



Municipality calls bids for year-long festival ground

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has announced a tender to provide consulting services for the creation of a multifaceted festival ground in the governorate. The site is intended to be a single venue capable of hosting a variety of events and activities.

The municipality is calling upon companies, those classified as First Class and registered with the Tender Board, to submit bids. Interested parties are required to present contemporary designs and ideas in keeping with international standards and current trends in event management.

The planned venue has the ambitious goal of bringing together all essential elements of events and activities within a cohesive space. Proposed features include walkways, lighting, theatres, exhibitions, dining establishments, restrooms and specially designated zones for entertainment and promotional activities.

Besides constructing the site, the tender also entails crafting designs for specific event areas, arenas, performance spaces, games sites and environmentally friendly neighbourhoods. These designs are intended to cater to a diverse array of programmes and activities, fitting into the broader scope of sustainable living.

'This initiative aligns with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 for sustainable city and governorate development,' municipality sated.

The venue's flexibility is expected to draw a wide array of events throughout the year, adapting to different seasons and meeting the needs of both visitors and tourists. 'It is a reflection of Muscat Municipality's commitment to the aspirations of the community.'

The project showcases a particular focus on engaging youth and community groups, aligning with broader civic goals and contributing to the vibrant cultural landscape of the governorate.

Sultanate's safe debt limit estimated at 30% of GDP

Sultanate repaid over RO1.5bn of public debt in H1 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Based on studies and risk analyses conducted by the Micro Fiscal Unit of the Ministry of Finance, Oman's safe debt limit has been estimated at 30% of GDP, enabling the government to meet debt obligations and sustain economic growth.

Due to fall in oil prices since 2014, the sultanate's general budgets recorded deficits for more than eight years, compelling Oman to finance these deficits by borrowing from local and external institutions. Consequently, public debt increased to 67.9% of GDP in 2020.

'There was an urgent need to adopt prudential fiscal policies with the aim of reducing public debt and achieving fiscal balance so as to absorb any potential financial shocks. So, the Ministry of Finance set out a public debt management strategy and conducted a study to identify the safe debt limit,' the ministry said in its monthly *Fiscal Performance Bulletin* on Sunday.

With the implementation of



Oman posts RO656mn surplus till June

Muscat - Oman has reported a budget surplus of RO656mn in the first half of 2023 compared to RO784mn surplus recorded in the corresponding period of 2022.

According to the Fiscal Performance Bulletin issued by the Ministry of Finance, total public revenues amounted to RO6.342bn in the January-

June period of 2023, down 6% compared to RO6.725bn registered in the same period in 2022.

Oman's net oil revenue this year increased 2% to RO3.257bn compared to RO3.187bn recorded in the same period in 2022. Net gas revenue of 2023 amounted to RO1.115bn, down 36% com-

pared to RO1.729bn registered in 2022. However, current revenue grew 9% to RO1.962bn in 2023 against RO1.796bn collected in 2022.

Total public spending decreased 4% to RO5.686bn during the first six months of 2023 compared to actual spending over the same period in 2022.

prudent fiscal policies and increased oil revenues over the past two years, Oman successfully reduced its public debt to 40% of GDP at the end of 2022.

The safe debt limit varies from country to country, depending on economic characteristics, current economic conditions, economic growth projections, and other in-

dicators. By the end of H1 2023, the Ministry of Finance had repaid more than RO1.5bn of its public debt, thereby reducing the sultanate's total public debt to

RO16.3bn as of June 2023.

The Ministry of Finance did not withdraw from reserves this year as planned earlier due to the generation of additional revenue, the Fiscal Performance bulletin reported.

In recent years, Oman has succeeded in reducing public debt and costs associated with debt servicing, thus minimising risks within its debt portfolio.

'This is a result of several measures and initiatives that focused on rationalising public spending and increasing public revenue,' the ministry stated. Higher oil prices and the allocation of additional revenues towards repaying government loans also contributed to debt reduction.

► NEWS BRIEF

3 MISSING CITIZENS FOUND DEAD IN WADI

Muscat - Three missing citizens were found dead on Sunday after their vehicles drifted away in a wadi in the wilayat of Mahda, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority.

In a statement, CDAA said, 'The Civil Defence and Ambulance Department, in cooperation with the Police Command in Buraimi and North Batinah governorates, have been able to find the bodies of three missing persons.'

On Saturday, CDAA received a report of two vehicles drifting away with seven passengers in a wadi in Mahda. Four of them were rescued immediately.



Crypto platform Easy Coins gets CMA registration



England relishing World Cup semi clash with Australia

18 injured in Mabela gas cylinder explosion

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Eighteen people were injured following a gas cylinder explosion at a restaurant in the South Mabela area of Seeb on Sunday morning, Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) reported. The injuries sustained by the victims varied from light to moderate.

According to a CDAA statement, 'Rescue and ambulance teams in the Muscat governorate were called to address a cooking gas cylinder explosion in a restaurant in the wilayat of Seeb.'

Besides injuries, the explosion also caused considerable damage to nearby buildings and vehicles.

The authority took this incident as an opportunity to remind the public of the importance of adhering to safety rules and regulations concerning the use and storage of gas cylinders. Accord-



CDAA took this incident as an opportunity to remind the public of the importance of adhering to safety rules and regulations concerning the use and storage of gas cylinders

ing to CDAA's guidelines, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders should only be purchased from authorised dealers and should always be stored upright.

The authority's handbook further instructs, 'Keep the gas

cylinder at least 1m away from open flames, heat sources and electrical outlets. Ensure that there are no naked flames nearby when changing the gas cylinder. Store no more than one spare cylinder at any time, and the spare should be kept upright in a ventilated cabinet.'

Emphasising routine safety measures, the handbook advises the public to keep windows open while cooking and never leave cooking unattended.

Additionally, residents are encouraged to 'turn off the gas supply from the regulator before leaving home. Check all gas connections regularly for leakage. Replace gas hoses every two years and gas regulators every five years'.

The incident is a reminder of the potential hazards associated with improper handling and storage of gas cylinders, CDAA stated.

Revenues of hotels grow to 110mn

Muscat - Revenues of three- to five-star hotels in Oman totalled RO110mn at the end of June 2023, up 32% over the corresponding period in 2022.

Statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) show that the total number of hotel guests grew 27.4% to 943,068 by the end of June 2023, compared to 740,050 during the corresponding period in 2022. Hotel occupancy registered a growth of 10.8%.

A total of 337,682 hotel guests were Omanis, while 72,849 were GCC citizens - up 28.7%, 250,151 were Europeans - up 46.3%, 29,899 were Americans - up 3.2%, 5,451 were citizens from African countries - up 41.3%, 141,007 guests were from Asia - up 54%, and 21,834 from Oceania - up 252.2%.

Naval forces in Gulf warn ships against nearing Iranian waters

Manama, Bahrain - Western naval forces operating in the Gulf warned ships sailing in the strategic Strait of Hormuz against approaching Iranian waters to avoid the risk of seizure, according to statements issued over the weekend.

'Vessels are being advised to transit as far away from Iranian territorial waters as possible' to minimise the risk of seizure, US Fifth Fleet spokesperson Commander Tim Hawkins told AFP.

The International Maritime Security Construct, led by Washington, is 'notifying regional

mariners of appropriate precautions to minimise the risk of seizure based on current regional tensions, which we seek to de-escalate,' he added.

The alliance, established in 2019, is made up of 11 countries, including the United States, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Its mission, according to its website, is to 'provide reassurance to merchant shipping in the Middle East region'.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) agency said late on Saturday in a



statement that it had been 'made aware of an increased threat within the vicinity of Strait Of Hormuz', through which one-third of the world's oil transported by sea passes.

The agency advised all vessels to 'exercise caution and report suspicious activity to UKMTO'.

In a statement released on Saturday afternoon, maritime security company Ambrey said that it had been warned by Greek and US authorities, as well as others, 'of an attack on a merchant vessel... in the Strait of Hormuz in the next 12 to 72 hours'.

There has been no reaction so far from Iranian authorities to the warnings.

This comes days after the US and Iran reached an agreement to release five American prisoners in exchange for the release of Iranian funds frozen for humanitarian purposes, raising hopes of reducing tensions between the adversaries.

On August 7, over 3,000 American sailors arrived in the Middle East as part of a plan to enhance their military presence in the region.

AFP



BOON OR BANE?

As the world moves forward, the ascent of artificial intelligence (AI) is proving to be a life-changing force, re-shaping the fabric of our lives in unprecedented ways. As AI continues to advance at an astonishing pace, it is quickly infiltrating various aspects of our lives, from businesses to human relationships. Having the potential to revolutionise efficiency, innovation and decision-making, AI's presence can be both a boon and a bane in the journey of mankind. With the use of AI rapidly rising, do you feel that it will replace jobs and human emotions? Here's what Muscat Daily readers said -



Javed Ismail
IT and cybersecurity expert

The fast development of AI poses a multipronged threat to us in the near future. The main threat lies in the potential for AI systems to surpass human control and comprehension, leading to unintended consequences and ethical dilemmas. As AI algorithms become more developed, the risk of biases, security breaches and decision-making errors will amplify, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities and compromising privacy.

Amir Hossein Anvarizadeh
Senior business head of retail operations

AI has the potential to automate chores and jobs, thereby harming employment. Human emotions, on the other hand, are complex and unlikely to be completely replaced because

these are the result of unique human experiences. While AI may simulate emotions, true comprehension and empathy remain uniquely human characteristics.

Jincy Rosevilla
Teacher

Over the last decade, there has been significant development in the field of artificial intelligence. Subsequently, automation phased out many jobs - data analysts, call centre jobs, customer care centre jobs as well as average skilled labour works. As a teacher, I am concerned about the risks posed by using AI for educational purposes. Teachers always consider individual differences among students like IQ level, interest, weakness and presence of mind. How can we expect such management of behaviour and empathy with students from a programmed robotic system?

Mudasir Umair Rafique
Branch manager and quality assurance officer

The rapid rise of AI sparks both excitement and concerns. While it might replace certain jobs, the depth of human emotions remains a unique aspect that AI is unlikely to replicate.

Mike Kosie Omotegbona
Petroleum geologist

This enigma called AI will one day destroy all mankind and give credence to the fact that man is and has always been an enemy of himself. AI is programmed for self-continuity, ever ready and ready to go. It does not ask for salary and wages; it has no family and emotions. It is designed to replace man from the face of the earth. AI will one day wage war against man, annihilating and obliterating him from the face of the earth.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Is Oman ready to send satellites into space? How can Oman become a space hub in the near future?

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

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PAKISTAN 14th August Happy Independent Day

On the auspicious occasion of Independence day of Pakistan, we wish to congratulate people of Pakistan and thanks to Sultanate of Oman for their continued patronage and support We have been participating in infrastructure development of Oman since 1980

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33% of Oman's plant species grow in the Hajar Mountains

Shedding light on the importance of these species, Sulaiman bin Nasser al Akhzami, Director General of Nature Conservation



Additionally, these contribute to controlling surface water runoff, maintaining soil stability and producing raw materials for

He further emphasised a cultural connection, noting that "the stick (assa) made from the wood

Jabal Akhdar, a region characterised by perennial wild trees, has well-known species such as al alan, al atam, al bout and al talh. As part of ongoing conservation efforts, 90 identification plates have been installed on perennial trees in Jabal Akhdar to facilitate counting and identifica-

EA has also undertaken significant initiatives to protect threatened species, including issuing legislation such as the Natural Reserves and Wildlife Protection Law and the Environment Protection and Pollution Control Law. Further, ministerial decisions have been made to safeguard

Akhzami highlighted challenges, such as climatic changes and overgrazing, that negatively affect the distribution of vegetation cover in Jabal Shams. Studies indicate that 60% of animal feed in the Hajar Mountains comes from the plateau and foothills, resulting in a decrease in load on pastoral land.

In memoriam: Moosa Omar, an icon of Omani fine arts

He was known for his innova-



tive use of raw materials, transforming these into pieces of art. Moosa was the recipient of numerous awards and his works grace the halls of art galleries around the world.

Chocolate, coffee and culture come together for khareef

A collaboration with Dhofar Municipality, the festival has an

Expressing her enthusiasm, Jaranaz bint Sulaiman bin Hashim, director of the exhibition, said, "The festival includes a chocolate museum, the first in the Gulf region. It features chocolate figures of monuments, personalities, antiquities and iconic symbols from Oman and the world."



In addition to the exhibition, the festival's offerings include an open theatre where various activities, such as plays, entertainment programmes,

Jaranaz informed that a children's area in the festival is designed with engaging models and

One of the standout elements of Choco Spray is a training workshops for chocolate preparation conducted by a specially contracted Russian chef. These workshops mark the first time such specialised courses are being held in Oman, aimed at enhancing the art of homemade chocolate-making and encouraging investment in this delicious craft.

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 30 JUNE 2023

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Un-audited Financial Results of Dhofar International Development & Investment Holding Company SAOG ("DIDIC") for the period ending 30th June 2023.

During the first six months of 2023, most of the securities markets in the region, including Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) showed marginal losses in their respective indices. MSX dipped by 104 points and closed at 4768.22 points as on June 30, 2023 which is a 2.14% drop over the six months period. Most other indices in the GCC region also witnessed a drop during this period, ranging from 2% to 8.55%.

During the six months period, the Company's investments in equities at a group level recorded a decrease of RO 0.720 million on account of drop in the prices of its key equity investments.

Group Consolidated Performance

During the six months period ending 30th June 2023, Net Profits were RO 2.13 million and the total comprehensive income attributable to our shareholders amounted to RO 2.96 million as compared to net profit of RO 5.40 million and total comprehensive profit of RO 4.37 million for the same period in 2022. The drop is mainly on account of one-time charge of RO 1.385 million for unamortised upfront cost of the earlier term loan which was refinanced during the period, and unrealized loss on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss for RO 0.720 million as against an unrealized gain of RO 1.769 million for the comparative period of last year.

The Group ended the first six months of 2023

with total assets of RO 221.74 million, a marginal decrease of 1.6% while shareholders' equity of RO 129.19 million registered an increase of 4.5% from the first six months of 2022 where total assets amounted to RO 225.35 million and shareholders' equity attributable to our shareholders was RO 123.57 million.

Performance of Key Associates

Bank Dhofar, our banking associate, reported after tax net profit of RO 18.433 million for the six months period ended 30 June 2023 as compared to RO 16.447 million for the same period in 2022, representing an increase of 12%. The net interest income and income from Islamic financing activities decreased to RO 56.996 million compared to RO 59.046 million during same period of 2022 registering a marginal decrease by 3.5%. However, non-funded income for the period was 59.57% higher compared to same period last year mainly due to increase in net fees & commission income. Net loans and advances including Islamic financing witnessed an increase of 10% and reached RO 3.924 billion as at 30 June 2023 as compared to RO 3.565 billion as at 30 June 2022. Similarly, customer deposits including Islamic deposits, increased by 4.03% compared to comparative period of last year. Total shareholders' equity in the bank registered an increase by 2.70%, increasing to RO 549.892 million from RO 545.155 million a year prior.

