accelerator, individual and group coaching, and personal interviews, in addition to research projects, and coaching and mentoring by experts from the private sector. She added that the programme will provide participants with a set of fundamental competencies such as a growth mindset, resilience, agile leadership style, creative and strategic thinking, collaboration, networking and persuasion skills.

Candidates in the 'Train the Trainer (Leadership) Programme', launched by the academy earlier this year, will also participate in some modules of the current national programme, giving them an opportunity to directly experience the process undertaken by training programme participants and to learn from the global experts.

Dr Karthik Kannan, Dean of the College of Management at the University of Arizona, which oversees Eller Executive

Education, said, "We are proud to partner with the Royal Academy of Management in the Sultanate of Oman in implementing the 'National Program for Developing Leaders and Future Foresight', which aims to develop and empower leadership in the public sector to achieve Oman Vision 2040."

Dr Kartik confirmed that the programme uses blended learning methods that combine direct training, online education and research projects, enabling participants to put their acquired skills into action. He also said that the program is characterised by the use of multiple learning methods such as the experience accelerator, individual and group project business coaching, in addition to utilising mentors and coaches from outside of the public sector.

"We are fully confident that the participants will be leaders with a resilient mindset, and they will be ambassadors for change, growth and development in the future," Dr Kartik added.

The involvement of the Ministry of Finance (Offset) reflects its aspiration to build national capacities and competencies in all sectors, and transfer knowledge and best practices through partnerships that link the programme with leading institutions and companies around the world.

Eller Executive Education is regarded as one of the best specialised centres in its field and was ranked 24th globally by the *Financial Times* in 2020 for customised executive education. It is one of the leading global providers in delivering organisational development solutions to companies and organisations around the world.

ITHCA Group participates in GITEX Global 2022

The ITHCA Group and affiliates have participated in the just concluded tech show GITEX Global 2022 in Dubai.

The five-day (October 10 to 14) event - said to be the world's largest and most comprehensive fest - attracted major start-ups at the Dubai World Trade Centre. For the 2022 edition, the show featured an unprecedented 5,000 participating tech companies, a press release said.

More than 800 exhibitors from 60 countries and 600 investors in the entrepreneurial sector participated in GITEX Global Dubai.

Launched in 2016 as GITEX Future Stars, the event's name changed in 2022 to GITEX Global to reflect the continuous development of the global start-up sector and to celebrate the important role that start-ups play in driving innovation and international cooperation in business and industry.



Said Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of the ICT Group said, "GITEX Global 2022 is part of the North Star Dubai exhibition for start-ups, which is the largest gathering for Unicorn companies this year in Dubai - with 35 Unicorn companies from 15 countries."

"ITHCA Group's participation consisted of many affiliates represented by several investments by Oman Technology Fund which was launched to compete for US\$1mn for start-ups. It received an overwhelming response, where the qualifying stages continue until now. This is

in addition to various participations by Onsor, Rihal, and Osos with the aim to strengthen their brand and expand with international clients and investors in the largest tech show, which is set to attract the attention of many global investors."

Dr Yousef bin Abdullah al Balushi, a Member of the Board of Directors of ITHCA Group, said, "The participation of Oman Technology Fund came as part of North Star Dubai, which is part of the GITEX Global 2022 event dedicated to the start-up world."

The OTF participated with several start-ups to introduce their brand to the exhibition audience and investors.

"This is in addition to competing for US\$1mn for start-ups which continues its evaluation stages for qualified companies, before members of the GITEX investment committee will determine the final ten companies for the final qualifiers which will have investment opportunities as part of the Oman Technology Fund."

GITEX Global 2022 is considered the largest edition in the history of GITEX. The 2022 event will attract more than 5,000 exhibitors from 90 countries, including government bodies, start-ups working on developing smart cities, and 250 government entities leading strategic technology projects and partnerships between the private and public sectors. The 42nd edition of GITEX promises to be the most influential and impactful edition in the tech show's history as it covers various technological topics, including Metaverse areas, the future of decentralised Internet, sustainable global digital economies, cloud services, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT).

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KR Eshraqa signs MoU with MoE to support infrastructure development of schools

As part of its conscientious efforts to strengthen the education sector in the sultanate, Khimji Ramdas Group's (KR) Eshraqa has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education (MoE), to enhance the infrastructure of government schools in the wilayat of Dima Watayeen, by equipping them with smart televisions, smart interactive boards, desktops and security cameras.

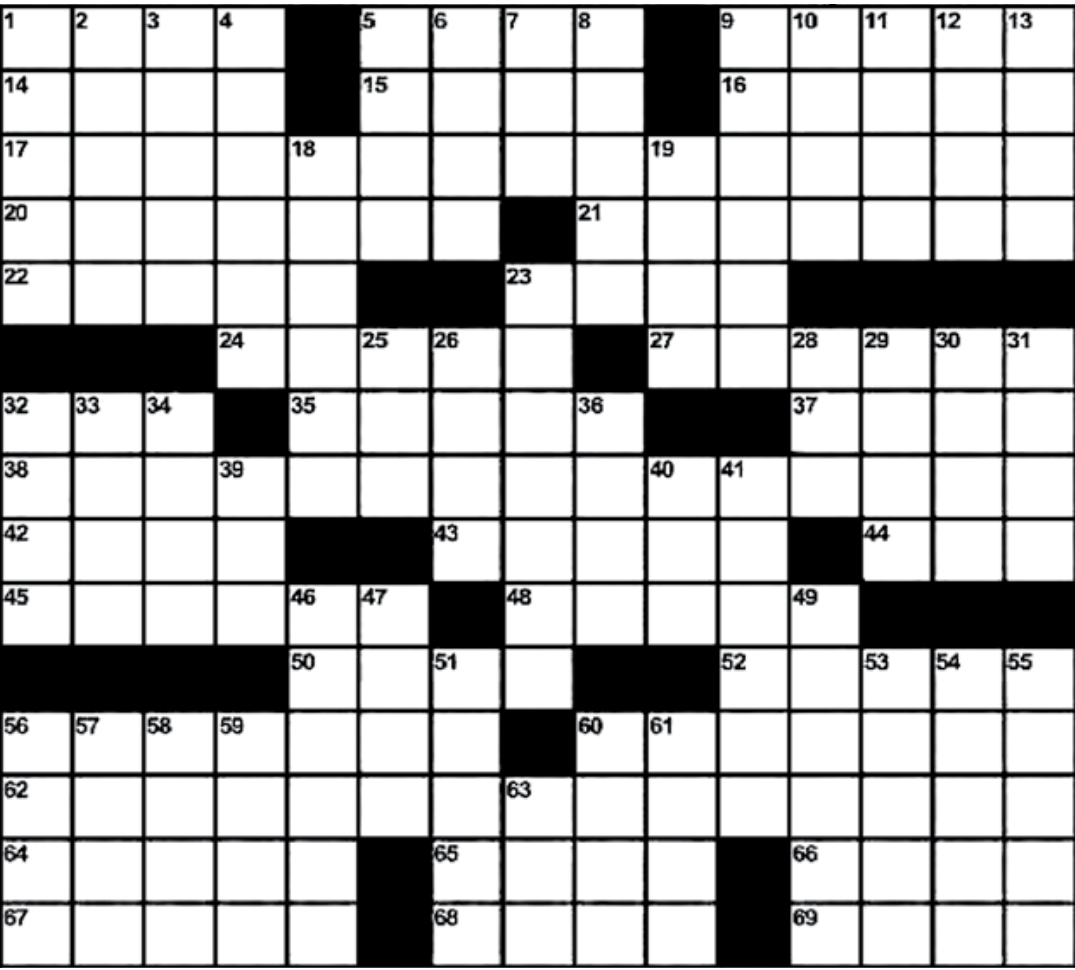
The MoU was signed by Nailesh Khimji, director, Khimji Ramdas Group, and H E Majid bin Said al Bahri, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Commenting on the MoU, Nailesh Khimji said, "In line with Oman's Vision 2040 goals, our



constant support to 'education' comes as a continuation of Eshraqa's initiatives to develop and improve the sector, by providing infrastructure that is at par with modern education globally. The infrastructure and learning environment of schools have a direct impact on students and teachers, and on the quality of education. This MoU is thus an endeavour to empower students; and support the efforts of educators in Dima Watayeen."

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Seek permission for
6) Black, in poesy
10) Chefs secret ingredient
14) Some Biblical pronouns
15) Battering wind
16) Eye feature
17) Expecting illness?
20) Title for Eva Peron
21) A tiny amount
22) Maiden-name indicator
23) Customary ceremonies
25) Reduced in intensity
27) What have you, briefly
30) Moo_ (Chinese dish)
31) Icky buildup
32) Suite section
34) Callas solo
36) Simple newsstand
40) Daily nap
43) Soft leather
44) Brownish purple
45) _ Bator, Mongolia
46) Napoleon's place of exile
48) _ and abet
50) Mine material
51) Aloha locale
54) "Tomorrow" musical
56) "Aladdin" prince

57) Check out groceries
59) Intertwine, as shoe-strings
63) Mae West's first movie
66) Repeated sound
67) Bulldoze, in Great Britain
68) Cultural value system
69) Collectors' goals
70) _ Mawr, Pa.
71) Come to, as a conclusion
DOWN
1) Money machines
2) Moccasin, for one
3) Tighten up type
4) Pavarotti, for one
5) Egyptian god of fertility
6) Breakfast staple
7) Foundation
8) Hodgepodge
9) Bee's attraction
10) Attila, to his wife?
11) Big occasion
12) Observe again
13) "_ on a true story!"
18) Revolutionary Hale
19) Elaborate Japanese drama
24) Large moon of Jupiter