Dhofar Insurance, our insurance associate reported a growth of 16.78% of gross premium written to RO 45.17 million from RO 38.68 million a year earlier for the six months period. Also, its net underwriting results showed an improvement of 9.21% from RO 4.451 million in the first six months of 2022 to RO 4.861 million a year later. It reported net profit of RO

2.25 million for the first six months period of 2023 as compared to RO 2.100 million a year earlier. The shareholders' equity has increased by 20%, from RO 27.34 million as at 30 June 2022 to RO 32.74 million as at 30th June 2023.

Oman Investment & Finance Company, our billing and collection associate that has also ventured into money exchange and contracting operations through two specialized subsidiaries, had its revenue marginally declined in its group operations in the first six months of 2023 by 3%, with net profits decreasing by 26% to RO 2.19 million from RO 2.97 million a year earlier.

The Shareholder's equity increased by 5%, from RO 27.26 million as at 30 June 2022 to RO 28.794 million as at 30 June 2023.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the board of directors, I would like to extend our gratitude to the leadership of the CMA, CBO and MOCI for their continued support. I would also like to thank the management teams of DIDIC, our subsidiaries and associate companies for all their hard work and dedication.

Finally, we wish our country continued safety and stability under the wise leadership and guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, may God protect him and prolong his life.

Khalid Bin Mustahail Ahmed Al Mashani
Chairman

UN-AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2023

	Group 2023 RO	Parent Company 2023 RO	Group 2022 RO	Parent Company 2022 RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	3,470,998	2,828,375	10,588,641	610,725
Receivables and prepayments	922,395	3,876,666	787,633	5,170,238
Inventories	22,129	-	23,205	-
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss				
-Investment in equities	41,196,611	25,495,886	44,963,499	30,011,299
-Investment in term deposits	1,830,000	1,830,000	1,830,000	1,830,000
Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income				
-Investment in subsidiaries	1,215,129	-	1,181,158	-
-Investment in associates	-	2,632,200	-	10,266,021
Loan to subsidiary	167,706,253	167,706,253	160,465,654	160,465,654
Investment property	247,212	247,212	247,212	247,212
Property and equipment	5,125,118	528,450	5,259,897	553,852
Total assets	221,735,845	210,095,042	225,346,899	214,104,801
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	54,472,000	54,472,000	54,472,000	54,472,000
Legal reserve	10,210,339	10,210,339	9,552,673	9,552,673
General reserve	7,070,040	7,070,040	7,070,040	7,070,040
Investment revaluation reserve	(2,678,188)	(2,678,188)	(3,489,811)	(3,489,811)
Retained earnings	60,115,631	59,707,044	55,962,509	55,962,509
Total equity due to shareholders of the Parent Company	129,190,186	128,781,599	123,567,775	123,567,775
LIABILITIES				
Other liabilities	675,277	297,443	561,260	264,162
Income tax payable	9,383	-	100,000	-
Loans and borrowings	91,861,000	81,016,000	101,717,864	90,272,864
	92,545,660	81,313,443	101,779,124	90,537,026
Total equity and liabilities	221,735,845	210,095,042	225,346,899	214,104,801
Net assets per share				

MARKET WATCH

MSX304,768.87

FOREX RATES

(ROI equals)

Indian	215.11
Pakistan	749.82
Bangladesh	284.58
Philippines	146.62
Sri Lanka	834.62

*Rates as on August 13

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China's auto exports surge 63% in July

China's automobile exports maintained robust growth momentum in July 2023, data from the China Passenger Car Association (CPCA) showed.

Last month, China shipped a total of 310,000 vehicles overseas, a surge of 63% year on year, according to the CPCA.

Chinese homegrown passenger vehicles expanded their global presence, with the export of Chinese-brand cars reaching 248,000 units, up 56% year on year. In the first seven months, passenger vehicle exports expanded by 81% from a year ago to 1.99mn units, the data revealed.

The latest numbers widened China's 15.8% lead over Japan. China exported 2.34mn vehicles in the first half, more than the 2.02mn Japanese marques reported by the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association. Japan exported 3.5mn vehicles in 2022.

Last month, China shipped a total of 310,000 vehicles overseas, a surge of 63% year on year, according to the figures.

Oman-Etihad Rail invites bids for passenger stations, freight facilities and depot



Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a new development towards building Oman-UAE Rail Network, Oman-Etihad Rail Company – a joint venture (JV) between the sultanate's Oman Rail and the UAE's Etihad Rail – has invited pre-qualification bids for the construction of passenger stations, freight facilities, and depot for the railway project connecting Sohar Port with the UAE National Rail Network.

Specialised contractors have been invited to apply for pre-qualification for the tendering of the freight facilities, depot, and passenger station works of the project in the two countries, according to a tender announcement issued by Oman-Etihad Rail Company.

As per the tender document, to apply for pre-qualification, the potential contractors must demonstrate individually or in a JV/consortium that they have the necessary resources and required expertise to meet the requirements.

The requirements include the contractor being a local company or a JV/consortium led by a local company registered in the UAE or Oman, as applicable, to deliver the package(s) in the relevant country.

The contractor should also have recent experience executing projects of a similar size and nature (such as rail freight facilities, rail passenger stations, and rail maintenance depots, etc.).

In particular, the applicant contractor must have experience in design, build, and construction in a railway environment for on-time completion to the required quality.

The pre-qualification documents will be available for purchase and downloading through an e-Payment Services Gateway from August 13, 2023, to August 27, 2023, the announcement said.

Earlier in March, Oman-Etihad Rail Company launched a pre-qualification tender for the civil works of the railway network, inviting specialised contractors to apply for the pre-qualification of civil works tender.

Oman-Etihad Rail Company is responsible for designing, building, and operating the railway network that connects Sohar Port with the UAE National Rail Network.

The railway track will extend for 303km from Sohar to Abu Dhabi. It will be connected to the UAE National Rail Network and its stations across the country.

The joint railway network is expected to drive the growth of the national economy in both countries.

It will also improve supply chain efficiency and facilitate cross-border trade by linking commercial ports to the railway network.

The joint railway network will provide freight and passenger transport services. Passenger trains will reach 200 km/hour speed, running between Sohar and Abu Dhabi in 100 minutes, and between Sohar and Al Ain in 47 minutes. Freight trains will run up to 120 km/hour.



Crypto platform Easy Coins gets CMA registration

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Easy Coins, a local start-up cryptocurrency trading platform, has become Oman's first virtual assets service provider (VASP) to be registered by the Capital Market Authority (CMA).

Easy Coins began operations in Oman back in 2021 before the establishment of a regulator for this sector within the sultanate. Following the launch of Easy Coins, a task force was established to evaluate the country's direction regarding the regulation or banning of cryptocurrency activities within Oman.

The CMA is now the regulatory body responsible for establishing the regulatory framework for the virtual assets sector. As part of the process of regulating this sector, the CMA initiated a registration process for any virtual assets service providers in Oman that meet the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) requirements.

Easy Coins was the first entity to launch a virtual assets platform in 2021 in Oman and is now the first to have received the CMA registration as a VASP, according to a press release.

H H Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, co-founder of Easy Coins, said, "Easy Coins has been in operation for two years and has been self-regulating its operations since its launch. Hence, when the CMA initiated its registration process for VASPs, we were able to instantly meet the CMA's and FATF's requirements."

Dr Khalid Tahhan, co-founder of Easy Coins, said, "We at Easy Coins believe that innovation from society will always be ahead of any regulator in any industry and nation. That is why for Vision 2040's primary innovation pillar to be properly realised, it is essential that innovation from society should not be slowed down or hindered until regulators catch up, but rather it is essential for innovators to innovate and regulators to catch up with them rapidly."

"We commend the CMA for their rapid response and acclimatization towards innovations in virtual assets and believe that with such adaptable regulators, this industry will have a healthy place in Oman to flourish," he added.

Oman Air records 42% growth in cargo volumes for first half of 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Air Cargo on Sunday released its results for the first half of 2023, recording a remarkable 42% growth in cargo volumes compared to the same period in 2022, primarily driven by capacity expansion.

Between January and June, total cargo revenue surpassed RO22.3mn, reflecting the resilience of operations amidst challenging market conditions, the company said in a press statement.

Despite a dip in yield compared to the previous year, the results indicate healthy growth and the carrier's focus on technology, efficiency and customer



service are ensuring it retains its strong position in the market.

Since its inception in 2009, Oman Air Cargo has maintained a remarkable upward trajectory. Having obtained the IATA CEIV Pharma and CEIV Fresh certifications in 2021, it continues to gain significant momentum through time- and temperature-controlled shipments.

While in 2022 Oman Air Cargo added several new destinations and introduced its innovative 'Cargo-in-Cabin' service to Europe, the Far East and Indian subcontinent, its 2023 strategy includes the launch of its first ever freighter to meet growing demand.

Furthermore, its ongoing digitalisation drive continues to make the customer experience simpler and more efficient, with a new revenue management system and online booking channels currently in the works, the statement said.

Leveraging Muscat's strategic location connecting East and West, Oman Air Cargo's state-of-the-art facilities ensure the seamless movement of cargo through its hub at Muscat International Airport. With bespoke solutions and the highest standards of safety and quality, Oman Air Cargo remains at the forefront of the rapidly evolving air cargo sector, while solidifying Oman's standing as a key regional logistics hub.

UK to host global energy security summit in early 2024



UK Energy Secretary Grant Shapps

London, UK – Britain will host an international energy security summit next year, the government announced, inviting big oil-producing nations and companies but focusing also on net zero.

The London Energy Security Conference, set for early 2024, will concentrate on shoring up supplies and making the system "more resilient to shocks", the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero said.

The gathering will come two years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine upended gas supplies and sent wholesale prices spiralling, and as countries grapple with the transition away from fossil fuels.

"Energy security does not stop at our borders," Energy Secretary Grant Shapps said in a statement.

"Our landmark... conference will bring together international governments and industry leaders to help rewire the global energy system and build collective resilience."

Shapps told Politico the event would be "inclusive" and major Middle Eastern fossil fuel producing countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates should be "in the room".

Russia will not be invited, the outlet reported, though he noted London had not "got to the detail of invitations at this stage".

The announcement comes with the UK's environmental credentials under increasing scrutiny, as the country's worst cost-of-living crisis in decades and electoral politics

threaten to slow its decarbonisation push.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's ruling Conservatives have faced criticism in recent weeks for announcing plans to issue hundreds of new oil and gas licences in the North Sea.

Ministers have also suggested the rollout of other environmental policies, such as improving the energy efficiency of rented properties and phasing out some domestic boilers, could be slowed.

It follows the Tories' surprise victory in a London parliamentary by-election which was dominated by Labour mayor Sadiq Khan's contentious expansion of a scheme taxing the use of the most polluting vehicles.

The result appears to have emboldened Tory net zero opponents, but Sunak has insisted he remains committed

to the UK's 2050 net zero target and key policies such as banning new petrol and diesel vehicle sales from 2030.

"We can't have global security without net zero," Shapps told Politico, noting extreme weather and other impacts from climate change were increasingly affecting security.

But he also argued diversifying away from fossil fuels was only "part of the answer" and that it has "never been more important not to be reliant on single sources" of energy.

"We're not going to do it while screwing our population," Shapps said on the net zero transition.

"We're going to do it while taking our population with us. That means accessing our own oil and gas rather than importing (it from) others."

AFF

US wholesale prices rise in July on services costs

Washington, US – US wholesale prices picked up in July on a surge in services costs, according to government data, although the overall inflation figure remains muted.

The bigger-than-expected rise in the July producer price index (PPI) indicates that services prices are still buoyant, even as increases in the cost of goods are tepid.

Wholesale prices rose by 0.3% from June to July, after a flat reading in the month before, according to Labor Department data.

"PPI inflation surprised to the upside in July," High Frequency Economics' chief US economist Rubeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients.

But headline producer prices



are well below two percent, she said, adding that annual changes in measures of underlying inflation are also moving towards target.

Economists surveyed by Mar-

ketWatch had expected a slightly lower headline figure of 0.2%.

Services prices rose by 0.5 percent from June to July, the largest monthly increase since

August 2022, fueled by a jump in trade services as well as in transportation and warehousing services.

Meanwhile, goods prices ticked up 0.1% from a month earlier, much of it attributable to a rise in the cost of food.

The Federal Reserve is weighing the prospect of another rate hike in September to reduce inflation.

While producer prices have come down rapidly since last year, progress has been slower in consumer inflation.

Many analysts and traders currently expect the Fed to hold rates steady at its next decision, as the effect of existing hikes filter through into the broader economy.

AFF

UK economy grows in second quarter despite high inflation

London, UK – Britain's economy expanded slightly over the second quarter thanks to strong output in June and despite inflation remaining high, official data showed.

Gross domestic product grew 0.2% in the April to June period after output expanded 0.1% in the first quarter, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

"Across the quarter as a whole, GDP grew a little with widespread growth across manufacturing, aided by falling raw material prices," said Darren Morgan, director of economic statistics at the ONS.

The economy grew by a stronger-than-expected 0.5% in June, sending the pound



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made it a government priority to get annual inflation down to 5% by the end of 2023

higher against the dollar in early London trading.

Government boost

The data was a boost also for

the Conservative government, forecast to lose power in a general election due next year as Britain struggles with a cost-of-living crisis.

"The actions we're taking to fight inflation are starting to take effect, which means we're laying the strong foundations needed to grow the economy," finance minister Jeremy Hunt said in reaction to the GDP figures.

"If we stick to our plan to help people into work and boost business investment, the IMF has said over the longer-term we will grow faster than Germany, France and Italy," he added.

The growth update came one day after British household goods company Wilko collapsed owing to big debts, putting about 12,500 jobs at risk as high inflation and interest rates hurt consumers and businesses.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made it a government priority to get UK annual inflation down to five percent by the end of 2023, around half the rate it was at the start of the year.

This will largely be down to outside factors, however, notably the independent Bank of England (BoE) raising interest rates and price growth slowing for food and energy.

UK annual inflation currently stands at 7.9%, the highest among G7 nations.

Despite Friday's bright data, economists said the UK remained at risk of recession this year, especially as the growth numbers could see the BoE keep on raising interest rates.

AFP

Yellen sees 'resilience' in US economy

Washington, US – US economic growth and wage gains should "serve as a source of resilience" moving forward even if the economy continues to cool, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

"I still believe that there is a path to continue reducing inflation while maintaining a healthy labor market," she said, in excerpts of a speech to be delivered in Nevada next week.

"While there are risks, the evidence we've seen so far suggests that we are on such a path," Yellen added.

The world's biggest economy has defied expectations of a slowdown, picking up pace in the second quarter of the year, supported by business investment and consumer spending. Its labor market has remained robust as well.

The strength comes despite



Janet Yellen

policymakers' efforts to ease demand and rein in inflation, fueling hope that the central bank's aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes will lower price increases without triggering a major recession.