26) "Arrivederci" relative
27) Important historic times
28) Health-food store staple
29) Dove shelter
31) High-kicking dance
33) Euripides drama
35) Last poker bet, sometimes
37) Christiania, now
38) "A_ Is Born"
39) "Batman" cartoonist
41) Advertise for new tenants
42) Type of fishing boat
4 7) Antacid, for short
49) Banquet
51) Fruit of the Loom competitor
52) "The Brady Bunch" housekeeper
53) British isle
54) Anxious
55) Glitterati, e.g.
58) "It's_ cry from ..."
60) Mideast muck-a-muck (var.)
61) Nattily dressed
62) Make impressions in

stone
64) Three words from
Santa
65) Suffix for "velvet"

NOTE PAD

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Controversy will be your ally today. It will create a nice, loud, distracting noise that will keep everyone busy -- and out of your hair! You will need all the elbow room and autonomy you can get today, as it's the perfect day to put new ideas to work. Get in some of that research, planning or organizing you need to do as early in the day as possible. By late afternoon, people could be hovering around you again, looking for the answers only you can give.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Acting your age won't feel like much fun today -- the children in your life are having a great time, so why can't you? Asking this question will lead you to a realization that you can do whatever you want to do! Take this attitude with you wherever you go today. You don't always have to be willing to grow up in order to be in charge. The world could use some of your immature ideas, so lead by example and have some fun. Laughter is a great way to get noticed.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

There will be a lot of confusion around your communications today, so do what you can to exchange your ideas clearly. Emails are more about convenience than they are about truly connecting with another person. So if you are building a romance online, it's time to stop the back and forth and schedule a good old-fashioned date. It's the only way to move things forward on solid footing. You need to get someone's attention to finish a conversation that started a few days ago.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Today you might get a strong sense that something new is beginning but it might not quite be what you were hoping for. Keep your hopes high, but do not bank on anything yet -- there is no such thing as a sure thing. Renewal is in the air right now, and you can easily grab some of it to get your own thing going if you stay dedicated. Whatever idea or scheme you've been playing with is more possible than ever right now, so get with your people and start making things happen.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A rude or unpleasant person will make your morning very interesting -- and give you a fresh perspective on where you are in your life right now. This person offers an example of what not to do...and seeing him or her in action will make you very grateful for the choices you have made in your life. Your diplomacy will serve you well as you take stock of all the gifts you have. Extend a kind hand to the people who use anger to hide their sadness.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

When it becomes dramatically clear that you can't do it all today, you'll have to let go of some of your obligations. But this is very good news -- and it will send a message to someone powerful that you are not superhuman. Adjusting expectations is important, and doing so is sometimes necessary if you want to keep harmony in your life. You'd do well to let go of some of your own expectations of someone close to you.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Today your energy is so bright and engaging that it's downright obnoxious so naturally, the world will be taking special notice of you! Expect some advances from people who might not care whether you are single or not. Put an end to any uncomfortable situations as soon as they start. Silence may be seen as compliance, so be sure to speak up if you're feeling uncomfortable or manipulated. The good news is that you are also attracting friends to spend more time with you.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Sometimes the hardest thing to do in life is to do nothing at all. Taking your hands off the steering wheel may seem like a dangerous thing to do, but in actuality right now it could be your best tactic (not literally, of course!). Let things take their natural course at work, at school and in a new relationship. You have less control over things than you think you do, so just admit that and take yourself off the hook. You don't have to fix anything. It's the way it's meant to be.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Don't look now, but you have reached a critical point with someone you are caring more and more about. All you need to do is make one last push in the direction you want things to go, and this person will finally communicate the message you want to hear. This isn't about forcing someone else to give you your way -- rather, it's about proving that you mean what you say. You'll get a lot of points for follow-through today. Be consistent in your actions, and you'll get what you want.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Other people have expectations of you right now, whether you like it or not. It's a fact, and you should accept it -- and learn how to react to it. This isn't a situation in which you should wait for orders to follow. You should take some initiative and show them that you're even more outstanding than they are expecting you to be. You have some amazing talents that have only been hinted at. This is a big chance to improve your (already stellar) reputation.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

When it comes to people pushing your buttons, enough is enough! If someone is getting on your last nerve, today is the day to stop the madness. Do whatever you can to remove this person from the picture -- even if it means you have to remove yourself from their environment. It might be a good idea to get off on your own for a while, regardless. You could use a little time to slow down the pace of your life and just watch the world swirl around you.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today a small sacrifice on your part might be called for. Letting something leave your life so you can make room for something else to come in is a difficult choice to make -- after all, how can you be certain that what is coming will be better than what is leaving? Rely on your faith in the people involved, and trust that they know what is best in this situation. If all else fails, just remember that moving forward is better than standing still.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In golf, what is the term for "three strokes under par"?
- A. Albatross
B. Conдор
C. Bogey
D. Eagle
02. What are SMS messages sent by?
- A. Carrier pigeon
B. Air mail
C. Mobile phone
D. Parcel post
03. Who wrote the novel "Wives and Daughters"?
- A. Anne Bronte
B. Jane Austen
C. Elizabeth Gaskell
D. George Eliot

Answers: 1.A 2.C 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

O	V	O	T
R	Z	C	S
R	A	I	V
M	E	N	E

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.

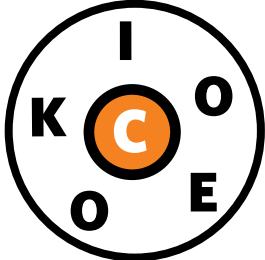
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

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

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

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

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

Astronomers are captivated by brightest flash ever seen

Washington, US - Astronomers have observed the brightest flash of light ever seen, from an event that occurred 2.4bn light years from Earth and was likely triggered by the formation of a black hole.

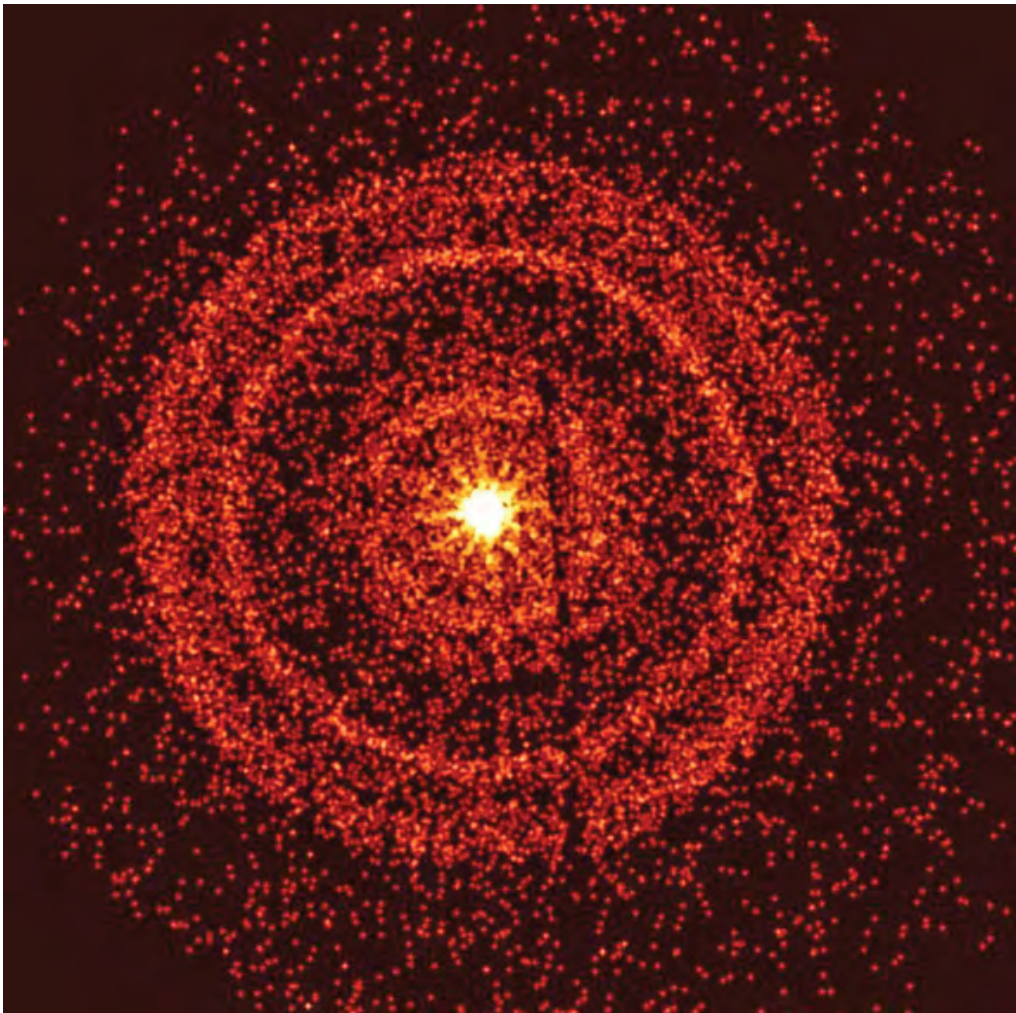
The burst of gamma-rays - the most intense form of electromagnetic radiation - was first detected by orbiting telescopes on October 9, and its afterglow is still being watched by scientists across the world.

Astrophysicist Brendan O'Connor told AFP that gamma-ray bursts that last hundreds of seconds, as occurred on Sunday, are thought to be caused by dying massive stars, greater than 30 times bigger than our Sun. The star explodes in a supernova, collapses into a black hole, then matter forms in a disk around the black hole, falls inside, and is spewed out in a jet of energy that travels at 99.99 per cent the speed of light.

The flash released photons carrying a record 18 teraelectronvolts of energy - that's 18 with 12 zeros behind it - and it has impacted long wave radio communications in Earth's ionosphere. "It's really breaking records, both in the amount of photons, and the energy of the photons that are reaching us," said O'Connor, who used infrared instruments on the Gemini South telescope in Chile to take fresh observations early on Friday.

"Something this bright, this nearby, is really a once-in-a-century event," he added.

Gamma-ray research first began in the 1960s when US satellites designed to detect whether the Soviet Union was



This picture provided by NASA on Friday shows the Swift's X-Ray Telescope capturing the afterglow of GRB 221009A about an hour after it was first detected (AFP)

detonating bombs in space ending up finding such bursts originating from outside the Milky Way. "Gamma-ray bursts in general release the same amount of energy that our Sun produces over its entire lifetime in the span of a few seconds - and this event is the brightest gamma ray burst," said O'Connor. This gamma-ray burst, known as GRB 221009A, was first spotted by telescopes including NASA's Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope, Neil

Gehrels Swift Observatory, and Wind spacecraft on Sunday morning Eastern time.

1.9bn-year-old movie

It originated from the direction of the constellation Sagitta, and traveled an estimated 1.9bn years to reach Earth - less than the current distance of its starting point, because the universe is expanding.

Observing the event now is like watching a 1.9bn-year-old recording of those events unfold

before us, giving astronomers a rare opportunity to glean new insights into things like black hole formation.

"That's what makes this sort of science so addictive - you get this adrenaline rush when these things happen," said O'Connor, who is affiliated with the University of Maryland and George Washington University.

Over the coming weeks, he and others will continue watching for the signatures of supernovas at optical and infrared

The burst of gamma rays was first detected on October 9. It's breaking records both in the amount of photons, and the energy of the photons that are reaching us. Something this bright, this nearby, is really a once-in-a-century event

BRENDAN O'CONNOR

wavelengths, to confirm that their hypothesis about the origins of the flash are correct, and that the event conforms to known physics.

Unfortunately, while the initial burst may have been visible to amateur astronomers, it has since faded out of their view.

Supernova explosions are also predicted to be responsible for producing heavy elements - such as gold, platinum, uranium - and astronomers will also be on the hunt for their signatures.

Astrophysicists have written in the past that the sheer power of gamma-ray bursts could cause extinction level events here on Earth.

But O'Connor pointed out that because the jets of energy are very tightly focused, and aren't likely to arise in our galaxy, this scenario is not something we should worry much about.

AFP



People clear mud from a property damaged by floods in the Melbourne suburb of Maribyrnong on Saturday (AFP)

One dead as Australia floods start to recede

Melbourne, Australia - Australia reported the first fatality from days of widespread flash flooding on Saturday, despite heavy rains easing and flood levels topping out across much of the south-east. Hundreds of homeowners began a long clean-up after storm waters engulfed streets, houses and cars across three states, with Melbourne suburbs among the worst hit.

Two very wet years have left much of eastern Australia sodden, and floods now frequently follow even moderate downpours. "It was frightening. I've been here for the other floods but I've never seen anything like that," 61-year-old Antoinette Besalino told AFP.

The apparent flooding victim was a 71-year-old man who was 'found deceased in floodwaters in the backyard' of his property in the town of Rochester, a small town north of Melbourne.

"Crews are on scene and police are attempting to get to the property, which is currently blocked off due to floodwater," police said. "The exact circumstances surrounding the death are yet to be determined."

As the waters ebbed, resi-

dents were left wading through mud-caked streets, passing collapsed fences, abandoned cars, tree branches festooned with debris and, in one instance, a marooned wheely bin.

"The cleanup is going to be huge," said 58-year-old Peter Di-mauro. "Think about all of the branches and all of the garbage that has washed up." About 466 homes have 'above-the-floor flooding', said Victoria state premier Dan Andrews. "Almost certainly those numbers will grow as we see flood waters peak in a number of communities."

For some, the risk is not yet over, with water still funnelling into already-swollen catchments. Evacuation orders remain in place for dozens of communities. "This is serious, this is potentially very very dangerous," said Andrews. Australia's east coast has been repeatedly lashed by heavy rainfall in the past two years, driven by back-to-back La Nina cycles. The east coast flooding disaster in March - caused by heavy storms in Queensland and New South Wales - claimed more than 20 lives.

AFP

On peace push, US envoy holds talks in Ethiopia

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - US special envoy Mike Hammer was in Addis Ababa on Friday as part of a push to try to end the nearly two-year war between Ethiopian government forces and Tigrayan rebels.

Hammer has been on a regional tour as international efforts intensify to try to bring peace to northern Ethiopia after fighting resumed in late August, rupturing a five-month truce.

Western powers including the US had on Wednesday urged Ethiopia's government

and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to start African Union-led peace talks, and called on neighbouring Eritrea to withdraw its troops from the battlefield. Hammer held talks in Addis with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen, who 'reaffirmed the government's commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the northern part of the country', Ethiopia's foreign ministry tweeted.

AFP

Venezuelan migrants in Mexico protest new US policy

Matamoros, Mexico - Venezuelan migrants hoping to enter the United States from Mexico on Friday protested a new US programme granting legal entry to 24,000 people from the crisis-ravaged country while deporting all those who cross the southern border illegally. In Matamoros, a Mexican city across the border from Brownsville, Texas, some 70 Venezuelans with their hands painted white marched in chains on the Gateway International Bridge, asking to be allowed on US soil. The demonstrators, part of the first group of deportees under the new immigration rules, wore the uniforms of the detention centers where they were



Venezuelan migrants walk to Tapachula from Huixtla, Chiapas state, Mexico, on Friday (AFP)

held before being transferred back to Mexico. Washington and Mexico City

on Wednesday announced an agreement that would allow 24,000 Venezuelans to enter

the United States if they can prove they have sponsorship, and only if they fly into the country. As part of the deal, the administration of US President Joe Biden said it would immediately return to Mexico any Venezuelans caught crossing the border illegally.

Until now, they had been granted exceptions due to Washington's distrust of the hard-left regime in Caracas, which it says punishes political opponents.

The programme - launched a month ahead of elections - is a bid by Biden to chart a path between Democratic demands to help desperate migrants and Re-

publican calls to stem what they paint as a 'tide' of illegal migration. The deal mirrors a controversial push by former President Donald Trump to keep Central Americans fleeing poverty and violence inside Mexico while their claims are processed.

On the verge of tears, some of the protesters said they were deceived by US authorities as they had already been in the country for 10 days. "They deceived us, saying that we were going to (the immigration office) when it was a lie... they didn't tell us anything either, just walk, walk," Jonathan Castellanos, one of the Venezuelans, told AFP.

AFP

Venezuelan town buries its dead after devastating landslide

Las Tejerías, Venezuela - 'We love you princess', reads the inscription on the fresh grave of a three-year-old girl among dozens of people killed by a devastating landslide in a Venezuelan town last week.

Gravediggers have had their hands full at the cemetery of Las Tejerías, a town of some 50,000 people laid to waste by a torrent of mud, stones and trees that followed hours of heavy rains.

Venezuelan authorities have confirmed 50 deaths so far, of whom 16 have been buried. Dozens remain missing.

"This has been sad," said one of the gravediggers, who asked not to be named.

"That belongs to a three-year-old girl who was wrenched from her mother's arms," by the landslide, he said pointing to a blue-tiled grave.

A few metres away, a fresh pile of soil with a bouquet of flowers marked the grave of an elderly couple.

Two more funerals were scheduled for later Friday.

Unusually heavy rains last Saturday caused a major river and several streams to overflow and gush through the town nestled in the mountains near Caracas. The muddy torrent washed away cars, parts of homes, businesses and telephone wires, and felled massive trees after a month's worth of rain fell in just eight hours.

Interior Minister Remigio Ceballos told the Telesur channel on Thursday the confirmed death toll stood at 50.

He offered no update on the number of missing, which by Tuesday was 56 people now also presumed dead.



Volunteers and residents pass along boxes with donations in the zone affected by a landslide during heavy rains in Las Tejerías, Aragua state, Venezuela, on Friday (AFP)

President Nicolas Maduro said earlier in the week that the toll from Venezuela's worst natural disaster in decades was likely to reach 100.

UN aid expected

Work continued on Friday to clear town streets of a thick layer of mud and debris and restore electricity as residents battled to

save what they could from their flooded homes.

Tankers were delivering drinking water, and some shops had reopened, though many areas of

the town remain inaccessible.

On Wednesday, military helicopters had dropped food parcels with small parachutes in some of the more isolated areas of the mountainous region.

The government has opened shelters and announced it will relocate families to social housing complexes elsewhere in the country.

Vice President Delcy Rodríguez has said 317 houses were destroyed and hundreds more were damaged.

A UN commission also visited the town on Friday to make supplies and technical help available to support the authorities.

"Just right away we have supplies that we are going to make available," Abubacar Sultan, a UNICEF representative leading the delegation, told reporters.

The Pan American Health Or-

ganization (PAHO) said on Thursday it had donated 'medicines and healing material for 5,000 people' and 10,000 tablets that are each able to purify 10 litres of water.

The rains had caused damage to several Venezuelan states.

San Timoteo, a fishing village on Lake Maracaibo in the country's west, was hit by an eight-hour storm that destroyed 20 modest stilt homes.

"The bridges were the first to come down and then the houses," Eli Rodríguez, a resident of the community of about 7,000 people, told AFP.

Crisis-hit Venezuela is no stranger to seasonal storms, but this was the worst so far this year following historic rain levels that caused dozens of other deaths in recent months.

AFP

Turkey mine blast: Death toll rises to 41

The blast ripped through the mine near the coal mining town of Amasra on Turkey’s Black Sea coast

Amasra, Turkey - Rescuers on Saturday found the body of the last missing miner at a coal mine in northern Turkey, bringing the death toll to 41 from a methane blast the previous day.

The blast ripped through the mine near the small coal mining town of Amasra on Turkey’s Black Sea coast shortly before sunset on Friday.

Shortly after his arrival at the site on Saturday afternoon, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that the last missing person had been found dead.

“Our priority was to find the miners in the gallery. We finally reached the last one.

“He also died, bringing the number of deaths to 41,” he said, ending rescue operations more than 20 hours after the deadly explosion.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu earlier said 58 miners had survived the blast, ‘either by themselves or thanks to rescuers’. He said 28 people had been injured as a result of the



A woman reacts as she waits outside a coal mine after an explosion in Amasra, in Bartin Province, Turkey, on Saturday (AFP)

blast.