Yellen noted in prepared remarks that annual inflation is now nearly six percentage points below its 9.1% peak in June 2022, while the economy continues to expand.

AFP



شركة عمان والإمارات للاستثمار والقابضة (ش.م.ع.)
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Board of Directors’ Report – 30th June 2023

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board, I take this opportunity to present the financial performance of Oman & Emirates Investment Holding Co SAOG for the six months period ended 30th June 2023.

Financial Results:

The Company (Group & Parent) achieved Net Profits of RO 295,676 and RO 322,774 respectively during the period January to June 2023, compared to (Group & Parent) Net Profits of RO 1,884,652 and RO 1,957,285 respectively during the same period in 2022. The details are shown below:

Particulars	Equity Holding %	Jan– Jun 2023 RO	Jan – Jun 2022 RO
Profit/(Loss) before share of results of Subsidiaries and Associates		(10,951)	2,129,604
FINCORP SAOG	51.2	151,600	(124,322)
Oman Hotels and Tourism Co. SAOC	31.72	2,010	(88,465)
Oman Fiber Optic Co. SAOC	20.97	180,115	40,468
Net Profit/ (Loss) - Parent		322,774	1,957,258
Oman Euro Food Industries Co. SAOG	80.84	(27,098)	(72,633)
Net Profit/ (Loss) - Group		295,676	1,884,652

Stock Market Indices:

During the period **January to June 2023**, MSM and ADX declined by **1.84%** and **6.47%** respectively while DFM increased by **13.67%** (January to June 2022: MSM declined by 0.17%, while ADX and DFM increased by 10.44% and 0.86% respectively).

Net Equity, Investments and Borrowing:

The Net Equity of the Group and the Parent Company decreased by **2.68%** and **2.45%** respectively during the first half of the year. The Net Equity of the Group decreased from RO **23.157 Million** at 31.12.2022 to RO 22.537 Million at 30.6.2023 (30.06.2022: RO 22.957 Million). The Net Equity of the Parent decreased from RO 24.220 at 31.12.2022 to RO **23.627 Million** at 30.6.2023 (30.06.2022: RO 23.900 Million).

The total value of investments of the **Group and the Parent Company reduced to RO 31.932 Million and RO 29.724 Million** respectively as at 30.6.2023 (30.6.2022: Group RO 32.987 Million and Parent Company RO 30.925 Million).

The total borrowing of the Group and the Parent Company reduced to **RO 13.481 Million and RO 9.361 Million** respectively as at 30.06.2023 (30.06.2022: Group RO 16.395 Million and Parent Company RO 12.674 Million).

Acknowledgement:

I take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt gratitude to the Governments of the Sultanate of Oman and United Arab Emirates for their support to our Company, the stock market authorities for their guidance, banks for their cooperation, shareholders for their trust and employees their unwavering efforts.

Saed Saif Al Sadi
Vice Chairman

8th August 2023

Consolidated and separate condensed interim statement of financial position as at 30 June 2023

	30 June 2023	Group 30 June 2022	31 December 2022	30 June 2023	Parent Company 30 June 2022	31 December 2022
	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)	(Audited)	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)	(Audited)
ASSETS						
Cash and bank balances	1,684,050	4,175,220	2,588,582	846,360	3,316,016	964,158
Trade and other receivables	1,665,218	1,513,920	1,487,530	55,122	42,010	206,666
Inventories	487,349	594,039	456,254	-	-	-
Investments at fair value through profit and loss	13,977,659	15,273,103	14,641,548	9,771,607	11,160,603	10,883,176
Investment in associates	15,860,042	15,608,817	15,798,771	14,111,182	13,911,100	14,231,630
Investment in subsidiaries	-	0	0	3,747,635	3,748,921	3,596,035
Financial assets at amortised cost	2,093,971	2,104,660	2,099,271	2,093,971	2,104,660	2,099,271
Investment property	2,888,550	3,012,750	2,950,650	2,618,550	2,742,750	2,680,650
Property, plant and equipment	2,121,627	2,386,829	2,257,421	366,095	464,746	414,810
Right-of-use assets	385,565	43,577	385,565	0	0	0
Deferred tax assets	39,274	62,626	78,367	0	0	0
	<u>41,203,305</u>	<u>44,775,541</u>	<u>42,743,959</u>	<u>33,610,522</u>	<u>37,490,806</u>	<u>35,076,396</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>41,203,305</u>	<u>44,775,541</u>	<u>42,743,959</u>	<u>33,610,522</u>	<u>37,490,806</u>	<u>35,076,396</u>
EQUITY						
Capital and reserves						
Share capital	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500
Legal reserve	4,991,892	4,991,892	4,991,892	4,062,500	4,062,500	4,062,500
Retained earnings	5,357,073	5,777,871	5,977,493	7,376,481	7,650,102	7,969,803
Total capital and reserves of Parent Company	<u>22,536,465</u>	<u>22,957,263</u>	<u>23,156,885</u>	<u>23,626,481</u>	<u>23,900,102</u>	<u>24,219,803</u>
Non-controlling interest	3,313,811	3,349,922	3,175,730	0	0	0
TOTAL EQUITY	<u>25,850,276</u>	<u>26,307,185</u>	<u>26,332,615</u>	<u>23,626,481</u>	<u>23,900,102</u>	<u>24,219,803</u>
LIABILITIES						
Lease liabilities	399,715	53,454	399,715	0	0	0
Bank borrowings	68,007	285,532	79,890	0	217,525	11,582
Term loan	1,860,657	2,456,349	2,121,833	1,860,657	2,456,349	2,121,833
Trade and other payables	1,871,650	2,020,021	2,656,906	623,384	916,830	1,223,178
Loan from Government	11,153,000	13,653,000	11,153,000	7,500,000	10,000,000	7,500,000
TOTAL LIABILITIES	<u>15,353,029</u>	<u>18,468,356</u>	<u>16,411,344</u>	<u>9,984,041</u>	<u>13,590,704</u>	<u>10,856,593</u>
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	<u>41,203,305</u>	<u>44,775,541</u>	<u>42,743,959</u>	<u>33,610,522</u>	<u>37,490,806</u>	<u>35,076,396</u>
Net assets per share	<u>0.185</u>	<u>0.188</u>	<u>0.190</u>	<u>0.194</u>	<u>0.196</u>	<u>0.199</u>

Consolidated and separate condensed interim statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the six-month period ended 30 June 2023

	Group				Parent Company			
	Period from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2023	Period from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2022	Period from 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023	Period from 1 April 2022 to 30 June 2022	Period from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2023	Period from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2022	Period from 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023	Period from 1 April 2022 to 30 June 2022
	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)	(Un-audited)
Interest income	127	0	64	0	127	0	64	0
Rental income	78,404	56,205	39,837	30,541	78,404	56,205	39,837	30,541
Brokerage commission income	85,889	62,506	35,994	24,971	0	0	0	0
Dividends income	595,866	568,816	171,289	119,284	453,426	479,034	116,264	128,760
Realised profit/(loss) on sale of investments at fair value through profit or loss	99,918	1,947,391	78,052	1,934,324	761	1,887,263	-8,030	1,920,095
Unrealised (losses)/profit on investments at fair value through profit or loss	-146,663	301,666	46,316	-428,330	-108,318	366,382	12,368	86,166
Share of profit / (losses) from investment in associates and subsidiaries	363,844	-255,243	203,351	-318,474	333,725	-172,319	226,340	-464,100
Gross profit on sale of food products	167,730	115,622	69,569	41,329	0	0	0	0
Asset management fees	45,188	52,526	22,495	27,716	0	0	0	0
Other income	28,283	15,310	11,206	8,976	0	0	0	0
Total income	<u>1,318,586</u>	<u>2,864,799</u>	<u>678,173</u>	<u>1,440,337</u>	<u>758,125</u>	<u>2,616,565</u>	<u>386,843</u>	<u>1,701,462</u>
Expenses								
Staff costs	-365,897	-388,123	-180,969	-201,737	-152,776	-157,958	-75,276	-83,897
Administrative expenses	-352,351	-350,102	-165,584	-185,612	-209,492	-195,311	-94,265	-107,036
Investment related expenses	-8,353	-5,301	-5,718	-302	-8,353	-5,301	-5,718	-302
Total expenses	<u>-726,601</u>	<u>-743,526</u>	<u>-352,271</u>	<u>-387,651</u>	<u>-370,621</u>	<u>-358,570</u>	<u>-175,259</u>	<u>-191,235</u>
Operating profit for the period	591,985	2,121,273	325,902	1,052,686	387,504	2,257,995	211,584	1,510,227
Finance costs	-119,135	-356,468	-58,667	-169,854	-64,730	-300,710	-31,564	-142,212
Net profit before tax for the period	<u>472,850</u>	<u>1,764,805</u>	<u>267,235</u>	<u>882,832</u>	<u>322,774</u>	<u>1,957,285</u>	<u>180,020</u>	<u>1,368,015</u>
Income tax	-39,093	-15,869	-15,998	24,118	0	0	0	0
Net profit after tax and total comprehensive income for the period	<u>433,757</u>	<u>1,748,936</u>	<u>251,237</u>	<u>906,950</u>	<u>322,774</u>	<u>1,957,285</u>	<u>180,020</u>	<u>1,368,015</u>
Net profit after tax attributable to:								
Parent Company	295,676	1,884,652	154,304	1,316,460	322,774	1,957,285	180,020	1,368,015
Non-controlling interest	138,081	-135,716	96,933	-409,510	0	0	0	0
	<u>433,757</u>	<u>1,748,936</u>	<u>251,237</u>	<u>906,950</u>	<u>322,774</u>	<u>1,957,285</u>	<u>180,020</u>	<u>1,368,015</u>
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	<u>0.002</u>	<u>0.015</u>	<u>0.001</u>	<u>0.011</u>	<u>0.003</u>	<u>0.016</u>	<u>0.001</u>	<u>0.011</u>

MHD Automobiles showcases JETOUR SUVs

Mohsin Haider Darwish Automobiles, the official distributor of JETOUR in Oman, hosts the lineup of the renowned automobile brand at its showrooms in Mabela and Azaiba.

All the models displayed feature a distinctive characteristic of city-based SUVs that encompass style, sleek design, luxurious space and a host of advanced technology features. Customers can benefit from the exclusive offering of 10 years/1 million km engine warranty on the purchase of any of the vehicles, namely X70, X70Plus, X90 Plus and Dashing, a press release said.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles, said, "Our Jetour lineup reflects our commitment to offering our customers vehicles that host well-crafted design, incredible engineering, cutting-edge innovation and unrivalled space and comfort capabilities. We look to provide them with vehicles that blend perfectly with their lifestyle and a peace of mind



driving experience. I would like to encourage our customers to visit our showroom to take a first-hand look at our lineup, request a test drive or even pre-order them if they choose to.

Several salespersons and brand representatives are also present to assist and answer any enquiries."

The Jetour X70 boasts a 1.5ltr turbocharged engine, with a maximum of 156hp and maximum torque of 230N.m. Alongside a 5MT transmission and

convenient electronic parking brake system (EPB), it also comprises entertainment and accessibility features such as an infotainment display, digital gauge screen, keyless access, 360-degree vision system and front and rear parking sensors within a spacious interior cabin.

The Jetour X70 Plus is a slightly larger variant of the X70 based on the same platform with a redesigned front and rear. Its interior is enhanced with fully functional luxury options including a multi-information display and integrated apps with Bluetooth facilities, alongside a number of high-end safety features.

The Jetour X90 Plus combines intelligent safety and a comfortable driving experience with multi-functional features, a high-strength cage body and luxurious car dimensions and expansive storage space. The vehicle comes with a powerful 1.6TGD/2.0L turbocharged engine that ensures a smooth and responsive drive for both city and long journeys.



Saudi Hospital does 26 transplants in 3 months

Surgeons at a specialised hospital in Dammam, eastern Saudi Arabia, succeeded in setting a record by transplanting 26 livers in 90 days.

A statement by King Fahd Specialised Hospital KFSH said that all donors underwent clinical

examinations according to detailed medical standards in the preparation stage.

The marathon surgeries witnessed great successes. For the first time in Saudi Arabia, one liver was divided between two patients. Also, a liver was taken

from a deceased child at the age of 2, marking it as the youngest and smallest in the history of Saudi organ transplantations.

Two of KFSH staff head the Arab Liver Transplant Society and Saudi Liver Transplant Committee.

Budget Rent a Car adds Tesla Model 3

Oman's leading car rental company, Budget Rent A Car, announces its trailblazing entry into the electric vehicle era, as the first car rental company in Oman to bring electric mobility to its customers.

Not only it has added the renowned Tesla Model 3 but has also installed an Electric Vehicle (EV) charger at its parking bay. By offering this sustainable option, the company aims to lead the industry in supporting Oman's vision of achieving net-zero emissions, a press release said.

Rami Maqbool al Saleh, business development director of OHI Group of Companies, stated, "As the first car rental company in Oman to embrace an eco-friendly initiative, we now offer the exceptional Tesla 3 to our esteemed customers. Additionally, our commitment to sustainability is reinforced through the installation of an EV charger at our parking bay.

"With Budget's dedication to reducing environmental impact, our customers can now experi-



ence the thrill of driving a cutting-edge EV while simultaneously contributing to a more sustainable Oman. We are thrilled to play our part in supporting efforts for a cleaner and greener future for our beloved nation, alongside providing our customers with eco-conscious driving choices."

Budget Oman's pioneering efforts in electric vehicle rentals

underline the company's commitment to environmental stewardship and its dedication to providing customers with innovative mobility solutions. The new EV addition will provide customers with the opportunity to embrace sustainable travel without compromising on comfort. The company's electric vehicle rentals cater to both eco-conscious travellers as well as to

those seeking a premium driving experience.

"At Budget, we believe that we have a responsibility towards the environment and the communities we serve. By introducing electric vehicle rentals, we are taking a significant step towards reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable transportation options in Oman," he added.

MARH hosts free vehicle check-ups for Khareef

Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan and Co (MARH), the official distributor of GMC & Suzuki vehicles in Oman, announces its exclusive Khareef Free Health-Check, designed to enhance the safety and peace of mind for all its customers visiting Salalah.

The initiative stems from the company's commitment to bringing the very best of vehicle offerings and services to its valued customers, a press release said.

Commenting on the Khareef, Said Darwish al Balushi, CEO, said "MARH has always been dedicated to providing exceptional experiences to our cus-



tomers. Through our free vehicle health check-up initiative, we aim to extend our commitment to safety and convenience to all travellers visiting Salalah."

He added, "The Khareef season is a much-awaited time, attracting visitors from far and wide to experience the breathtaking beauty and pleasant climate of the region. At MARH, we understand the importance of ensuring your journeys are as smooth and worry-free as possible, especially during this time."

To avail of this exclusive offer, customers can simply call 800 76 200 to book an appointment at the service centre.