Television images late on Friday showed anxious crowds -

some with tears in their eyes - congregating around a damaged white building near the en-

trance to the pit in search of news of their friends and loved ones.

Erdogan earlier vowed on Twitter that the incident will be thoroughly investigated.

Most initial information about those trapped inside was coming from workers who had managed to climb out relatively unharmed.

But Amasra mayor Recai Cakir said many of those who survived had suffered ‘serious injuries’. Turkey’s Maden Is mining workers’ union attributed the blast to a build-up of methane gas.

But other officials said it was

2014 disaster

Rescuers sent in reinforcements from surrounding villages to help in the search and rescue.

Television footage showed paramedics giving oxygen to the miners who had climbed out, then rushing them to the nearest hospitals.

The local governor said a team of more than 70 rescuers had managed to reach a point in the pit some 250 metres below.

Turkey’s AFAD disaster management service said the initial spark that caused the blast appeared to have come from a malfunctioning transformer.

It later withdrew that report and said methane gas had ignited for ‘unknown reasons’.

The local public prosecutor’s office said it was treating the incident as an accident and launching a formal investigation.

Turkey suffered its deadliest coal mining disaster in 2014 when 301 workers died in a blast in the western town of Soma. AFP

Our priority was to find the miners in the gallery. We finally reached the last one. He also died, bringing the death toll to 41

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN

premature to draw definitive conclusions over the cause of the accident.



Iranian protesters chanting slogans as they march in a street in the southeastern city of Zahedan on Friday (AFP)

Iranians pour onto streets to protest Mahsa Amini death

Paris, France - Demonstrators took to streets across Iran again on Saturday over Mahsa Amini despite internet cuts, as the protest movement sparked by outrage over her death in custody enters a fifth week.

Amini’s death on September 16, three days after she was arrested by Iran’s notorious morality police, has fuelled the biggest wave of street protests and violence seen in the country for years. Young women have been at the forefront of the demonstrations, shouting anti-government slogans, removing and burning their headscarves, and standing up to security forces on the streets.

Despite what online monitor NetBlocks called a ‘major disruption to internet traffic’, protesters were seen pouring onto the streets of the northwestern city of Ardabil, in videos shared on Twitter.

Shopkeepers went on strike in Amini’s hometown Sazez, in Kurdistan province, and Mahabad in West Azerbaijan, according to the 1500tasvir social media channel that monitors protests and police violations.

“Freedom, freedom, freedom,” young women at Shariati Technical and Vocational College in Tehran chanted as they waved their headscarves in the air, 1500tasvir said.

“Schoolgirls in Ney village in Marivan began the protests by setting fires on the ground and yelling anti-government chants,” said Hengaw, an Oslo-based rights group.

Youths were also seen demonstrating at universities in Tehran, Isfahan and Kermanshah, in footage widely shared online. They were responding to an appeal for a huge turnout for protests on Saturday under the catchcry “The beginning of the

end!”

“We have to be present in the squares, because the best VPN these days is the street,” activists declared, referring to virtual private networks used to skirt internet restrictions.

In response to the call for fresh protests, one of Iran’s main revolutionary bodies, the Islamic Development Coordination Council, has urged people to ‘express their revolutionary anger against sedition and rioters’.

A call also went out this week for ‘retirees’ of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to gather on Saturday given ‘the current sensitive situation’, according to a journalist at the Shargh newspaper.

‘Brave women of Iran’

The women-led protests have won support from the US president. “I want you to know that we stand with the citizens, the brave women of Iran,” Joe Biden said late on Friday.

“It stunned me what it awakened in Iran. It awakened something that I don’t think will be quieted for a long, long time,” he said. Iran ‘has to end the violence against its own citizens simply exercising their fundamental rights’, he added.

At least 108 people have been killed in the Amini protests, and at least 93 more have died in separate clashes in Zahedan, capital of the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, according to Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights.

The unrest has continued despite what Amnesty International called an ‘unrelenting brutal crackdown’ that included an ‘all-out attack on child protesters’ - leading to the deaths of at least 23 minors.

AFP

Iraq’s Sadrist camp refuses to join new government

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraqi firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr’s movement on Saturday announced its refusal to join a new government being formed by prime minister-designate Mohammad Shia al-Sudani.

The announcement came two days after lawmakers elected Abdul Latif Rashid as Iraq’s new president, and he swiftly named Sudani as prime minister in a bid to end a year of political gridlock since October 2021 elections.

“We stress our firm and clear refusal for any of our affiliates to participate... in this government formation,” Mohammed Saleh al-Iraqi, a close associate of Sadr, said in a statement posted on Twitter. The 52-year-old Shiite



This file photo shows supporters of Moqtada Sadr (image), protesting in Baghdad’s high-security Green Zone on August 2 this year (AFP)

former minister Sudani has the backing of Sadr’s Iran-backed rivals, the Coordination Framework, which controls 138 out of 329 seats in the Iraqi legislature.

In June, Sadr had ordered the 73 lawmakers in his bloc to resign, leaving parliament in the hands of the Framework, which includes representatives of the

former paramilitary Hashed al-Shaabi. In his statement on Saturday, Iraqi charged that the upcoming government has a ‘clear subordination to militias’ and would ‘not meet the people’s aspirations’.

The Sadrist official said the movement refused to take part in any government led by Sudani or any other candidate from among the old faces or those affiliated with the corrupt. “Anyone who joins their ministries does not represent us... rather, we disavow them,” Iraqi said.

Snap elections were held last year following nationwide protests that erupted in October 2019 to decry endemic corruption, decaying infrastructure and

the absence of services and jobs for youth. The stakes are high for the next cabinet, with a colossal US\$87bn in revenues from oil exports locked up in the central bank’s coffers. The money can help rebuild infrastructure in the war-ravaged country, but it can only be invested after lawmakers approve a state budget presented by the government, once formed. Sudani vowed on Thursday to push through ‘economic reforms’ that would revitalise Iraq’s industry, agriculture and private sector.

The prime minister-designate also promised to provide young Iraqis ‘employment opportunities and housing’.

AFP

At 34, Burkina’s new junta chief Traore is world’s youngest leader

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - Just two weeks ago, 34-year-old Ibrahim Traore was an unknown, even in his native Burkina Faso.

But in the space of a weekend, he catapulted himself from army captain to the world’s youngest leader - an ascent that has stoked hopes but also fears for a poor and chronically troubled country.

Traore, at the head of a core of disgruntled junior officers, ousted Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who had seized power just in January.

The motive for the latest coup - as in January - was anger at failures to stem a seven-year militant insurgency that has claimed thousands of lives and driven nearly two million people from their homes.

A few days after the September 30 coup, Traore was declared president and ‘guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity... and continuity of the State’.

At that lofty moment, Traore became the world’s youngest leader, wresting the title from Chilean President Gabriel Boric, a whole two years older.

And on Friday, a national forum made up of about 300 delegates named Traore interim president until elections are held in July 2024, two members of the ruling junta told AFP.

Traore’s previously unknown face is now plastered on portraits around the capital city



Burkina Faso’s new junta leader Captain Ibrahim Traore (AFP)

Ouagadougou.

His photo is even on sale in the main market, alongside portraits of Burkina’s revered radical leader Thomas Sankara, assassinated in 1987, and of Jesus.

Military career

Traore was born in Bondokuy, in western Burkina Faso, and studied geology in Ouagadougou before joining the army in 2010.

He graduated as an officer from the Georges Namono Military School - a second-tier institution compared to the prestigious Kadiogo Military Academy (PMK) of which

Damiba and others in the elite are alumni.

Traore emerged second in his class, a contemporary told AFP, describing him as ‘disciplined and brave’.

After graduation, he gained years of experience in the fight against the militants.

He served in the badly-hit north and centre of the country before heading to a posting in neighbouring Mali in 2018 in the UN’s MINUSMA peacekeeping mission.

He was appointed captain in 2020.

A former superior officer,

speaking on condition of anonymity, recounted an incident that occurred in 2020 when the town of Barsalogo in central Burkina was on the verge of falling to the militants.

The highway into Barsalogo was believed to have been mined, so Traore led his men on a ‘commando trek’ across the countryside, arriving in time to free the town, he said.

When Damiba took power in January, ousting elected president Roch Marc Christian Kabore, Traore became a member of the Patriotic Movement for Preservation and Restoration (MPSR), as the junta chose to call itself.

Discontent

In March, Damiba promoted Traore to head of artillery in the Kaya regiment in the centre of the country.

But it was a move that ironically would sow the seeds of Damiba’s own downfall.

The regiment became a cradle of discontent, and Traore, tasked by his colleagues with channelling their frustrations, made several trips to Ouagadougou to plead their case with Damiba.

Disillusionment at the response turned into anger, which appears to have crystallised into resolve to seize power after an attack on a convoy in northern Burkina last month that left 27 soldiers and 10 civilians dead.

AFP

West Bank raids: Israeli troops kill 3 Palestinians

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Two Palestinians including a doctor were killed on Friday in an Israeli raid in the flashpoint city of Jenin in the occupied West Bank, an army spokeswoman said.

Hours later Israeli troops killed a Palestinian youth accused of firing shots at an Israeli settlement in the West Bank. Dr Abdullah al-Ahmad ‘succumbed to a bullet wound that pierced his head, fired by the occupation (Israeli) soldiers’, the ministry said in a statement following the earlier incident.

A ministry spokesman told AFP that another Palestinian, Mateen Debaya, was also killed in the raid on the city’s refugee camp, with five others wounded.

Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, named Debaya as a ‘fighter’. The ministry said Ahmad was shot outside a government hospital, located on the edge of the camp. An AFP journalist said the doctor underwent emergency surgery at the facility after the shooting.

The armed wing of the mainstream Fatah movement described Ahmad as ‘its commander’ who had died after an ‘armed clash’.

AFP

Pakistan summons US envoy over Biden's nuclear remark

Joe Biden described Pakistan as one of the most dangerous nations in the world

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan on Saturday summoned the US ambassador for an explanation after President Joe Biden described the South Asian country as 'one of the most dangerous nations in the world' and questioned its nuclear weapons safety protocols.