Vodafone Oman takes part in 'Lamat Shabab'

Vodafone Oman's partnership with the Youth Centre has garnered positive momentum during the Khareef 2023 season.

As part of the long-term collaboration, Vodafone took part in a youth discussion forum called 'Lamat Shabab' with H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, listening from the youth first-hand on their aspirations for a bright future, a press release said.

Bader al Zidi, CEO of Vodafone Oman, said, "At Vodafone Oman, we are ensuring that our advanced digital capabilities drive the future of our nation, and nurture a tech-savvy generation. The discussions during 'Lamat Shabab' were very useful, giving us great insight into what really matters for Dhofaris. We believe in our youth and understand the key role they will have in building the Oman of tomorrow. It is therefore our joint responsibility to empower them with the means, knowledge, and

expertise to achieve their goals and aspirations, and ultimately contribute to the growth of the national economy."

Vodafone's partnership with the Youth Centre was kicked-off earlier this month with a carefully designed programme that includes workshops, vocational sessions, networking and entertainment activations, as well as gaming tournaments and competitions across the governorate.

"At the Youth Centre, we select partners who share our vision for the future and who believe in the capacities and capabilities of Omani youth," said Zaid al Salmani, managing director of the Youth Centre. "Working together with Vodafone Oman, starting with the Khareef season, our aim is to upskill our youth and expose them to experiences that will enable them to compete in the global jobs market, in line with the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2024."

Sharjah's Summer Promotions promises surprises

The 20th edition of Sharjah Summer Promotions, running until September 3, and organised by the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), has seen participating shopping malls fiercely vying to present enticing prizes and attract a record number of shoppers.

As the event heads into its concluding stages, shopping enthusiasts will have a thrilling chance to enter raffle draws with



rewards including luxury cars and other prizes collectively worth over half a million dirhams, a press release said.

Beyond the grand prizes, visitors can take advantage of unprecedented discounts, with up to 75% off on renowned international brands. The event has an array of entertainment offerings and standout marketing activities, ensuring shoppers experience more than just the typical

retail therapy during these summer months.

Sharjah's malls are pulling out all the stops, promising both residents and tourists an unforgettable summer shopping spree. As Sharjah Summer Promotions celebrates its 20th anniversary, the Sharjah Chamber has lined up a plethora of prizes and promotions. Among these are vouchers, tourist and hotel packages, and a grand prize draw.

Father of Colombian kids rescued in jungle charged with sexual abuse

Bogotá, Colombia - The father of two of the four Indigenous children who survived for 40 days in the Amazon has been charged with sexually abusing his stepdaughter, Colombian prosecutors announced.

The siblings were the only survivors after their plane crashed in the jungle in May, killing all three adults onboard, including their mother.

During judicial proceedings on Saturday, the Colombian Prosecutor's Office accused Manuel Ranoque of 'abusing his stepdaughter' Lesly since she was 10 years old.

Lesly, now 13, was credited with keeping her siblings alive during their five-week ordeal using her deep knowledge of the jungle and its many dangers - including snakes, predatory animals and armed criminal groups.

The children, members of the Huitoto Indigenous group, managed to subsist on a package of cassava flour they found



Manuel Ranoque after being captured in Florencia municipality, Caqueta department, Colombia on Saturday (AFP)

The siblings were the only survivors after their plane crashed in the jungle in May, killing all three adults onboard

on the plane and wild fruits. Ranoque, who was arrested on Friday and denies the

charges, is to remain in custody, prosecutors said.

He participated in the massive search operation to track down Lesly, nine-year-old Soleiny, five-year-old Tien Noriel, and Cristin, who is one.

After the children were miraculously discovered about five kilometers (three miles) from the crash site, a custody battle ensued between their maternal grandparents and Ranoque, who is the biological father of the two younger siblings.

The children spent a month recovering in hospital and were then placed in the custody of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, which detected the possible sexual abuse and informed prosecutors.

William Castro, the governor of the Indigenous village where the family lived, told a local television station at the end of June that 'there were indications' that Ranoque had abused Lesly.

AFP

Sidelined Arab Israelis fear outcome of legal overhaul

Haifa, Israel - Members of Israel's Arab minority fear they will bear the brunt of the hard-right government's judicial overhaul, but have remained largely on the margins of a raging debate over the sweeping changes.

Israelis have rallied weekly since the controversial reform package was announced in January by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition, dubbed 'the worst ever' by Samira Kanaan Khalaylah, 57, who lives in the northern Arab town of Majd al-Krum.

Arab or Palestinian citizens of Israel, who make up around 20 per cent of the population, are already 'on the sidelines' of Israeli society and politics, said Khalaylah, a school secretary.

Moves by the coalition - which includes extreme-right leaders with a history of anti-Arab rhetoric - to restrict judicial oversight of government decisions and to weaken watchdogs 'will be very bad for us', she said.

Israeli protesters have staged mass demonstrations against the government's legislative agenda they view as a threat to democracy. But Arabs have been largely absent from these rallies, often heavy with Israeli flags which some find alienating.

They have organised their own rallies calling for equality.

The broader protest movement has been spearheaded by activists and army reservists largely unwilling to highlight messages relating to the plight of the Arab minority or of Palestinians, fearing it would harm their cause in the eyes of Israel's Jew-



Activists march with placards denouncing the violent crimes against Arab communities in Tel Aviv on August 6 (AFP)

Israelis have rallied weekly since the controversial reform package was announced in January by ruling coalition

ish majority.

In the northern city of Haifa, Arab demonstrators have rallied in relatively small numbers, carrying banners against the legal overhaul and demanding rights.

Yousef Jabareen, a lawyer and former lawmaker, told AFP the proposals might hand the government 'authoritarian powers' which threaten Arab citizens and their elected representatives.

With limited oversight, 'the

right wing will have... broader powers', said Jabareen.

'Settlement projects'

The first key clause of the reform package passed through parliament on July 24, amending the 'reasonableness' clause which was used by the Supreme Court to overturn government decisions deemed unconstitutional.

The court is set to hear petitions against the legal change in September. Other proposals include handing the government a greater say in the appointment of judges and downgrading the status of legal advisers attached to ministries.

Netanyahu's government which took office late last year has been set on expanding settlements in annexed east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, both seized in the

Six-Day War of 1967.

'The extreme right wants to get rid of' the few objections 'presented by the Supreme Court against settlement projects', Jabareen said.

Leah Tsemel, a lawyer who has represented many Palestinians in Israeli courts, said multiple rulings have failed to protect minority rights even before the 'reasonableness' amendment.

The Supreme Court has upheld the 2018 Nation State Law which enshrined Israel's primary status as a state for Jews and downgraded Arabic as an official language.

The court has also signed off on handing east Jerusalem properties to settler organisations who hold deeds proving past Jewish ownership, prompting the eviction of Palestinian residents.

Tsemel noted the court had

failed to recognise Palestinians' ownership claims over properties in west Jerusalem.

The court has ruled 'in favour of the state or settlement associations, and ignored the 'reasonableness' argument', she said.

Little 'hope' lost

Studies by leading rights groups have concluded that Israel's legal system and policies amount to apartheid, which Israel denies.

The Haifa-based Mossawa Center advocacy group has warned the judicial overhaul will only worsen 'the rights violations of the Arab minority' and further the occupation of Palestinian territories.

Despite widespread reservations concerning Israel's legal system, there had been 'hope in Palestinian society that the court will intervene in unreasonable government decisions', said Mossawa's director, Jafar Farah.

He said the erosion of the court's powers will 'deepen institutional corruption', affecting both Arab and Jewish Israelis.

But the minority wields far less political power, with an independent Arab party only once being part of a coalition government, in 2021-22.

With parliament now in recess until October 15, Netanyahu has said the door remains open for talks with his detractors.

But after his allies pressed ahead with the July vote - which opposition lawmakers boycotted - protesters have vowed to stay on the streets as hopes for a compromise fade.

AFP

Six Malian soldiers killed in attack: Army

Dakar, Senegal - Six Malian soldiers have been killed in an attack by 'armed terrorist groups' in the north of the country, according to an army report.

An earlier army statement on the incident had said one soldier was killed and four wounded in the attack in Ber on Friday.

The death toll has risen to six, it said on Saturday, while 'in their rout armed terrorist groups abandoned 24 bodies'.

They also left behind AK-47 assault rifles and motorbikes, the army said.

It said the clashes in the Timbuktu region took place after an 'attempted incursion and harassing fire by terrorist groups against FAMA (Malian Armed Forces) units'. The Malian troops were due to be stationed in Ber as part of a handover while the UN mission in Mali, known as MINUSMA, prepares to leave the country, the army said.

Mali's junta, in power since 2020, pushed the UN Security Council in June to withdraw MINUSMA by the end of the year.

AFP

Explosions rock pro-Iran missile stockpiles in Syria

Beirut, Lebanon - Violent explosions were heard from missile stockpiles of pro-Iran militias east of Syria's capital Damascus before dawn on Sunday, a war monitor said.

Residents of the Damascus region heard the blasts which came from 'the warehouses of pro-Iran militias' in a mountainous area east of the capital, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a wide network of sources inside Syria. "We don't know if it was from an air strike or ground operation," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

During more than a decade of war in Syria, neighbouring Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes on Syrian territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Hezbollah fighters, as well as Syrian army positions.

Syria's official news agency SANA said during the night that 'the sounds of explosions' had been heard on the outskirts of Damascus.

Four Syrian soldiers and two Iran-backed fighters were killed last Monday in pre-dawn Israeli air strikes near Damascus, the Observatory said at the time, in the latest deadly Israeli air raid to hit war-torn Syria's capital.

The air strikes targeted Syrian regime forces, as well as military positions and weapons depots used by armed groups supported by Tehran, the monitor said.

AFP

BEATING THE HEAT



Cubans swim in a natural swimming pool off the coast of Havana on August 4. With the current hot summer, Havana residents have rushed to the dilapidated natural pools on the coast of their city (AFP)

Sudanese start small businesses to survive war

Wad Madani, Sudan - Sudan's war has left university lecturer Ali Seif without pay for months. To make ends meet, he has turned to making soap in his room at a makeshift displacement camp.

Out of work as fighting rages between the forces of rival generals, many Sudanese have been forced to find creative ways to support themselves and their families.

Until April 15, when the conflict erupted between the army headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Daglo's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, Seif had worked at a Khartoum university.

Now the engineering lecturer and his family live in Wad Madani, a city where most of the nearly three million people displaced from the capital fled for safety with the few belongings they could bring. Wad Madani has been spared the violence so far, but air strikes and fighting are taking place around 150km (95 miles) to the north.

Like many others, Seif said his



A girl prepares food outside a camp for the internally displaced in al-Suwar, north of Wad Madani, on June 22 (AFP)

house was 'robbed' by paramilitaries, and he told AFP he has not received a salary since March with banks closed.

In order to survive, he has started selling soap. "Misfortune makes you creative," said Seif.

"I noticed there was no soap left on the market even though everyone wanted some, so I decided to make soap bars," he recalled, surrounded by plastic pots he uses to mix soap paste before pouring it into ice cube trays to

mould the bars.

'No choice'

Like Seif, Michelle Elia Moussa used to stand in front of a classroom full of students.

But since the war turned her

life and country upside down, she has spent her days standing in front of a stall at Al-Hasaheisa market, halfway between Khartoum and Wad Madani.

"I've given up hope and shelved my ambitions of being a brilliant teacher," she said, glasses on her nose and apron around her waist, as she looks over her cakes. "Without a job, I can't support myself," she said, in a poverty-stricken country where the spectres of famine, epidemics and widespread war crimes now loom large.

"It's the first time I've worked in a market," she told AFP.

"I'm not comfortable, I'm ashamed, but it's a war. I have no choice," she added, expertly spreading a light dough on cast-iron plates to make thin wafers with holes.

Eshraqa Mousa, another woman who fled Khartoum, has opened a small stall to sell tea. Without it, she said, she could 'only provide one meal a day' for her children.

AFP

IN BRIEF

North China landslide death toll rises to 21

Beijing, China - The death toll from a landslide triggered by heavy rains in northern China has risen sharply to at least 21, authorities said on Sunday, with six others missing.

China has faced deadly floods and historic rainfall in recent weeks, with dozens killed in storms in the northern part of the country.

“Twenty-one people were found dead so far, and six others are still missing,” the Xi’an emergency management bureau said in an online statement about the landslide on Sunday.

A mountain flash flood in the village of Weiziping, south of Xi’an in Shaanxi province, caused a landslide on Friday that swept away two houses and damaged roads, bridges, electricity supply and other infrastructure, national public radio CNR reported earlier.

One dead, one missing in Thai boat accident

Bangkok, Thailand - One person has died and another remains missing after a boating accident in southern Thailand, police said on Sunday.

The tourist boat struck a waterspout and capsized, throwing seven Thai passengers into Ban Laem district’s Bangtaboon river in Phetchaburi province on Saturday evening.

Four women and a man were pulled from the waters, sustaining mild injuries, with rescuers searching until midnight for two others. Local police said they had recovered the body of a man in his early twenties.

Russia evacuates 2,000 in Far East over floods

Moscow, Russia - Russia has evacuated more than 2,000 people from flooded areas in its Far East, emergency officials said on Sunday, after Tropical Storm Khanun brought heavy rains to the region.

“More than 2,000 people, including 405 children, have been evacuated in Primorye,” the Russian emergency situations ministry said on Telegram. The ministry said nearly 5,000 buildings had been flooded in the Primorye region, which borders China and North Korea.

AFP

Pain, anger as Hawaii fire death toll climbs to 93

Lahaina, US - Anger was growing on Saturday over the official response to an inferno that levelled a Hawaiian town, killing at least 93 people in the deadliest wildfire in the United States for over 100 years.

More than 2,200 structures were damaged or destroyed as the fire tore through Lahaina, according to official estimates, wreaking US\$5.5bn in damage and leaving thousands homeless.

Hawaiian authorities have begun a probe into the handling of the fire, with residents saying there had been no warning.

“The mountain behind us caught on fire and nobody told us jack,” Vilma Reed told AFP.

“You know when we found that there was a fire? When it was across the street from us.”

Reed, whose house was destroyed by the blaze, said she was depending on handouts and the kindness of strangers.

“This is my home now,” the 63-year-old said, gesturing to the car she has been sleeping in with her daughter, grandson and two cats.

Lahaina, a town of more than 12,000 and former home of the Hawaiian royal family, has been reduced to ruins, its lively hotels and restaurants turned to ashes.

A banyan tree at the centre of the community for 150 years has been scarred by the flames but still stands upright, its branches denuded and sooty trunk transformed into an awkward skeleton.



Volunteers sort out donations for those affected by a wildfire, at a parking lot in Lahaina, Hawaii on Saturday (AFP)

You know when we found that there was a fire? When it was across the street from us

VILMA REED

Deadliest in a century

The County of Maui said in a Saturday night update the number of confirmed fatalities had increased to 93, up from 89.

Governor Josh Green had warned that the official death toll was bound to grow. “It’s going to

continue to rise. We want to brace people for that,” he said.