Biden made the apparently off-the-cuff remark late on Thursday while talking about United States foreign policy during a private Democratic Party fundraiser in California, but the White House later published a transcript of his comments, sparking outrage in Pakistan.

Washington's relations with Pakistan have soured since last year, when the US ended a two-decade war in Afghanistan.

Pakistan provided crucial logistical access, but US officials believe Islamabad's powerful military and intelligence apparatus also aided the Taliban, who swept back to power as foreign troops pulled out.

Biden was speaking about his frequent interactions with Chi-



US President Joe Biden, in his off-the-cuff remark during a private Democratic Party fundraiser in California late on Thursday questioned Pakistan's nuclear weapons safety protocols (AFP)

nese leader Xi Jinping, when he said: "Did anybody think we'd be in a situation where China is trying to figure out its role relative to Russia and relative to India and relative to Pakistan? This is a guy who understands what he wants but has an enormous,

enormous array of problems. How do we handle that? How do we handle that relative to what's going on in Russia? And what I think is maybe one of the most dangerous nations in the world: Pakistan. Nuclear weapons without any cohesion."

Hours after the transcript of his address was posted, Pakistan summoned the US ambassador Donald Blome to the foreign office in Islamabad.

Room to manoeuvre
"I have discussed it with the

prime minister, and we have summoned the ambassador of the United States... for an official demarche," Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said during a press conference in Karachi.

"I am surprised by the remarks of President Biden. I believe this is exactly the sort of misunderstanding that is created when there is lack of an engagement." Zardari appeared to offer Washington some room to manoeuvre. "It was not an official function, it was not an address to the nation or an address to the parliament," he said.

"We should allow them an opportunity to explain this position. I don't believe that this should negatively impact the relations between Pakistan and the United States." The US is wary of Pakistan's close partnership with China, as Beijing pushes ahead with a US\$54bn 'economic corridor' that will build infrastructure and give Beijing an outlet to the Indian Ocean.

Washington has repeatedly said China will reap most of the benefits, leaving Pakistan with unsustainable debt. The warnings by the US - which considers China its preeminent global competitor - have repeatedly been brushed aside by Pakistan.

Nuclear-armed Pakistan this week abstained from a UN General Assembly vote to condemn Russia's annexation of parts of Ukraine, despite a major US diplomatic push to seek clearer condemnation of Moscow.

AFP



Supporters of the Tunisian Free Destourian Party stage a demonstration against President Kais Saied in the capital Tunis, on Saturday (AFP)

Tunisia protesters denounce 'coup', demand removal of president Saied

Tunis, Tunisia - Thousands of Tunisians demonstrated on Saturday in the capital Tunis, denouncing a power grab by President Kais Saied and demanding accountability for the country's long-running economic crisis.

Saied staged a dramatic power grab in July last year and later pushed through a constitution enshrining his one-man rule, in what critics have called a return to autocracy in the only democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring.

Protesters in central Tunis chanted, 'Down, down', 'Revolution against dictator Kais' and 'The coup will fail.'

The march was organised by the National Salvation Front, a coalition of opposition parties including the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha that had dominated Tunisia's parliament before its dissolution by Saied.

Ali Laarayedh, Tunisia's former prime minister and a senior Ennahdha official, told AFP that the protest was an expression of 'anger at the state of affairs under Kais Saied'.

"We are telling him to leave."

Saied's power grab was welcomed by some Tunisians tired of what they saw as a fractious and corrupt system established after the 2011 revolution that ousted late dictator Zine El Abidine Ali.

But a worsening economic situation, compounded by supply shortages in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, has agitated many in the North African country of 12mn.

If Saied stays, 'Tunisia will have no future', said Laarayedh, citing growing despair, poverty and unemployment.

The National Salvation Front has announced it will boycott a December vote to elect a new parliament with limited powers.

AFP

India tests ballistic missile from submarine

New Delhi, India - India on Friday successfully tested a ballistic missile fired from its first indigenous nuclear-powered submarine, the defence ministry said, in a boost for its growing strike capabilities.

The test of India's 'nuclear deterrence capability' makes it one of six countries - alongside the United States, Britain, Russia, France and China - with nuclear strike and counterstrike capabilities on land, sea and air.

The submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) underlined India's push towards building its own military hardware. The Asian giant is one of the largest arms importers in the world and still heavily relies on hardware from Moscow, its largest and oldest military supplier for decades. The launch 'is significant to prove crew competency and validate' the ballistic missile submarines - 'a key element of India's nuclear deterrence capability,' the ministry statement said.

It added that 'all operational and technological parameters of the weapon system' fired from INS Arihant in the Bay of Bengal had been passed. India has fought wars and has long-standing border disputes with its nuclear-armed neighbours arch-rival Pakistan and China.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government recently unveiled the first batch of Indian-made attack helicopters, designed for use in high-altitude areas.

AFP

China leader Xi expected to be given third term

Beijing, China - President Xi Jinping is expected to be handed a historic third term in control of China on October 23, it emerged on Saturday, after a spokesman confirmed the Communist Party's 20th Congress will end the previous day.

About 2,300 party delegates from every province will gather at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing from Sunday for the mostly closed-door conclave, to rubber-stamp the country's next leadership make-up.

The five-yearly talking shop will get under way at 10am (0200 GMT) with an opening ceremony, after which Xi is expected to deliver a lengthy speech that will give an assessment of the previous term as well as a roadmap for the next five years. Should everything go to plan, after the week-long meeting 69-year-old Xi will be reconfirmed as the party's general secretary, cementing his position as China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong.

At the highly choreographed conclave, the 2,296 participants



A man walks past portraits of (L to R) late Chinese chairman Mao Zedong, former Chinese leaders and current president Xi Jinping at Yanian Revolutionary Memorial Hall in Yan'an city on Saturday (AFP)

will also pick members of the party's roughly 200-member Central Committee, which in turn selects the 25-person Politburo and its all-powerful Standing

Committee - the country's highest leadership body.

The day after Congress closes, the new Standing Committee - currently a group of seven men

Should everything go to plan, after the week-long meeting 69-year-old Xi will be reconfirmed as the party's general secretary, cementing his position as China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong

including General Secretary Xi - should be revealed, if this year follows the same convention as previous Congresses.

Congress spokesman Sun Yeli confirmed the closing date of October 22 and told reporters: "The preparations for the Congress have now been fully completed."

During the two-hour press conference - in which Chinese state media asked several questions, as well as some international outlets - Sun said the proportion of female delegates had increased to 27 per cent, from 24 per cent at the last Congress in 2017. There were no questions asked about Xi.

China is holding Sunday's opening ceremony under a strict zero-COVID policy, sealing organisers and journalists in a virus-secure bubble two days in advance. Participants have been ordered to take daily COVID-19 tests to attend events, some of which are being held remotely by video link instead of in person.

At a hotel in western Beijing, organisers have set up a press centre crammed with exhibitions extolling Xi, festooned in the Communist Party's signature red and gold.

AFP

Robbie Coltrane, who played Harry Potter's Hagrid, dies aged 72

London, UK - Scottish actor Robbie Coltrane, who played Hagrid in the Harry Potter films, has died aged 72, his agent said on Friday.

Coltrane also played a former KGB agent-turned-Russian mafia boss in two James Bond films - *Goldeneye* (1995) and *The World Is Not Enough* (1999) - with Pierce Brosnan.

"My client and friend Robbie Coltrane OBE passed away on Friday October 14," Belinda Wright said in a statement, calling him 'a unique talent'.

"Robbie was one of the funniest people I've met and used to keep us laughing constantly as kids on set," said Daniel Rad-

cliffe, who played the title role in the Harry Potter series.

"I feel incredibly lucky that I got to meet and work with him and very sad that he's passed."

On the official James Bond Twitter account, franchise producers Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli, paid tribute to Coltrane as 'an exceptional actor whose talent knew no bounds...'

"We shall miss him as a dear friend. Rest in peace Robbie."

'Depth, power, talent'
Coltrane, who was born Anthony Robert McMillan on March 30, 1950, in Rutherglen,



Robbie Coltrane (AFP)

near Glasgow, forged a career as an actor, comedian and writer.

On television, he starred alongside Emma Thompson in

the cult BAFTA-winning BBC mini-series *Tutti Frutti* in 1987.

He came to prominence and won more awards for his portrayal of the hard-drinking criminal psychologist Dr Eddie 'Fitz' Fitzgerald in the ITV series *Cracker* (1993-2006).

He was the English author and lexicographer Samuel Johnson in the TV comedy series *Blackadder the Third* alongside *Mr Bean* star Rowan Atkinson and Hugh Laurie (*House*).

Frequent co-star Stephen Fry tweeted that he was 'awe/terror/love struck all at the same time' when he first met Coltrane 40 years ago.

"Such depth, power & talent:

funny enough to cause helpless hiccups & honking as we made our first TV show, *Alfresco*. Farewell, old fellow. You'll be so dreadfully missed," he wrote.

An 'incredible talent'
On the big screen, Coltrane had roles in the 1987 Neil Jordan crime drama *Mona Lisa* and teamed up with former Monty Python star Eric Idle in the 1990 comedy *Nuns on the Run*.

But he will best be remembered globally as Rubeus Hagrid, the half-giant half-human gamekeeper and Keeper of the Keys and Grounds of Hogwarts school in the film franchise of JK Rowling's best-selling *Harry Pot-*

ter books. The role 'brought joy to children and adults alike all over the world, prompting a stream of fan letters every week for over 20 years', said Wright.

"As well as being a wonderful actor, he was forensically intelligent, brilliantly witty," she said.

Rowling tweeted that 'I'll never know anyone remotely like Robbie again.'

"He was an incredible talent, a complete one off, and I was beyond fortunate to know him, work with him and laugh my head off with him," she wrote.

Coltrane is survived by his children Spencer and Alice and their mother Rhona Gemmell.

AFP

MANDROID CITY!