The new toll makes the blaze the deadliest in the United States since 1918, when 453 people died in Minnesota and Wisconsin, according to the non-profit research group the National Fire Protection Association.

The death toll surpassed 2018’s Camp Fire in California, which virtually wiped the small town of Paradise off the map and killed 86 people.

Maui Police Chief John Pelletier said only a small fraction of the disaster zone has been searched and only two victims have been identified because of how badly they were burned.

“The remains we’re finding are from a fire that melted metal,” he said. “We have to do rapid DNA to identify every one of these.

“When we pick up the remains... they fall apart.”

Firefighters were battling at least one other blaze in Maui on Saturday night, in the inland mountainous Upcountry.

The Pulehu/Kihei fire in the south was declared 100 per cent contained on Saturday night.

Hawaii congresswoman Jill Tokuda told CNN that officials had been taken by surprise by the tragedy. “We underestimated the lethality, the quickness of fire,” she said.

AFP



This photograph shows the burnt facade of a five-storey building in the historic centre of Grasse, on Sunday (AFP)

3 people killed in building fire in French Riviera city

Nice, France - Three people died in a fire that broke out early on Sunday in a residential building in the centre of the French Riviera city of Grasse, firefighters said.

Three others were seriously injured and four had lighter injuries, they said, adding that the fire had been extinguished.

“The condition of the victims can always change,” Aymeric Soufflet from the firefighting service told AFP.

The origin of the fire in the historic centre of Grasse, considered the world’s perfume capital, was not immediately clear.

It affected the top three floors of the five-storey building, whose facade was partially blackened by the flames.

“The fire mainly affected the stairwell,” Jean-Christophe Demarte, head of the rescue operation, said, adding the flats mostly

sustained smoke damage.

Firefighters were alerted by local residents at around 3am (0100 GMT). They found the body of a person who had jumped out in front of the edifice and two other corpses inside.

“An alarm started beeping and then I heard cries,” said Martine, a woman who lives in an adjoining building and who only gave one name.

“A woman cried out for help shouting ‘Fire!’ and asked me to call the fire service, which is what I did. A man from the floor above tried to come down to avoid the flames but he fell,” she added.

The building is in a square in the old town which is lively in summer and popular with tourists for its restaurants, fountain and the small pedestrian streets running off it.

AFP

Typhoon Lan set to hit Japan

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese authorities on Sunday warned residents in much of the country to prepare for a strong, slow-moving typhoon set to hit during the peak summer travel week.

Typhoon Lan is on course to make landfall Tuesday on Japan’s main island of Honshu, bringing heavy rain and violent gusts, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

Some areas may see as much as 50cm (20 inches) of rain in 24 hours to 6am on Tuesday (2100 GMT Monday), followed by more rain as the typhoon churns across the nation, the agency said.

“The slow speed of the typhoon could mean that its impact may last for a long time,” Shuichi Tachihara, chief fore-



Pedestrians walk with their umbrellas in the rain in Ginza district of Tokyo on Sunday, as Typhoon Lan heads for Japan’s main island Honshu (AFP)

caster at the agency, told a media briefing on Sunday.

“It is possible that some areas will receive more rainfall in one day than their average monthly rainfall in August,” he said.

Lan approaches Japan as the nation kicks off the traditional

‘obon’ holiday week when millions of families return to their hometowns for annual gatherings. National television broadcasters have called on viewers to consider changing their travel plans to avoid the typhoon.

AFP

ABOVE THE HORIZON



France’s Chloe Moglia of the artistic company Rhizome performing ‘Horizon’ during the final day of ‘Le Castrum’ a contemporary artistic festival in Yverdon-les-Bains, western Switzerland on Sunday (AFP)

Migrants on France’s Channel coast undeterred by latest deaths

Loon-Plage, France - “Crossing the Channel, it’s playing with our lives,” Hajji Mahmud acknowledged. But despite the dangers, the Afghan migrant remained determined to attempt the crossing, even after the deaths of at least six of his countrymen early on Saturday when their vessel sank.

In the makeshift camp at Loon-Plage on the north coast of France, some 15 tents were scattered behind an embankment near a pile of burning rubbish.

Mahmud lives there with a group of other Afghans, some of them very young, and hoping for a better life in Britain.

“If we had a good life in Afghanistan, a good government, a good education system...,” he said.

He entered the European Union through Croatia. What he would like, he says, is for the French and English police to help him cross the Channel without having to risk his life.

But he knows he won’t get that. “We’ll suffer until we manage to cross,” he said.

The French and English coastguard said two people were still missing late on Saturday after this latest disaster, when the boat carrying more than 60 people capsized.

Many of those on board - most of the around 60 people rescued - were Afghans, like him, plus a few Sudanese people with them. A few of those on board were minors.

‘We will try again’

For France’s State Secretary for the Sea Herve Berville, it was ‘a terrible human tragedy’, adding to what is already a grim toll.

Five migrants died at sea and four went missing while trying to cross to Britain from France last year.

In November 2021, 27 migrants died when a boat capsized in the Channel.

But many migrants are still



Migrants picked up at sea while attempting to cross the English Channel, are brought by a UK Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) lifeboat into the Marina in Dover, southeast England, on Saturday (AFP)

willing to risk the crossing. According to the authorities on the north coast of France, there are currently around a thousand people waiting to take their chance.

Bilal and Basir are two of them, camped out on an old canopy installed under a tarpaulin sheet.

If their families knew about the latest sinking, they would

never let them attempt the crossing, they said.

They had in fact meant to try to get across the previous night but they had missed the boat, they said. Nevertheless, they in-

sisted they will try again.

“My sister, my uncle, are in England,” said Basir, aged 22.

“My dream is to learn because we know English and we (would) like to learn in their universities, or college,” said 20-year-old Bilal.

But 36-year-old Kurdish Iraqi exile Abu Mohamed admitted he was having second thoughts about risking the journey.

“If I see that it’s very risky, I’m going to try to stay in France,” he told AFP.

‘Predictable and avoidable drama’

Some 30km away, at the French channel port of Calais, two 16-year-old Sudanese were among the survivors.

“In France, it’s complicated for us,” said one of them.

“There’s racism, nobody wants us, we sleep in the street and nobody cares, we can’t work.”

They will keep trying to make

the crossing to England, they told AFP, hopeful of reaching there safely and studying computing.

Saturday’s deaths were ‘a predictable and avoidable drama’, says Pierre Roques who works at the L’Auberge des Migrants (‘Migrants Inn’) - an alliance of associations offering migrants support.

“The United Kingdom is moving towards completely extreme solutions to stop the crossing, which will have no effect apart from increasingly endangering people,” he added.

He cited Britain’s controversial plans to outlaw asylum claims by all arrivals via the Channel - transferring them instead to third countries, such as Rwanda - or the plan to house some migrants on barges off the coast, also fiercely by rights groups. For the people he was working with, these policies add to their worries, but will not stop them risking the crossing.

AFP

India set to celebrate 77th Independence Day

This year’s Independence Day will culminate the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations

New Delhi, India - Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lead the nation in marking its 77th Independence Day as the grand stage is all set for celebrations on Tuesday at the iconic Red Fort in the national capital.

As per a release by the Ministry of Defence issued on Sunday, Modi will hoist the National Flag and deliver the customary address to the nation from the ramparts of the historic monument. This year’s Independence Day will culminate the ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’ celebrations, which were launched by the the prime minister from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gujarat on March 12, 2021, and will, once again, usher the country into



School children perform during a full-dress rehearsal for India's Independence Day celebrations in Amritsar on Sunday (AFP)

‘Amrit Kaal’ with renewed vigour to realise the dream of making India a developed country by 2047.

According to the release, a number of new initiatives have been planned to mark the 77th

Independence Day celebrations and a large number of guests have been invited as compared to 2022.

Upon his arrival at the Red Fort, Modi will be received by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh,

Raksha Rajya Mantri Ajay Bhatt, and Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane. The defence secretary will introduce the General Officer Commanding (GoC), Delhi Area, Lieutenant General Dhiraj Seth to the prime minister.

The GoC Delhi Area will then conduct Modi to the saluting base where a combined Inter-Services and Delhi Police Guard will present a general salute. Thereafter, the prime minister will inspect the guard of honour,

the release said.

The guard of honour contingent will consist of one officer and 25 personnel each from the Army, Air Force and Delhi Police and one officer and 24 personnel from the Navy, the release said.

The Indian Army is the coordinating service this year.

“The guard of honour will be commanded by Major Vikas Sangwan. The army contingent in the Prime Minister’s Guard will be commanded by Major Indra-

PM Modi will hoist the National Flag and deliver the customary address to the nation from the ramparts of the iconic Red Fort

Swami,” it added.

Modi will proceed to the ramparts of the Red Fort where he will be greeted by Rajnath Singh, Ajay Bhatt, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral R Hari Kumar, and Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari, the Ministry said.

The GoC, Delhi area will conduct the Prime Minister to the dais on the ramparts to hoist the National Flag.

After being hoisted, the Tricolour will receive a ‘Rashtriya Salute’. The Army band, consisting of one JCO and 20 other ranks, will play the national anthem during the unfurling of the national flag and presenting of the ‘Rashtriya Salute’.

The Band will be conducted by Naib Subedar Jatinder Singh, the official release said.

Major Nikita Nair and Major Jasmine Kaur will assist the PM in hoisting the national flag.

“It will be synchronised with the 21 gun salute by the valiant gunners of the elite 8711 Field Battery (Ceremonial).

ANI

Migrant deaths are open wound for humanity: Pope

Vatican City, Holy See - The number of migrants dying in the Mediterranean is an ‘open wound’ for humanity, Pope Francis said on Sunday after a week marked by a string of deadly shipwrecks.

At his weekly Angelus prayer, the 86-year-old pontiff offered his prayers for the 41 people reported missing on Wednesday by four survivors brought to safety on the Italian island of Lampedusa.

He recalled ‘with pain and shame’ UN figures showing more than 2,000 migrants have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea since the start of the year.

“It is an open wound in our humanity,” he told pilgrims gathered in St Peter’s Square.

“I offer encouragement to the politicians and diplomats who are seeking to heal it, in a spirit of solidarity and brotherhood.” He also hailed ‘the commitment of all those who work to prevent



Pope Francis delivers his blessing to the pilgrims during his Sunday Angelus prayer in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican (AFP)

shipwrecks and rescue sailors’.

Francis - who regularly urges better treatment of those who flee their homes for a better life elsewhere - had this week already warned against becoming ‘indifferent’ to the deaths.

A spokesman for the UN migration agency, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said on Saturday that ‘at least 2,060’ migrants had lost

their lives in the Mediterranean since January 1.

Of those, more than 1,800 died in the Central Mediterranean, the route from North Africa to Italy and Malta, he said - more than twice as many as in the same period last year. In the latest incident, two Tunisians including a baby died when their boat sank on Saturday.

AFP

Germany’s Olaf Scholz urges further talks after Saudi-led Ukraine summit

Frankfurt, Germany - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Sunday welcomed a recent Saudi-led summit on a peace settlement to end the fighting in Ukraine, and called for further diplomatic efforts.

Representatives from around 40 countries including China, Germany, India and the United States took part in last week-end’s gathering in Jeddah, though Russia was not invited.

“It makes sense for us to continue these talks, because they increase the pressure on Russia to realise that it has taken the wrong path and that it must withdraw its troops and make peace possible,” Scholz said in his annual summer interview with German broadcaster ZDF.

Similar international talks to discuss a path towards peace also took place in Copenhagen in June.

Scholz called the talks in Denmark and Saudi Arabia, held at the level of foreign policy advi-



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (AFP)

sors, ‘very special’.

“They are very important and they are really only the beginning,” Scholz said.

Ukraine on Monday said it was ‘satisfied’ with the Saudi summit during which Kyiv

sought to drum up support for its 10-point peace plan, including the full withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory.

Moscow meanwhile said a peace settlement was only possible if Kyiv put down its arms.

More than a year after Russia’s invasion, Ukraine launched a highly anticipated counteroffensive in June after stockpiling Western weapons.

But it has struggled to make headway in the face of stiff Russian resistance.

Kyiv has repeatedly asked Berlin for long-range Taurus cruise missiles to boost its efforts, but Germany has so far resisted amid concerns the weapons could reach Russian territory and widen the conflict.

Scholz reiterated in the interview that Germany was now the second-biggest supplier of military assistance to Ukraine after the United States.

But on the issue of sending Taurus missiles to Ukraine, the chancellor remained vague.

“As in the past, we will always review every single decision very carefully, what is possible, what makes sense, what can be our contribution,” Scholz said.

AFP

55 killed in Bangladesh floods in August

Chittagong, Bangladesh - At least 55 people have been killed and more than a million affected by two weeks of torrential rains causing floods and landslides in southeast Bangladesh, officials said on Sunday.

Administrators of four of the worst-hit districts said floods and landslides since August 1 killed 21 people in Cox’s Bazar, 19 in Chittagong, 10 in Bandarban and five in Rangamati.

“These are some of the heaviest rains in recent years,” Bangladesh Meteorological Department chief Azizur Rahman told AFP.

He said 312mm (12 inches) of rainfall was recorded on August 7 alone. Officials said heavy rains lashed the region until August 11, triggering flash floods that caused rivers to burst their banks and inundate hundreds of villages.

It was only possible to confirm how many were killed after the floodwaters began to recede.

The summer monsoon brings South Asia around 80 per cent of its annual rainfall, as well as death and destruction due to flooding and landslides.



Flood affected people take shelter on a railway track after heavy rains in Satkania on Sunday (AFP)

The rainfall is hard to forecast and varies considerably but scientists say climate change is making the monsoon stronger and more erratic, while deforestation and building on hillsides has made flash floods worse.

Villages swamped

“In Cox’s Bazar some 600,000 people were affected by the floods,” district administrator Shaheen Ibrahim told AFP.

Bangladesh is home to one

million Rohingyas who fled a military crackdown in Myanmar and now live in some three dozen camps built on cleared forest and hill slopes in Cox’s Bazar.

“At least 21 people were killed,” Ibrahim said.

Refugee commissioner Mizanur Rahman said four Rohingyas were killed, including a child and her mother who were buried under a landslide.

“We have relocated around 2,000 people to safe places who

are at risk of landslides in the camps,” he told AFP.

Hundreds of villages were swamped in Chittagong, Bangladesh’s second-largest city and home to its biggest port, in what residents said was some of the heaviest flooding in decades. “The flood damaged at least 5,000 thatched houses,” district administrator Abul Bashar Mohammed Fakhruzzaman told AFP.

AFP

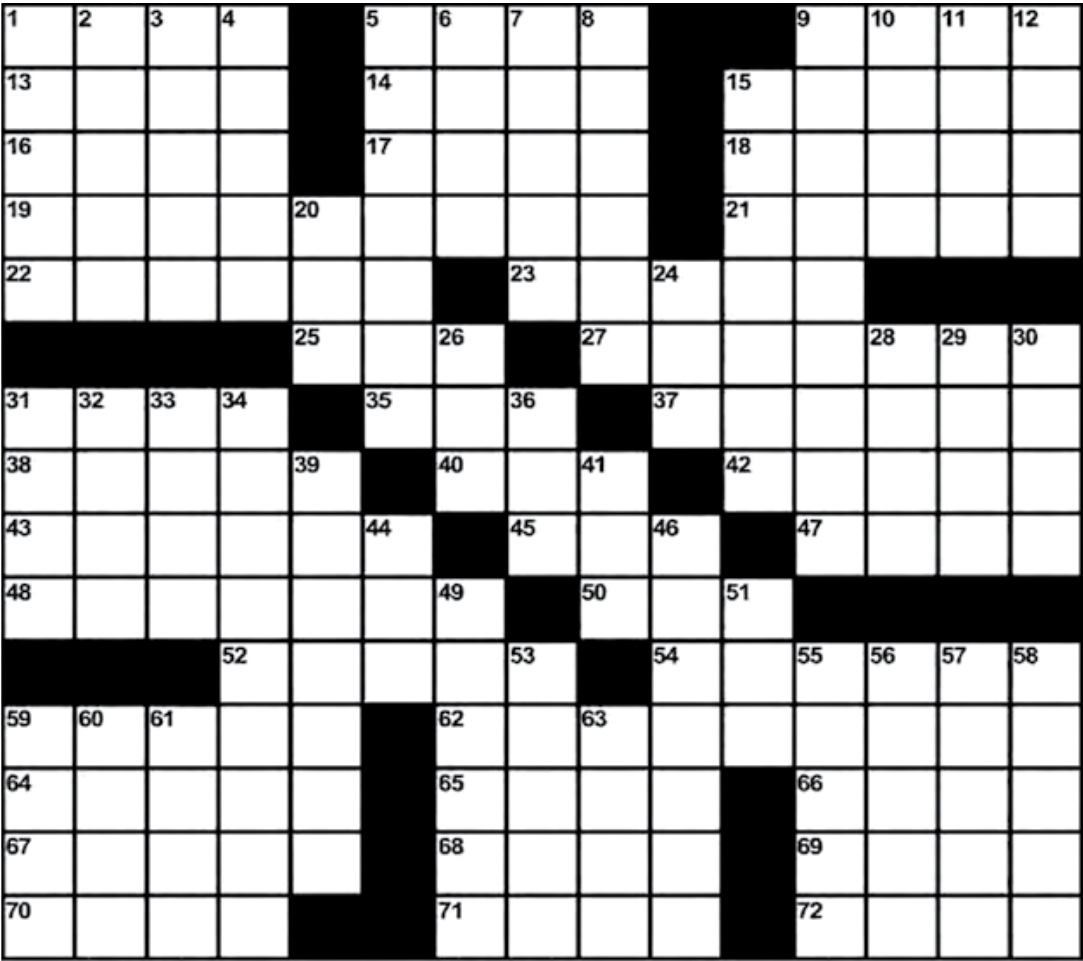
FOR FLAG-WAVING PATRIOTS



A man carrying Pakistan’s national flags, walks through a street on the eve of country’s Independence Day celebrations in Peshawar on Sunday (AFP)

DAILY

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) They go together
5) Turkey, on Broadway
9) Campbell of “Scream” films
13) University of Nevada city
14) Awful reporter
15) Piece of cave art
16) Popular cookie
17) “What’s more ... ”
18) Doesn’t include
19) Of the highest quality
21) Pounded to the max?
22) Upholstered piece
23) Sign of friendliness
25) !tty-bitty pencil
27) In a clever way
31) Censor’s target
35) Good friend
37) Shrink’s topic
38) English pounds?
40) Hoover, e.g.
42) Carroll character
43) Makes it work
45) Whipped cream unit
47) Periods of history
48) Food preservative

DOWN

1) Univ. teachers
2) Nest high aboveground
3) Inactive, chemically
4) Bird perch
5) Erupt
6) Country singer McCann
7) Drying ovens
8) Introductions
9) “We’re_!”
10) “Great” lake for sailing
11) Large holders of wine
12) “If all_ fails ... ”

15) Bread, dinero and cab-
bage
20) Yards for a first down
24) Poor-behaving little boy
26) Like 24-Down
28) Alpine lift
29) Old Italian money
30) Asian oxen
31) Card game with sevens
through aces
32) Long skirt
33)_ Bator, Mongolia
34) Like an ace pilot?
36) Straggle
39) Larry, Moe and Curly
41) Sound on a farm
44) Title for John Gielgud
46) They swing for the
fences
49) Drive of a kind
51) To return?
53) Commemorative meal
55) Butcher’s leavings
56) Call with a “Polo” re-
sponse
57) Like some jackets
58) Cleverly avoid

NOTE PAD

REACTIOWANGAM
EAGREVERSORHO
GREENBERETSHEEL
TAI NUT EAT
URGENCYSTRANDS
NORTEENEURO
CUESPLAYMENS
USESPIES SIPS
TENTS SLANGORT
HANS STARNEO
SHOGUNSPARSER
TAUGOP UZI
ONS GREENPEPPER
WOE LEAVE RUSTY
SIS ERRED SPICE

YOUR

DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today, it's payback for you, which can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on how many brownie points you've accrued in your karma account. If you worry that you're due for some bad news, try to keep busy! Staying distracted is the best way to soften whatever blows are coming your way. But if you're confident that you've built up a lot of goodwill, then this is a great day to relax. Open up your schedule and enjoy having unstructured time to soak up all the good vibes.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

There are all sorts of creative ways to get around the conflicts in your life, but ignoring them sure isn't one of them! Procrastination will never help you get things done. It will only keep you passive. Step up and take charge of your own life by having that conversation you've been dreading. Set some time aside later today and try to get face-to-face with the person who's causing you stress. If you can't do that, then talk to them on the phone in a quiet location.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Childlike behavior is only cute when children are doing it, so if you see grownups acting like ten-year-olds today, do yourself a favor and steer clear of them! And if you can't do that, at least refuse to join in on their silly games. You've got grown-up business to attend to, and sitting around gossiping or cutting people down behind their back isn't going to help you. People might think you're being a party pooper for not joining in, but do you really care?



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Try to avoid any financial dealings with your friends right now. No matter how exciting an opportunity may be, it's just not worth the risk when the health and happiness of a friendship could be at stake. There is a lot of uncertainty about transactions and investments right now, and you all would be much better off if you delayed moving forward with things. Wait for another time when things are clearer. Money is a very personal issue. Don't make it a public one.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

There is a huge risk of people overreacting today, so be careful about what you say to others, especially people you don't know very well. Even the slightest hint of something controversial could trigger someone's temper and get them all worked up and in your face. Who needs that? Plus, all of the excess energy they create will distract you from the things that really need your attention today. Just carry on as you normally would, and keep an eye out for hotheads!



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You have natural patience and compassion that make you a wonderful leader, so why are you letting your fears keep you from stepping into that role? It's time for you to swallow your doubts and raise your hand when someone asks who wants to be in charge. You know you can do it, and you know you can do it well! You're only too glad to help, and there's no reason not to show it. Be enthusiastic and all your doubts will just fade away.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If someone is critical about your work or your attitude today, don't waste any time worrying about it. Unless they are saying things that will negatively affect your reputation and how others see you, you don't need to give a darn about what they think. But if you do start seeing that people might be listening to this person and believing what they say, then you must address the attacker immediately. People will think that if you don't fight back then what they are hearing must be true.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Staying in sync with other people is going to be fun and easy for you today, which is obviously a very good thing. Each of the power players you're working with is on the same page as you, so you won't have to waste any energy being more flexible than you're willing to be. Everything you want to do, they'll want to do, and vice versa. The tone of the day will be harmonious, and no one is going to be annoyed or out of sorts when you suggest your nuttiest idea.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You might get sidetracked from one of your pressing projects by an unexpected relationship issue today, but it probably won't be a problem. Don't worry about the distraction. Just deal with it. You can take care of it without alerting anyone at work or school to the fact that anything is amiss. You'll be back and focused on the task at hand without anyone being the wiser. In fact, you can expect a few compliments by the end of the day about what a great job you're doing!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You can't search for a readymade new philosophy on life. You have to create one, by familiarizing yourself with new ideas and theories. If you've been wrestling with a certain issue and just can't shake the bad way it's making you feel, seek some insight from friends. Ask them how they would handle things, and their answers will help you shape your own attitudes. What's right for them might not be right for you, but at least you're seeing different points of view. And that will be helpful.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You've been dutiful, diligent, and respectful to your elders. You've done everything you could possibly do for all parties concerned, not just lately but for as long as you can remember. You've gone even further above and beyond the call of duty over recent days and weeks, so no one could possibly begrudge you at least one or two fun-filled days. Guess what? Here they come. Fasten your seat belt and prepare for some well-deserved fun.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your friends all come in different shapes, sizes, and styles, so why are you treating them all the same way? It's not that you should play favorites. It's just that you need to start being more mindful of the fact that some friends require more attention from you than others. Just because one friend doesn't need to hear from you for months doesn't mean that another is going to be cool with that. Make sure you're giving everyone what they need. And if you're not, it's not too late to start trying.



TEST YOUR

KNOWLEDGE

01. Which of these animal films was released last?

- A. Babe
- B. Jaws
- C. Lassie Come Home
- D. Lady and the Tramp

02. What was the venue for the 2021 Ryder Cup?

- A. Whistling Straits, Wisconsin, US
- B. Singing Sands, Islay, UK
- C. Thunderbird, California, US
- D. The Belfry, Warwickshire, UK

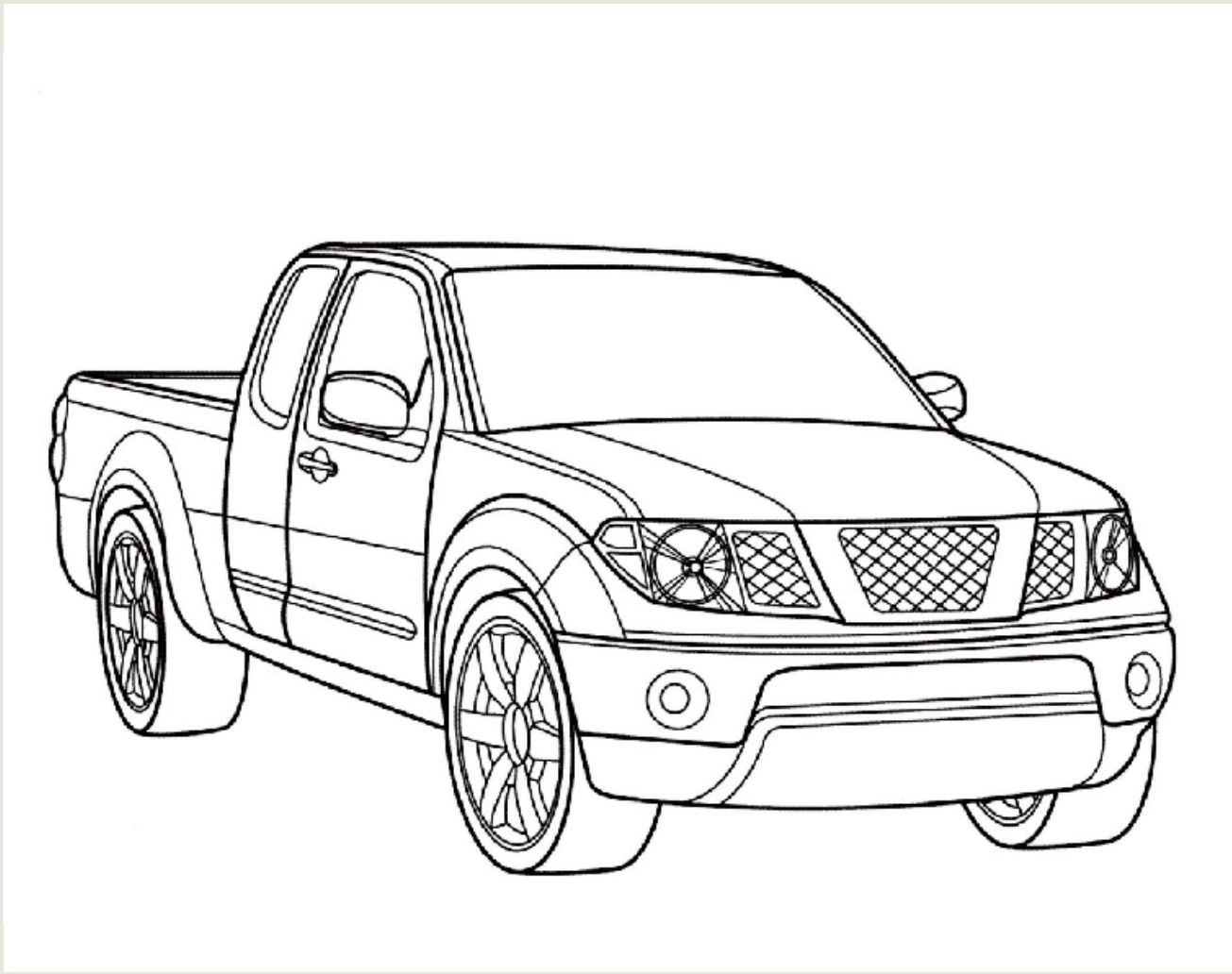
03. When Hugo Chávez entered the Venezuelan Military Academy in 1971 at the age of 17, what was he aiming to be?

- A. A fire fighter
- B. A naval engineer
- C. A professional baseball player
- D. An aviator

Answers: 1. D 2. C 3. D

KIDS

COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	P	O	R
H	L	R	S
E	O	A	D
R	E	Y	L

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

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

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

THE X FACTOR

Paralluelo adds pace and power to Spain’s passing game at World Cup

Auckland, New Zealand - Women’s World Cup semi-finalists Spain might be defined by technique and a mesmerising passing game, but the player who gives them that precious something different is Salma Paralluelo.

The 19-year-old took Spain to this stage of the World Cup for the first time with her brilliant winner against the Netherlands in the quarter-finals.

The Barcelona ace, who was once a promising athlete before concentrating on football, struck on the counter-attack in extra time after coming off the bench.

A starter in every round before that, she also played a big part in the 5-1 demolition of Switzerland in the last 16 with her deliveries from the left wing, two of which led to goals for Aitana Bonmati.

With Alexia Putellas still recovering full fitness following a serious knee injury, midfielder Bonmati has been the leader in Jorge Vilda’s team that will face Sweden in the last four in Auckland on Tuesday.

But Paralluelo could have a big role to play against a physically imposing Swedish side thanks to her pace, direct running and power on the flank.

“She is a player with enormous potential and she is a long way from touching the ceiling in terms of what she can do,” Vilda said.

“She is very young and has only been focusing fully on training for football for a year. We will see the best of Salma in the future.”

“She is already shining now, but I am sure that in the future she will do so even more.”