Nobody can compete with Erling Haaland-powered Man City, claims Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp

Liverpool, United Kingdom - After five years of duelling for Premier League supremacy, Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp believes Erling Haaland's arrival at Manchester City has made the difficult task of winning a title almost impossible.

Liverpool's first title in 30 years in 2019/20 interrupted City's run of four Premier League wins in five seasons, but twice Pep Guardiola's men have pipped the Reds by a solitary point, in 2018/19 and again last season.

But Klopp's men head into the first league meeting between the sides this season at Anfield on Sunday already 13 points behind the champions.

Liverpool's worst league start in 10 years has seen their summer recruitment come under scrutiny.

Most of the club's transfer budget was splashed on striker Darwin Nunez, who has taken time to adjust to Klopp's methods, while the decision not to reinforce an ageing midfield now looks questionable.

By contrast, City have added who Klopp described as "the best



Erling Haaland has already scored 20 goals for Manchester City in just 10 competitive appearances

Nobody can compete with City. You have the best team in the world and you put in the best striker on the market. No matter what it costs, you just do it.

JURGEN KLOPP

striker in the world" to a squad of seasoned winners.

Haaland has struck 20 times already in just 12 competitive appearances and goes into Sun-

day's clash on a 10-game scoring streak for his new club.

"Nobody can compete with City," said Klopp at his pre-match press conference. "You have the

best team in the world and you put in the best striker on the market. No matter what it costs, you just do it."

The total package of the Haaland deal including agents' fees, bonuses and wages is reported to be as much as £190 million (\$212.4 million).

The Norwegian is certainly proving his worth on the field, with Klopp an admirer since seeing his "insane" potential when Liverpool faced RB Salzburg in the Champions League in 2019.

"Even when he was very young, you could see the potential was insane. We were already

pretty busy thinking about him, how can you shut him down? He scored anyway.

"Physically, he sets new standards. The combination of being really physical and technical and sensational awareness, his orientation on the pitch is exceptional." AFP

Xavi: I will leave Barca if I think I'm not the solution

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez says he will walk away from his post if he feels he cannot help the team improve.

The Catalans are close to elimination from the Champions League after a draw with Inter Milan on Wednesday, despite heavy summer expenditure, and have faced criticism this week, ahead of the Clasico on Sunday.

"I know there's a lot of pressure, a lot of criticism, this is Barca," Xavi told a press conference on Saturday.

"I will not stop working and trying. The day that I'm not sure (of myself), I will leave. I will not be a problem for Barcelona, the day I see I am not a solution."

Xavi's side, La Liga leaders, face champions Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu, where they won 4-0 last season. The coach insisted that it is too early to judge his team after the new arrivals this summer, and believes they are heading in the right direction.

"It's a vital game for us, and for Madrid too, let's see who comes out of it as leaders," said Xavi. "I think (our) project is under construction. The debacle in Europe is sad, but we are on a good path."



Barcelona have spent big in the summer to bring star players such as Robert Lewandowski to Camp Nou

Xavi and Laporta all-in on Clasico after summer gamble

Barcelona, Spain - The football world watched on with surprise, and in some quarters, disdain, as Barcelona spent big this summer, bringing in Robert Lewandowski, Jules Kounde, Raphinha and others.

Despite crippling debts of over 1.3 billion euros (1.27 billion dollars), the club attacked the market and beat other sides to sign a host of world-class players, after activating a series of "palancas" - financial leverage.

The Catalans sold 10 percent of their La Liga television rights to American investment firm Sixth Street Partners for the next 25 years in June, then another 15 percent in July, for a total of 400 million euros.

They also sold 24.5 percent of Barca studios to Fan Token platform Socios.com for 100 million euros, and another equivalent stake to production company Or-

pheus Media for the same.

President Joan Laporta was keen to give coach Xavi Hernandez the players he asked for, and apart from Manchester City's Bernardo Silva, he delivered.

However, on the pitch, in the Champions League, Barcelona have not. Defeats against Bayern Munich and Inter Milan, followed by a home draw against the Italian side, leave them about to suffer a second consecutive group stage elimination.

"Last year we were not good enough, this year it was our own fault, it hurts more, admitted Xavi.

Still reeling from their 3-3 draw with Inter, Barcelona head into Sunday's Clasico at the Santiago Bernabeu against Real Madrid searching for a victory that will in some way vindicate their high summer expenditure.

AFP



Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti speaks to his staff during a training session on the eve of their Spanish League match against Barcelona (AFP)

Barcelona 'spectacular' in La Liga, says Ancelotti

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti warned his team that Barcelona have been "spectacular" in La Liga, despite their struggles in the Champions League.

Barcelona are on the verge of Champions League elimination after a 3-3 draw at home against Inter Milan on Wednesday, but come into Sunday's Clasico at the Santiago Bernabeu as leaders, unbeaten in the top flight.

Xavi's side have conceded just one goal all season in La Liga and

lead Real Madrid on goal difference, both sides tied on 22 points at the top of the table.

"We're looking at a team that's won all their games in La Liga after drawing their first one, they have very good form in the league," Ancelotti said.

"Since the start of the competition they have done every well. They've had trouble in the Champions League, which usually happens in that competition, but in La Liga they have been spectacular."

AFP

Frustrated Leicester held to goalless draw by Palace

Leicester, United Kingdom - Leicester climbed off the bottom of the Premier League table on Saturday but failed to make their superiority count in a frustrating goalless draw with Crystal Palace.

The stalemate at the King Power Stadium leaves Brendan Rodgers' team level on five points with Nottingham Forest, who have an inferior goal difference.

Leicester, with 24 goals conceded this season, have the leakiest defence in the Premier League and although they were solid at the back, they were unable to find their cutting edge in the autumn sunshine.

The home side had the bulk of the possession and the better chances in the first half but clear-cut opportunities were few and far between.

Harvey Barnes forced a save from Vicente Guaita after break-



Leicester City's Daniel Amartey (L) vies with Crystal Palace's Wilfried Zaha during their English Premier League match on Saturday (AFP)

into the box down the left and Patson Daka tested the goalkeeper midway through the opening period.

The visitors occasionally threatened, with Eberechi Eze firing just over in the dying minutes of the opening period but they

were unable to put the Leicester defence under consistent pressure. Leicester started the second half brightly, with in-form James Maddison unable to keep his left-footed shot down after being found by the lively Barnes.

AFP

Neymar goes on trial in Barcelona ahead of World Cup

Barcelona, Spain - A month before the World Cup begins in Qatar, Brazilian superstar Neymar goes on trial in Spain over alleged irregularities in his transfer to Barcelona nearly a decade ago.

The trial opens in Barcelona on Monday following a years-long legal saga over his 2013 transfer from the Brazilian club Santos, with the 30-year-old star in the dock as well as his parents, whose company manages his affairs.

All three are facing charges of business corruption.

Investigators began probing the transaction after a 2015 complaint filed by DIS, a Brazilian company that owned 40 percent of the player's sporting rights



Neymar

when he was at Santos.

Barcelona said the transfer cost 57.1 million euros, but prosecutors believe it cost at least 83 million euros.

The club said it paid 40 million euros to N&N, a company owned by the Neymar family, and 17.1 million to Santos, of which 6.8 million was given to DIS.

But DIS alleges that Neymar, Barcelona and the Brazilian club colluded to mask the true cost of the deal.

A total of nine defendants are on trial on corruption-related charges, among them two former Barca presidents, Sandro Rosell and Josep Maria Bartomeu, and ex-Santos boss

Odilio Rodrigues Filho.

Rosell and Barcelona FC are facing charges of fraud and corruption, while Filho and Santos are accused of fraud.

If convicted, the Paris Saint-Germain forward could face two years in jail and a 10-million-euro (\$9.7 million) fine.

The trial is to run until October 31, barely three weeks before the World Cup begins on November 20, with Neymar due to lead Brazil into their Group G opener against Serbia four days later.

Neymar is expected in court when the trial opens, although his presence has not been officially confirmed, and will testify on either October 21 or October 28.

AFP

STRENGTH IN DEPTH

India have the bench strength to make up for the absence of injured stars, says captain Rohit Sharma

Melbourne, Australia - India have the bench strength to make up for the absence of their injured stars when their T20 World Cup campaign gets under way against arch-rivals Pakistan, skipper Rohit Sharma said Saturday.

Mohammed Shami has been added to India's 15-man squad to replace pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who is out with back issues, for the marquee tournament in Australia starting Sunday.

Key all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is also missing the tournament due to injury, but Rohit insisted the team was ready for the challenge with the players at hand.

"Injury is part and parcel of the sport. Injuries will happen if we play so many matches, so our focus for the last one year was that we had to build bench strength," Rohit told reporters at a press conference in Melbourne.

"Our focus is to try and create backups and give them opportunity. The bowlers, who have come with us in the World Cup, have played enough matches."

India, who last won a global title with their 2013 Champions Trophy, begin their campaign against Pakistan on October 23 in Melbourne.

Shami, 32, was a last-minute replacement after the team waited on his recovery from Covid, which made him miss the home series against Australia and South Africa.



India skipper Rohit Sharma (L) and the captains of other teams participating in the T20 World Cup pose with the trophy after a press conference in Melbourne on Saturday (AFP)

The veteran quick will meet up with the rest of the squad in Brisbane, where India will play two warm-up matches against the hosts and New Zealand.

"Whatever we have heard about Shami has been very positive," said Rohit.

"His recovery after Covid has been good and (he) has had three to four bowling sessions with full intensity. All's looking good with Shami."

Shami will join fellow fast bowlers Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Harshal Patel and Arshdeep Singh.

Our focus is to try and create backups and give them opportunity. The bowlers, who have come with us in the World Cup, have played enough matches

ROHIT SHARMA

'Fully fit and dedicated'

Pakistan have welcomed back pace bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi, who recovered from a knee injury in a boost to their chances.



Skipper Babar Azam, who turned 28 on Saturday and was presented with a birthday cake on the dais by Australia skipper Aaron Finch, said Shaheen was fit and ready.