Vilda must consider whether to recall Paralluelo from the start or whether to focus first on passing Sweden into submission in a clash of styles at Eden Park.

Spain have completed 3,171 passes in their five games so far

She is very young and has only been focusing fully on training for football for a year. She is already shining now, but I am sure that in the future she will do so even more

JORGE VILDA, SPAIN COACH

at the tournament, compared to under 2,000 for Sweden.

Athletics star

Born in the northeastern city of Zaragoza to a Spanish father and a mother from Equatorial Guinea, Paralluelo grew up combining football with athletics.

“I started doing both when I was seven. At first it was just a game for me but little by little as I grew up I started to realise I could go further,” she said of her early footballing days in an interview with FIFA.com last year.

Paralluelo won medals in sev-

eral different track disciplines, taking part in hurdles and triple jump.

She also competed in the 400 metres at the 2019 European Indoor Championships in Glasgow, when aged 15.

Paralluelo’s budding football career took her to Villarreal, where she suffered a ruptured ACL in her left knee in April 2021 that kept her out for nine months.

In July last year she joined Barcelona, the emerging super-

power of European women’s club football, just after another injury ruled her out of the Spain squad for the European Championship in England.

That move meant giving up athletics once and for all.

“It was difficult to give up one sport, but it was a step I had to take and I couldn’t be in a better place,” she said at the time.

Having helped Barca win the Champions League in June, she is now hoping to beat Sweden and go on to win a third world title with Spain.

AFP



Spain's Salma Paralluelo celebrates after scoring against the Netherlands in their Women's World Cup quarter-final match on Friday (AFP)

Sweden seek to inflict pain on Spain

Auckland, New Zealand - Sweden will feed off the hurt of numerous near-misses when they face Spain in the semi-finals of the Women's World Cup on Tuesday in Auckland.

Sweden beat Japan 2-1 on Friday to reach their third semi-final in the last four World Cups, and their fifth overall, but they have never gone on to win the tournament.

Peter Gerhardsson’s side were also semi-finalists at last year’s European Championship and have been beaten finalists at the last two Olympics.

“We have had a lot of good results in recent tournaments so it is not a coincidence that we are in this situation and I think that it is time,” Sweden’s Chelsea midfielder Johanna Kaneryd told reporters on Sunday.

A year ago Sweden were blown away by England at the same stage of the Euro, losing 4-0 to the hosts, who went on to lift the trophy. If Sweden beat Spain at Eden Park they will face England or Australia in the final in



Sweden's Amanda Ilestedt has scored four goals in the tournament, just one behind Japan's Hinata Miyazawa

Sydney next Sunday.

Ilestedt for golden boot?

Sweden are ranked third in the world and have shown why, topping their group with three wins

out of three before they defeated holders the United States on penalties in the last 16.

They then blew away Japan in the first hour of the quarter-final before surviving a late storm.

In Amanda Ilestedt they have

an unlikely contender to win the golden boot. The Arsenal defender has scored four goals, more than any other player still at the tournament and one behind Japan’s Hinata Miyazawa.

AFP

England relishing ‘huge’ World Cup semi clash with Australia

Sydney, Australia - England say they are relishing playing in front of what promises to be a partisan 80,000 home crowd in their Women's World Cup semi-final against co-hosts Australia on Wednesday.

The European champions had a taste of what awaits when they fought back from a goal down to beat Colombia 2-1 on Saturday during what felt like a home game for the well-supported South Americans.

The Lionesses will be back at the imposing Stadium Australia in Sydney on Wednesday with both teams attempting to win the World Cup for the first time.

Alessia Russo scored the winner in the 63rd minute against a physical Colombia and the Arsenal forward said she had enjoyed playing in front of a hostile crowd.

“That’s what the World Cup is all about - seeing top teams on the biggest stage with their fans behind them,” she said.



England coach Sarina Wiegman speaks to her players (AFP)

“We’ve had a taste of that tonight because their fans were incredible and (Australia) is another test, but one that is exciting, not only to face the hosts but to be in a semi-final.”

“So yes, keeping the dream alive.”

England’s Dutch coach Sarina Wiegman praised her side’s resilience, having fallen behind in the 44th minute, before Lauren Hemp’s equaliser in first-half in-

jury time and Russo’s winner.

They will need plenty of that character if they are to overcome an Australia side who prevailed 7-6 on penalties over France and have the weight of a nation behind them.

“It’s just really fantastic that we can be here and be part of it.”

“We’re through to the semi-finals and we are going to stay till the end of the tournament.”

AFP

Australia’s World Cup exploits will leave legacy, says coach Gustavsson

Brisbane, Australia - Co-hosts Australia are “on a mission” to inspire and unite the nation as they head into a Women’s World Cup semi-final against England on Wednesday, coach Tony Gustavsson said.

The Matildas came through a penalty shootout crammed with twists and turns to beat France 7-6 on Saturday in Brisbane and set up a clash with the Lionesses.

It propelled Australia into the first semi-final in their history and followed 120 minutes of seesawing football that ended deadlocked at 0-0.

National broadcaster ABC called it the game that “stopped the nation” with fans enthralled by Australia’s exploits and packing out the stadium, as well as pubs around the country.

Big screens were also erected in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth.

“I genuinely really believe that this team can create history in so many ways, not just winning football games,” said Gustavsson, who was assistant to USA coach Jill Ellis when they won the World Cup in 2015 and 2019.

“The way that they can inspire the nation, how they can



Tony Gustavsson

I genuinely really believe that this team can create history in so many ways

TONY GUSTAVSSON

unite the nation, how they can leave a legacy that is much bigger than 90 minutes of football.

“That is also why I believe in them so much.

“When that drives you, that is a powerful tool that is very diffi-

cult to stop, and I have sensed that from day one working with this team, the inner drive is what gets them to where they are today.”

Kerr to start?

Australia have been a tight unit under the Swede and he fielded the same XI for the third game in a row against France in their quarter-final.

That could change in Sydney when they meet European champions England, who battled from behind to edge Colombia 2-1.

Australia skipper Sam Kerr

played 65 minutes against France on her return from a calf injury, making an immediate impact, and the prolific striker is looking increasingly likely to start.

Gustavsson said he toyed with starting the Chelsea forward against France despite her limited match fitness, but believes he made the right decision to hold her back.

“When Sam came in we really had them on the hook. We really got the momentum and from the fans as well, and we were very close to scoring two goals in that period,” he said

HUNGRY FOR SUCCESS

Kane’s desire for silverware behind Bayern move

Munich, Germany - Harry Kane said on Sunday that his desire to end a personal quest for silverware was behind the decision to join German giants Bayern Munich from Tottenham.

Kane left Spurs in a deal worth an initial 100 million euros (\$110 million, £86 million) on Saturday after spending his whole career with his boyhood club.

The 30-year-old leaves as Tottenham’s record goalscorer with 280 goals and is also England’s all-time top scorer at international level.

However, he is yet to win a single trophy for club or country.

Tottenham’s eighth-placed finish in the Premier League last season meant Kane was also facing a season without European football had he stayed in north London. “I think I’ve always said in my career I’ve wanted to keep improving, keep pushing myself to you know my limits and see how far that can take me,” said Kane at a press conference at Bayern’s Allianz Arena.

“Ultimately I wanted to be playing at the highest level, I wanted to be playing in the Champions League, I wanted to be fighting for titles every year.

“So to come to Bayern Munich, one of the biggest clubs in the world, goes with that opportunity so I’m looking forward to that challenge.”

Bayern have won the Bundesliga for the past 11 years.

But they were seeking a world-class striker to compete once more for Champions League glory.

And Kane is eyeing a dream return to England for next season’s Champions League final at Wembley.

“Joining this club was to try and win the Champions league,” added Kane. “The prospect of trying to win it at Wembley would be amazing for me personally of course.

“I’m not going to lie, so we’ll have to see how the season goes first and hopefully we can we can manage to achieve that.”

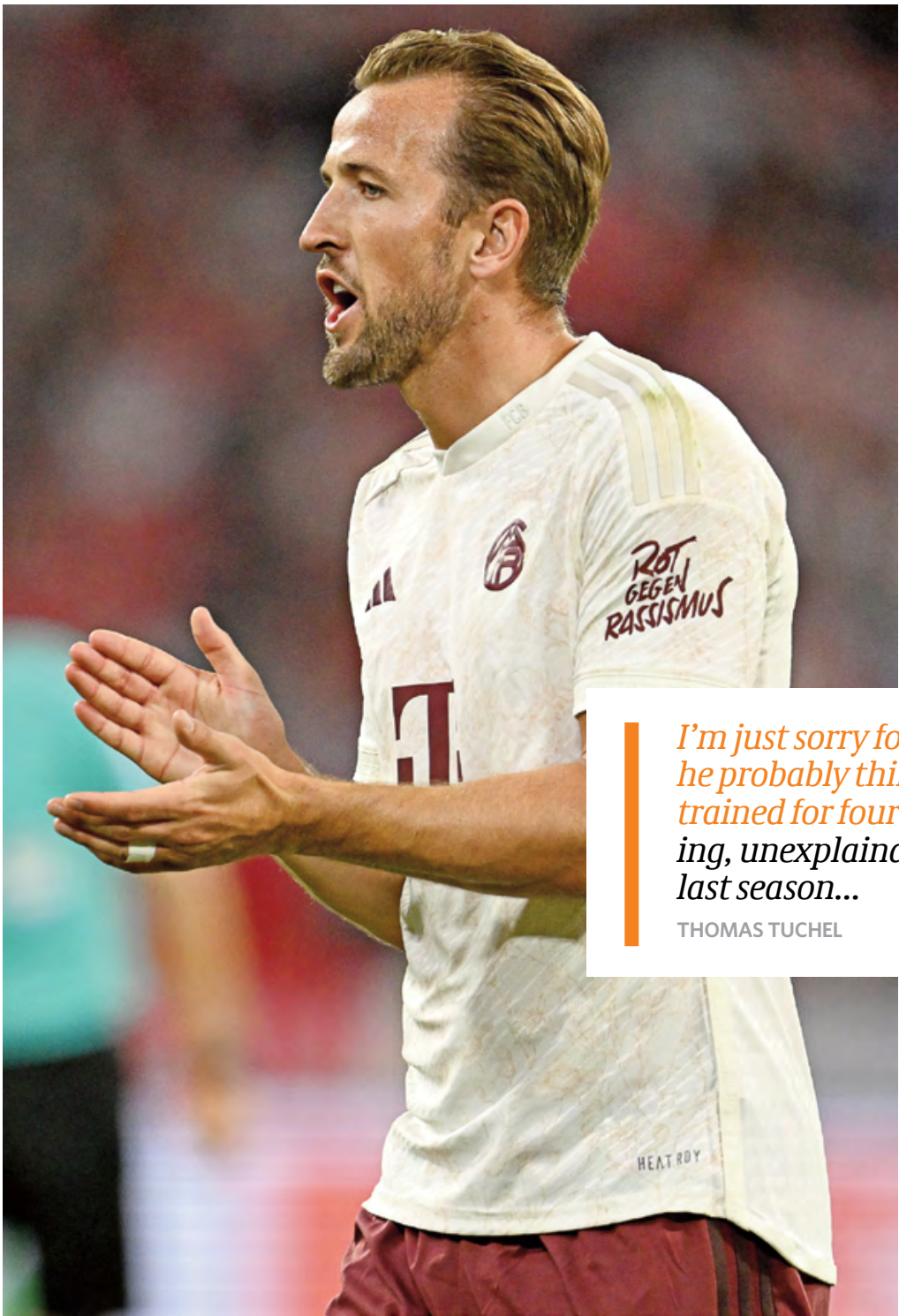
Previous attempts at trying to lure him away from Tottenham have been rebuffed by the club’s chairman, Daniel Levy, who is a notoriously tough negotiator in transfer deals.

However, Levy’s hand was weakened by the fact that Kane had only one year left on his contract, meaning he could have left next year on a free transfer.

“This is kind of my first real of my first transfer that I’ve been involved in so yeah it was an up and down experience for sure,” said Kane on the weeks of negotiations between the clubs.

“But I’m happy to be here now. I said yesterday and on my social media posting I wish Tottenham all the best, I wish Daniel Levy all the best but my focus is here now and trying to help this team.”

AFP



Bayern Munich's Harry Kane in action in their German Super Cup match against RB Leipzig on Saturday (AFP)

Harry Kane suffers defeat in Bayern Munich debut

Munich, Germany - Harry Kane endured a losing debut with Bayern Munich on Saturday when his new team crashed to a 3-0 defeat to RB Leipzig in the German Super Cup, just hours after sealing a move from Tottenham.

Dani Olmo was the star of the show, producing a virtuoso performance and scoring a hat-trick in Munich as Kane’s dream of clinching his first major silverware was shattered.

Kane came on as a 64th-minute substitute with Bayern already trailing 2-0 with Olmo completing his hat-trick soon after. The England skipper was largely anonymous but earned the sympathy of Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel.

“I’m just sorry for Harry Kane, he probably thinks that we haven’t trained for four weeks,” said Tuchel who admitted he was at a loss for words for the German champions’ limp performance.

“It’s frightening, unexplainable,” he said. “It was the case last season and clearly we have completely disintegrated to that frequency again today.”

Record England goalscorer Kane joined from Tottenham for a fee in excess of 100 million euros (\$109.6 million) earlier Saturday.

Bayern fans had lined up hours before kick-off to get their “Kane 9” shirts printed at the club store.

Kane, who was given the number nine vacated by Robert Lewandowski, had indicated on social media that he was “feeling good” and “looking forward to the match” after taking part in his first training session as a new Bayern player.

But he couldn’t turn the tide as Leipzig were awarded a penalty three minutes after his introduction.

Olmo converted the spot-kick to seal a first Super Cup title for Marco Rose’s side.

Kane, who has lost three finals with Tottenham and one with England, must wait for his first ever trophy.

I’m just sorry for Harry Kane, he probably thinks that we haven’t trained for four weeks. It’s frightening, unexplainable. It was the case last season...

THOMAS TUCHEL



Rasmus Hojlund

Man Utd spend big in pursuit of Premier League despite stalled sale process

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester United kick-off their season at home to Wolves on Monday with fresh hope they can end a 10-year wait to win a Premier League title despite the lingering uncertainty over the club’s future.

Nine months on from an announcement by owners, the Glazer family, that they were exploring a sale of the club, the process has stalled.

Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Al Thani and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe appeared locked in a battle for control of the club during several rounds of bidding.

However, supporters’ hopes that a new owner could be in place by the start of the new season have been dashed.

Deeply unpopular with fans since they saddled the club with debt in a £790 million (\$1 billion) leveraged takeover in 2005, the Glazers are reportedly seeking a world record £6 billion for a sports club.

Protests are planned at Old Trafford on Monday, but they have consistently fallen on deaf ears during the American

cans’ nearly two decades in charge.

Despite the uncertainty, United manager Erik ten Hag has again been backed heavily in the transfer market to try and build on a positive first season in charge.