"The way Shaheen has come back and he is fully fit and dedicated and we are looking forward to the tournament and play," said Azam.

"Pakistan have always produced good fast bowlers. Shaheen's return has only made our fast bowling lot stronger," he added.

Pakistan, who missed out on

the title last year after losing in the semi-finals to eventual winners Australia, are fresh from winning a T20 tri-series in New Zealand. Mohammad Rizwan last month overtook Babar as the number one T20 batsman in the world, while the captain could well hit top gear in the T20 showpiece event.

"The boys are confident and we will try to take this momentum into the World Cup," said Babar, adding that he was expecting a high-intensity match against India in their tournament opener.



Australia's captain Aaron Finch with England skipper Jos Buttler (AFP)

'Tired' Australia favourites for T20 World Cup, says England captain Jos Buttler

Melbourne, Australia - Australian captain Aaron Finch admitted his team was "tired" and needed to freshen up before their defence of the Twenty20 World Cup title, but England skipper Jos Buttler on Saturday said the hosts remain the favourites.

The reigning champions head into the showpiece cricket tournament on home soil, which starts Sunday with the preliminary round after a lacklustre three-match series against the English. They lost 2-0, with the third game abandoned Friday evening due to rain, culminating eight matches for Australia in 26 days - three of them in India.

"I think the guys are probably a little bit tired at the moment," Finch said after the washed-out England match, where he fell for a first-ball duck.

"The schedule has been so packed over the last six to eight weeks that we identified a couple of months ago that we wanted to make sure that we're in a posi-

They are also reigning champions, so you have to pick them out as favourites

JOS BUTTLER

tion to be peaking at the right time of the World Cup and not beforehand.

"So it's going to be important over the next couple of days to try and freshen everyone up as much as we can."

Buttler, whose team are riding high after a confidence-boosting build-up, insisted Australia were still the team to beat.

"T20 is one of those games that can be unpredictable, but I think history tells you that, generally, the host nation are slight favourites in big tournaments," he said in Melbourne.

"Many of us have travelled

and played in Australia and know the conditions, but of course no-one is going to know the conditions or be as accustomed to them as the Australian team.

"They are also reigning champions, so you have to pick them out probably as favourites for the tournaments."

Australia still has an unofficial warm-up game scheduled against India before they enter the World Cup at the Super 12 stage on October 22 in a rematch of last year's final with New Zealand.

Finch said the players would be given a couple of off days in the lead-up "where there's no cricket at all to let our guys recharge".

He also acknowledged that England "definitely outplayed us".

"With the bat, we were always just one wicket down further than we needed to be over the whole series," he said.

AFP

Cold weather a worry for Sri Lanka, Namibia ahead of World Cup opener

Melbourne, Australia - Namibia captain Gerhard Erasmus expressed concern Saturday about the cold weather in Australia, but insisted the African nation could set the Twenty20 World Cup on fire by upsetting Sri Lanka in the tournament opener.

Temperatures at Geelong, where the global showpiece starts on Sunday, have been hovering around 16 degrees Celsius (60 degrees Fahrenheit) and plunging to as low as four in the evening.

That is nippy for a Namibian side more used to balmy weather at home this time of year, and Erasmus admitted it was a shock to the system.

"It's a lot more chilly than we thought, but we have to embrace it," he said in Melbourne.

"It's been difficult most days, obviously, but it is the same for everybody. There's nothing you can do about it, you just have to do what you can."



Sri Lankan captain Dasun Shanaka at a press conference in Melbourne on Wednesday (AFP)

Sri Lanka skipper Dasun Shanaka said his team had also struggled.

"We are trying to acclimatise,

it's quite different to Sri Lanka weather," he said.

"Much chillier than we expected. We are getting used to it

and hopefully it won't harm us when we are in the field."

Namibia sprung a surprise at last year's World Cup by making the Super 12 stage on their tournament debut.

They also met Sri Lanka first up in 2021, crashing by seven wickets, before beating the Netherlands and Ireland to qualify from the first round.

Erasmus said they were better placed to beat the Sri Lankans this time around.

"We know all the games are going to be tough, but there's a little more of a sense of calmness, of knowing what to expect. We know what's on the line and for us that's a good feeling to have," he said.

"Sri Lanka are a good team. They just came off an Asia Cup win and are playing very good cricket so opening the World Cup against someone like that is going to be hard." AFP

Bangladesh make late changes to World Cup squad

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh included batsman Soumya Sarkar and left-arm pacer Shoriful Islam in a last-minute change to their squad for the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia, starting in Geelong, Australia on Sunday.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board said that it had submitted the final squad to the World Cup authorities ahead of the October 14 cut-off date for participating teams to change players.

Left-handed batsman Soumya and pacer Shoriful were originally on the standby list for the tournament.

They replaced batsman Sabbir Rahman and all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin, who had been named earlier in the 15-man team, announced on 14 September.



Soumya Sarkar

Sabbir and Saifuddin were also part of the Bangladesh squad that participated in the just-concluded tri-nation tournament in New Zealand.

Bangladesh failed to win any of their four matches in the tri-nation tournament, which also included Pakistan, the eventual winners.

Sabbir played one match in

the tournament to score just 14 runs while all-rounder Saifuddin was generous with the ball conceding 90 runs for his two wickets in two matches at an economy rate of 11.48.

Sabbir and Saifuddin will return home from New Zealand, said the BCB, adding that the Bangladesh World Cup squad will head for Brisbane, Australia on Saturday. They will play two warm-up games against Afghanistan and South Africa before starting their campaign in Hobart on October 24.

Bangladesh will play directly in the second round where they are drawn in Group 2 alongside India, Pakistan, South Africa and two qualifiers.

AFP



Oman sailors fighting for top honours on the final day of the Arab Sailing Championship at Barcelo Mussanah Resort

Muscat - Hosts Oman's Tamim al Balushi and Mayed al Ali of UAE are level on points at the top of the Optimist leaderboard going into the final day of the Arab Sailing Championships at Barcelo Mussanah Resort, Al Masnaah, on Friday.

Mohammed al Marzouqi of the UAE is third while Oman's Abdulateef al Qassmi is fourth. Firas al Nabhani ended the day in tenth, while teammates Hood al Noufli and Hassan al Wahaibi are close behind in 11th and 12th.

In the women's category, Egypt's Karma Walid Mohamed continues to excel, leading by 16 points and sitting third overall. In second place currently is Malak al Doseri of Bahrain and Talia Hussein Emad of Egypt remains in third.

UAE's Othman al Hammadi extended his lead over teammate Alharith al Ali to 15 points in the ILCA 4 class.

Almutasim al Farsi of Oman retained the lead in the ILCA 6 class, moving 12 points ahead of Bahrain's Dawood Abdullah in

second.

Egypt's women sailor Khoulood Moustafa Mansy is second overall, nine points behind Al Farsi.

Oman's Ali Alsaadi suffered disqualification in the first race of the day and despite fighting back well to win the second, ended up surrendering his lead to Abdullah Al Janahi of Bahrain in the ILCA.

Adil Khalid of UAE remains a close third.

Oman's Abdulmalik Al Hanai ended the day in fifth once again, hot on the heels of the leaders,

and Abaraa Al Noufli is not far behind in seventh overall.

The top three in iQFOiL ended the day just as they started it, with Oman's Abdulmajeed Al Hadhrami in first, nine points ahead of fellow Omani Omar Al Qartobi in second and Mehdi Guembri of Tunisia third. Abdullah Al Sarahi of Oman is currently fourth.

Oman are dominating the proceedings in the RS Venture class as well. The team of Malik Juma Al Qartobi and Ghaliya Al Jabri continued the excellent form they

have shown all week and now lead by four points from their Omani teammates Sami Al Sulaimi and Naser Al Rahbi who recorded two second-place finishes and one win.

Saleh Al Tuwaylie and Turki Al Khawaji of Saudi Arabia stay third and the Egyptian team skippered by Ahmed Salman Abdulwahid ended the day in fourth.

Sailors will compete for medals on Saturday with the final three races in all classes. The top-performing nation will also claim the Nations Cup trophy.

Record-breaking Martin takes pole for Australian MotoGP

Phillip Island, Australia - Jorge Martin smashed the nine-year-old Phillip Island lap record Saturday to grab pole position for the Australian MotoGP, with world champion Fabio Quartararo coming in fifth.

In dry and partly cloudy conditions, the Spaniard ensured he will start at the front of the grid on Sunday with a blistering lap of one minute and 27.767 seconds.

It shattered the 1:27.899 mark held by Jorge Lorenzo since 2013 and, incredibly, came with the Ducati-Pramac rider having never driven the picturesque waterfront circuit before this weekend.

"It's time to beat those records because the bikes are faster now," said Martin.

"Yesterday I struggled a bit because I was a bit lost, it is my first time here and I had to take the measurement (of the track). But finally today I had good pace.

"I thought I could be competitive, but not this competitive. Making 1:27 is amazing.

Six-time world champion Marc Marquez amazingly saved

a crash when he lost the front end of his Honda and spun at turn 10 on his first lap, but recovered to take second, 0.013 behind, also under Lorenzo's time.

"I'm not a little bit happy, I'm a lot," said Marquez, who is a three-time winner at Phillip Island and only recently back from yet another bad injury.

"The most important thing is

I thought I could be competitive, but not this competitive. Making 1:27 is amazing

JORGE MARTIN

the feeling is coming with the bike, so step by step I am feeling better. And physically feeling better... is a key point for me."

World championship leader Quartararo of Yamaha finished fifth but behind fellow title contender Francesco Bagnaia, who will start third on his Ducati.

AFP



Prima Pramac's Jorge Martin speaks at a press conference in Phillip Island on Saturday, ahead of the Australian MotoGP (AFP)

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Rublev eases past Thiem to reach Gijon Open final

Gijon, Spain - Andrey Rublev secured his place in the Gijon Open final with a comfortable 6-4, 6-4 victory over Dominic Thiem on Saturday.

The Russian, top seed and ranked ninth in the world, will face Sebastian Korda or Arthur Rinderknech in Sunday's final.

Rublev, playing aggressively, broke to move 3-1 ahead in the first set and after the Austrian broke back for 5-4 expressed his anger but managed to follow suit to seal the first set.

In the second set Thiem saved two match-points but Rublev eventually sealed the victory with another break as he closes in on his fourth title of the year.

"When I was winning 4-1 with a break point for 5-1 it looks like the match is going my way and then I am at 5-4 with him serving," said Rublev. "That's not easy to accept, but I was lucky I played a really good game and Dominic helped me out a little bit.

"Then I felt more confident and I was able to win in two sets, which was the most important thing." This week I have been playing really well and I'll try to



Andrey Rublev was always in control in the semi-final against Dominic Thiem (AFP)

show my best tennis of the week tomorrow."

Swiatek rips Gauff

World number one Iga Swiatek, seeking her eighth WTA title of the year, cruised past CoCo Gauff on Friday to reach the San Diego Open semi-finals.

In a rematch of this year's

French Open women's final, the 21-year-old Polish star rolled over 18-year-old American Gauff 6-0, 6-3 in 65 minutes.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek advanced to a Saturday semi-final against sixth-ranked Jessica Pegula, who defeated 18th-ranked US compatriot Madison Keys 6-4, 7-5.

Croatia's 77th-ranked Donna Vekic made the semi-finals by ousting fifth-ranked Aryna Sabalenka 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1.

Vekic will next face 19th-ranked American Danielle Collins, who defeated Spain's fourth-ranked Paula Badosa 7-6 (7/5), 6-4.

AFP

Baby joy for Ukrainian tennis star Svitolina

Paris, France - Ukrainian star Elina Svitolina announced on Saturday the birth of a baby girl with her fellow tennis player husband Gael Monfils.

"What a night. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to Skai Monfils," Svitolina said in a post on Twitter.

Svitolina, a former world number three, stepped back from tennis in March, in a year which has been traumatic for the 28-year-old because of the war in her native Ukraine.

"I can only thank my wife and God for this special moment," Monfils, 36, also said on Twitter.

"I had the most incredible night of my life, which ended with the most incredible gift at 6:00 a.m. Elina was strong and brave."

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C.R. No: 1365452 | MM No: 06/05/2022

Environmental protesters threw tomato soup over one of Vincent van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' paintings at London's National Gallery on Friday, in the latest direct-action stunt targeting works of art.

The gallery in Trafalgar Square said the protesters caused 'minor damage to the frame but the painting is unharmed'. The painting went back on display a few hours after the attack.

Protest group Just Stop Oil, which was behind the action, wants to end UK government approval for exploring, developing and producing fossil fuels, and has mounted a series of high-profile protests.

London's Metropolitan Police said officers arrested two protesters from the organisation for criminal damage and aggravated trespass after they 'threw a substance' at the painting in the gallery and glued themselves to a wall, just after 11 am (1000 GMT). Police added they had unglued the protesters and taken them to a central London police

station.

A video posted on Twitter by the Guardian newspaper's environment correspondent Damien Gayle and retweeted by the eco-activism group shows two young women wearing T-shirts bearing the slogan 'Just Stop Oil' lobbing cans of soup at the iconic painting.

Keep getting soup

After glueing themselves to the wall, one of the activists shouted, "What is worth more, art or life? Are you more concerned about the protection of a painting or our planet and people?"

In the video, someone can be heard yelling "Oh my God" as the soup hits the canvas and another person shouts "security!" while soup drips from the



Whether you're Just Stop Oil, Insulate Britain or Extinction Rebellion, you cross a line when you break the law - and that's why we'll keep putting you behind bars," she said.

Just Stop Oil has previously targeted several other famous paintings with glue attacks. In June, two activists glued their hands to the frame of van Gogh's painting 'Peach Trees in Blossom' at the Courtauld Gallery in London.

In July, supporters glued their hands to the frame of British painter John Constable's "The Hay Wain" at the National Gallery. They first taped over the canvas with a reimagined version of the bucolic scene, showing the landscape covered in pollution, dotted with wildfires and overflowed by aircraft.

In the same month, they glued themselves to a full-scale copy of Leonardo Da Vinci's 'The Last Supper' at the Royal Academy in London. In recent days, Just Stop Oil has held multiple protests blocking major roads.

JUST STOP OIL PROTEST

Art attack

Climate activists throw tomato soup over Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' in London



covering famous artworks, condemned the attack.

"There are hundreds of ways to achieve attention for the climate problems. This should not be one of them," he said.

Crossing a line

The attack came a week after Britain's new interior minister Suella Braverman issued a threat to direct-action climate protesters, accusing them of using 'guerrilla tactics' to bring chaos and misery to the public.

Whether you're Just Stop Oil, Insulate Britain or Extinction Rebellion, you cross a line when you break the law - and that's why we'll keep putting you behind bars

SUELLA BRAVERMAN

Met Police Commissioner Mark Rowley said of the protests that he was 'frustrated so many officers are being taken away from tackling issues that matter most to communities'.

Later on Friday, police arrested 24 people on suspicion of conspiracy to commit criminal damage and wilful obstruction of the highway after a Just Stop Oil demonstration outside New Scotland Yard, the Met's headquarters. An activist sprayed orange paint at the force's sign, as others blocked the road.

AFP

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AUTUMN SALON

People Need People

Twenty nine international artists, including 11 Omanis, are currently participating in the Autumn Salon at Matti Sirvio Art Gallery (October 8 – November 5)



Hubert Vaz
(Text and photos)

There's a pin-drop silence as you enter Matti Sirvio Art Gallery where his annual Autumn Salon, titled 'People Need People' is currently on... Then the murmurs begin to rise, as the varied canvases and installations vie for your attention, and suddenly you find yourself caught in a deafening din stemming from a whirlwind of conflicting messages. 'People need people', indeed, and you can see the currents of friendship, conflict, connections, endeavours for peace, love, as well as silence, pouring forth like a river that is faced with the prospect of branching out into multiple streams, each in a different

direction. The artworks on display, as well as the installations, sit together in a seemingly harmonious fashion, but you can sense their innermost desires to tear apart from the conglomerate and find a new path. The messages are all written on the wall, in bold as well as subtle strokes, and if you can read them with an eye for detail, you would emerge taking what best suits your own situation in life. The exhibition was inaugurated on October 8 under the auspices of Rudaina Amur al Hajri, president of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association. It will be on display at the gallery till November 5. The exhibits have been presented by 29 artists hailing from 12 countries, including 11 Omanis.

Diversity of human interest
Matti Sirvio, the Finnish proprietor of the gallery, known for his unique wizardry in cu-

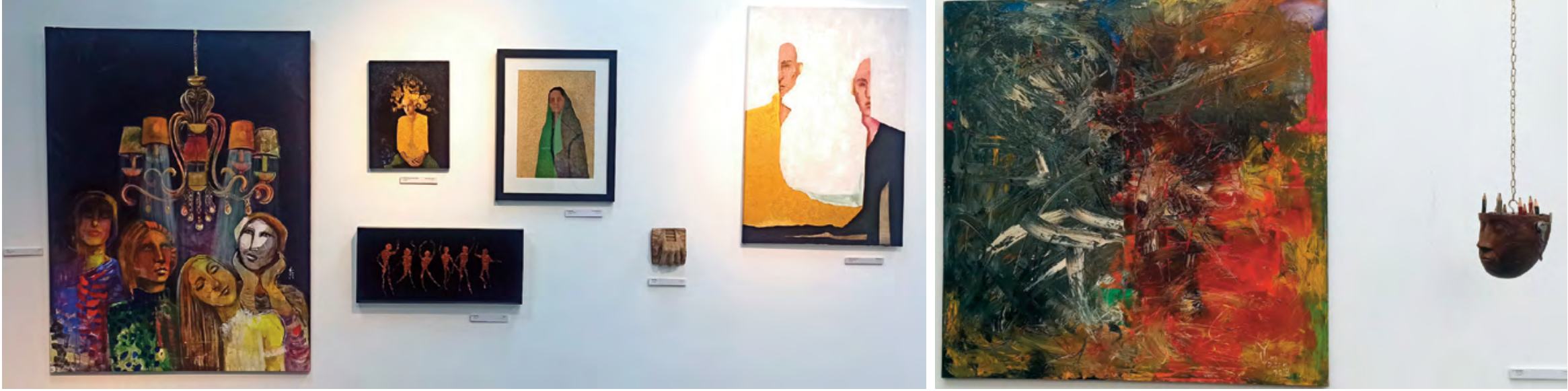
rating vibrant seasonal exhibitions every year, said, "The theme of this exhibition is 'People Need People' and most of the artists were inspired by this theme, expressing a diversity of human interest, family, forgiveness, refugees, communication, love, care, teamwork, friendship, bonding, and many other facets of life. The request was to work in the style of abstract figurative painting. Asked whether artists have experienced any new gusto of energy after the restrictions during the pandemic, Matti said, "I feel the restriction dam has been broken, both, physically and emotionally. Art events and creative activities are back, stronger than ever." About juxtaposing installations with canvases in a joint exhibition, Matti asserted, "In group exhibitions, the greatest challenge is to move the works around a long time until you feel that they start complementing and supporting each other - the same way



as it works with people. The art is made by people, after all." Year after year, Matti has been presenting vibrant joint exhibitions, providing artists of all statures in Oman, budding as well as established artists, a common platform to showcase the essence of their own emo-



tions through creative expression. The exercise not only gives artists in Oman equal opportunity to show their talent and seek buyers but also gives them a chance to learn from each other's prowess with the paintbrush. He adds, "You see the artists grow in their skill and confidence. It's always a joy to have new artists join and mingle with the old timers. I believe, it strengthens the artist community and helps us all grow." The current exhibition displays diverse works of international as well as Omani artists. In fact, some brilliant works of young Omani artists are on display indicating their steady growth as well as the maturity with which they have explored their creativity with colours and dexterity with multi-media installations.



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