The former Ajax boss overcame a disastrous start to his

Protests are planned at Old Trafford on Monday, but they have consistently fallen on deaf ears

reign 12 months ago to guide United back into the Champions League and end a six-year trophy drought by lifting the League Cup back in February.

Ten Hag has addressed key positions in a near £200 million outlay on goalkeeper Andre Onana, midfielder Mason Mount and striker Rasmus Hojlund.

Bellingham strikes on debut as Real Madrid beat Athletic Bilbao in La Liga

Barcelona, Spain - Jude Bellingham said “it was really special” to score on his Real Madrid debut in a 2-0 win at Athletic Bilbao on Saturday in their opening La Liga match.

Despite concerns at both ends of the pitch, Carlo Ancelotti’s side earned a convincing victory at the San Mames to kick off their title bid, with Rodrygo Goes opening the scoring.

Madrid, who lost Ballon d’Or holder Karim Benzema to big-money Saudi football in the summer, are still heavily linked to Paris Saint-Germain forward Kylian Mbappe as a replacement, as the transfer saga drags on.

Brazilian duo Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo worked well as a strike duo, with Bellingham in the No 10 role at the tip of a diamond midfield offering ample support.

“It’s really special, the most important thing is the win,” Bellingham told Real Madrid TV.

Los Blancos goalkeeper Andriy Lunin started in place of regular stopper Thibaut Courtois, who is set to miss the majority of the season with a cruciate ligation injury.

The Ukrainian was solid, although he may soon be behind Chelsea goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga in the pecking order, with the Spaniard set to join on loan according to various reports.

Ancelotti, who will take over



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham in action in their La Liga match against Athletic Bilbao on Saturday (AFP)

the Brazilian national team at the end of this campaign, handed defender Fran Garcia his second Madrid debut after his return from Rayo Vallecano.

However it was Bellingham’s name that stood out and the 20-year-old demonstrated why

Madrid paid over 100 million euros (\$110 million) for him.

“I’m very happy to play with (Bellingham), he’s a great player, and I’m sure he’ll help us a lot this season,” said Rodrygo.

Ancelotti also hailed the England international on his fine

debut.

“(He was) very good, he’s got personality, being here motivates him a lot,” said Madrid’s coach.

“He’s a fantastic player, a very important signing - he’s out of the ordinary.”

Madrid took the lead before the half-hour mark when Dani Carvajal hooked the ball back to Rodrygo, who slotted past Unai Simon at his near post.

The goalkeeper managed to force David Alaba’s header onto the post and thwarted Vinicius after he burst into the box, but Bellingham soon added Madrid’s second.

The England international netted in unorthodox fashion, volleying Alaba’s corner into the ground and over Simon.

Bellingham stood still, facing the home fans with arms wide in celebration, as if announcing his arrival to La Liga - drawing a rebuke from Athletic captain Iker Muniain.

“I’ve always been taught if you try and hit the target you can score,” said Bellingham.

AFP

Newcastle hit Villa for five

London, United Kingdom - Alexander Isak scored twice as Newcastle United thrashed Aston Villa in their Premier League opener on Saturday.

Newcastle finished fourth last season to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in 20 years and their rise under the control of the Saudi sovereign wealth fund shows no sign of stopping.

Italian international Sandro

Tonali enjoyed a dream debut as he fired the Magpies into the lead after just six minutes.

Villa equalised almost immediately through one of their own new signings Moussa Diaby.

But Unai Emery’s men, who also ended last season strongly to qualify for Europe, collapsed after Isak restored Newcastle’s lead.

The Swedish striker calmly dinked home his second just before

the hour mark.

Harvey Barnes then came off the bench to exemplify Newcastle’s new-found strength in depth as the former Leicester winger teed up Callum Wilson to make it 4-1 and then rounded off the scoring himself in stoppage time to put Eddie Howe’s men top of the table.

“It was a tight game decided by our ruthlessness in front of goal,” said Howe.



Newcastle United's Alexander Isak (L) beats Aston Villa's Ezri Konsa before scoring their third goal on Saturday (AFP)

NEW CONCERN FOR PSG

Mbappe reinstated by French champions but Neymar ‘probably leaving’ for Saudi Arabia

Paris, France - French superstar Kylian Mbappe was reinstated in Paris Saint-Germain’s first team on Sunday just as Neymar was said to be negotiating a move to join the cash-rich Saudi league.

It has been a rocky build-up to the new Ligue 1 season for the French champions PSG with both Mbappe and Neymar left out of new coach Luis Enrique’s team for Saturday’s underwhelming opening goalless draw against Lorient.

After being sidelined for several weeks amid an ongoing contract dispute Mbappe watched from the Parc des Princes stands.

But the club’s prize asset is now back in the fold, for the time being at least.

“After very constructive and positive discussions between Paris Saint-Germain and Kylian Mbappe before the PSG-Lorient match, the player was reinstated in first team training this morning,” PSG said in a statement.

Brazilian star Neymar was in contrast conspicuous by his absence on Saturday, the official line being he was suffering from a “viral syndrome”.



Neymar

A source told AFP on Sunday that the 31-year-old Brazilian forward “no longer figures in the club or manager’s plans”.

Neymar, who joined PSG for a record 220 million euros (\$241m) from Barcelona in 2017, is “probably leaving”, the same source added.

Neymar was said to be in talks with a club from the Saudi Pro League.

French sports daily *L’Equipe* reported that Al Hilal is the club that has tabled the offer.

Last month Al Hilal made a 300-million-euro (\$328 million) bid for Mbappe, though the striker reportedly refused to meet with officials from the

Mbappe stand-off

After a summer of flux at the Parc des Princes filled with new arrivals, doubts over Neymar’s future and Lionel Messi’s departure, it is the Mbappe stand-off that dominates the headlines.

The France captain has refused to sign an extension to his PSG deal, meaning he can leave for free next year, with Real Madrid long seen as his preferred destination.

Qatari-owned PSG want to sell him now and bring in a significant transfer fee for a player who cost 180 million euros (\$198 million) from Monaco in 2017.

“The position is very clear. If Kylian wants to stay, he must

After very constructive and positive discussions between Paris Saint-Germain and Kylian Mbappe before the PSG-Lorient match, the player was reinstated in first team training

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

team.

Neymar underwent surgery on his right ankle in early March, only returning to join PSG on their pre-season tour of Asia.

His time at PSG has been blighted by a catalogue of injuries.

Although he helped the club to the 2020 Champions League final he has often been sidelined for key games.

If Neymar does end up moving to Saudi Arabia he will join a growing list of top players lured to the oil-rich kingdom since Cristiano Ronaldo moved to Al-Nassr in January.

sign a new contract. We can’t let the best player in the world today leave for free. It’s impossible,” PSG president Nasser al Khelaifi said last month.

Mbappe had not been allowed train with the first team and played only one of PSG’s five warm-up games and was not invited to the pre-season tour in Japan and South Korea.

He sat alongside fellow 2018 World Cup winner Ousmane Dembele, who completed his transfer from Barcelona earlier Saturday, as Luis Enrique handed debuts to six players against Lorient.

AFP



Mancini resigns as Italy coach

Rome, Italy - Roberto Mancini has resigned as coach of European champions Italy, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) announced on Sunday.

The FIGC said in a statement they had “received late yesterday evening” Mancini’s surprise decision to step down. “Because of important and close commitments for the team with Euro 2024 qualifiers against North Macedonia and Ukraine, the FIGC will announce the name of the new national coach in the next few days,” the federation added.

Mancini was appointed in May 2018 after Italy’s failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup under Gian Piero Ventura.

A former international, Mancini won Euro 2021 with Italy but then failed to qualify his side for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Mancini’s resignation comes as a major shock with no warning signs.

Earlier this month the 58-year-old had also been handed responsibility for the country’s Under-21 and Under-20 teams.

AFP



Jessica Pegula of the US hits a return against Iga Swiatek of Poland

Pegula stuns top-ranked Swiatek in Montreal

Montreal, Canada - Jessica Pegula of the United States upset world number one Iga Swiatek on Saturday before wet weather left the American waiting to discover the identity of her WTA Montreal Open final opponent.

Fourth-seed Pegula took advantage of an error-strewn display by Poland’s Swiatek to complete a 6-2, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4 victory in 2hr 30min.

But heavy rain over the Montreal region washed out Saturday’s second semi-final between third seed Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan and 15th seed Liud-

mila Samsonova.

Rybakina, who battled through weather delays on Friday before clinching her semi-final berth in the early hours of Saturday morning, or Samsonova will now face a gruelling double-header on Sunday with a well-rested Pegula awaiting in the final.

“It feels great,” Pegula said after the win. “No better way to earn it, right? It was tough match. I felt like I was in control. But as the world number one does and a champion, she played some really great tennis at the end of the second set and in the third. So,

she made me earn it.”

Reigning French and US Open champion Swiatek, meanwhile, was left reflecting on a scratchy display that saw her suffer no fewer than 11 breaks of serve.

A jittery first set opened with five straight breaks of serve before Pegula finally managed to hold to take a 4-2 lead.

Swiatek continued to struggle with her serve in the next game, and Pegula was soon 0-40 up.

Although Swiatek fought back to level at deuce, she was soon in trouble again.

AFP

Paris Saint-Germain held by Lorient in season opener with Mbappe sidelined

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain kicked off their title defence with a 0-0 draw at home to Lorient on Saturday as Kylian Mbappe watched from the stands amid his ongoing contract dispute with the French champions.

After a summer of flux at the Parc des Princes filled with new arrivals and Lionel Messi’s departure, it is the Mbappe stand-off that continues to dominate the headlines.

The France captain has refused to sign an extension to his PSG deal, meaning he can leave for free next year, with Real Madrid long seen as his preferred destination. PSG want to sell him now and bring in a significant transfer fee for a player who cost 180 million euros (\$198 million) from Monaco in 2017.

New coach Luis Enrique on Friday said he hoped a solution can be found, but Mbappe has not been allowed train with the first team and was left out of the squad to face Lorient.

Instead he sat alongside fellow 2018 World Cup winner Ousmane Dembele, who completed his transfer from Barcelona ear-



Lorient’s Julien Ponceau (R) tackles Paris Saint-Germain’s Achraf Hakimi during their French L1 match

lier in the day, as Luis Enrique handed debuts to six players.

Goncalo Ramos started in a new-look attack with Marco Asensio and Lee Kang-in, while Milan Skriniar and Lucas Hernandez began in defence as the impressive Uruguayan Manuel Ugarte lined up in midfield.

Neymar missed the season opener because of a viral infection, and the club are reported to be open to selling both the Brazilian and midfielder Marco Verratti if a suitable offer is made.

Ramos, who has joined on an initial loan deal from Benfica, nearly grabbed his first PSG goal

inside 10 minutes when his bending effort was superbly clawed away by Yvon Mvogo.

Lorient captain Laurent Abergel hit the outside of the post from distance after pinching the ball deep in PSG’s half, but both sides struggled to create clear chances.



Jannik Sinner celebrates winning the first set against Gael Monfils

Sinner to face de Minaur for Toronto Masters title

Toronto, Canada - Jannik Sinner and Alex de Minaur both dominated opponents in straight sets on Saturday to reach the final of the ATP Toronto Masters.

Sinner, runner-up last spring in Miami, reached his second final of the season at the elite level with a 6-4, 6-4 defeat of American Tommy Paul.

De Minaur put an Australian into a Canadian final for the first time since 2001 with his 6-1, 6-3

defeat of Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. The last Aussie to reach the title match here was Patrick Rafter - who had lifted the 1998 trophy.

De Minaur maintained his hardcourt form from last weekend in Los Cabos, where he finished runner-up to Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Sinner had to battle in his fourth career Masters semi-final, claiming the opening set in 53

minutes and winning a 46-shot rally to take a 5-2 lead in the second set.

Sinner was broken while serving for victory but recovered a game later for victory on his third match point.

“This was a fight, he was playing great,” the winner said. “This is what I play for - the big matches. I know the feeling of a Masters 1000 final. Hopefully I can show my best tennis tomorrow.

I’m happy with how I reacted to situations on the court. I’m happy to be in the final again. The pressure is something great, it’s positive.”

Sinner leads de Minaur - his doubles partner this week - 4-0 in previous meetings.

World number 18 De Minaur will bid for his eighth career trophy and second this season after winning a wind-swept semi-final over Davidovich Fokina that was

littered with service breaks.

The Australian, who knocked out second seed Daniil Medvedev in the quarter-finals, said winning could not have been more difficult.

“It was a very tough day, tricky conditions for playing tennis with all of the wind,” he said.

“From the first point I told myself to stay positive and not expect perfect tennis.”

AFP

India romp to nine-wicket win to level T20 series with Windies

Lauderhill, United States - India powered to an emphatic nine-wicket victory in their T20 international against the West Indies on Saturday thanks to a magnificent opening partnership from Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill as they levelled the five-match series at 2-2.

West Indies set India a target of 179 to win, which looked challenging on a slow surface but the opening pair made short work of the task, rattling up 165 before Gill finally departed for 77 in the 16th over.

Jaiswal, the 21-year-old left hander, ended unbeaten on 84 after some outstanding stroke-play, producing 11 fours and three sixes to the delight of the heavily pro-India crowd at the Broward County Stadium in South Florida.

The series decided concludes at the USA's recognised international cricket venue on Sunday and India will now fancy their chances of a comeback from trailing 2-0.

Shimron Hetmyer struck a lively 61 as West Indies recovered from a shaky start to reach 178-8.

Arshdeep Singh had removed West Indies openers Kyle Mayers (17) and Brandon King (18) and fans bedecked in India's blue shirts, including supporters who had travelled from across the United States, were lapping it up as West Indies struggling to 57-



Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrates after steering India to a nine-wicket win against the West Indies in Lauderhill, Florida, on Saturday (AFP)

4 with left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav picking up two wickets.

But then Shai Hope steadied the innings with 45 from 29 balls before he holed out to Axar Patel off Yuzvendra Chahal.

But it was Hetmyer who took on India's attack, hitting four sixes as he put up his 61 off 39 balls, combining some power hitting with strategic patience.

Odean Smith's last-ball six, smiting Arshdeep Singh over extra cover, helped West Indies set a respectable total but their bowling attack was soon being pulled to pieces.

India skipper Hardik Pandya was delighted to see his young opening batsmen deliver. "Brilliant. As we've seen, there's no doubt in their skillset. They just needed to spend some time between the wickets. Going forward we have to take more responsibility as a batting group and support the bowlers. I've always believed bowlers win matches. Yashasvi and Shubman were brilliant. Very pleasing to see," he said.

While the dominating nature of India's win suggests they have a strong chance of clinching the series, Pandya warned against complacency.

"In T20 cricket no one is favourite. You have to turn up and play good cricket. You have to respect the opposition."

Joshua overcomes jeers to stop stand-in opponent Helenius

London, United Kingdom - Former world champion Anthony Joshua needed seven rounds to stop stand-in opponent Robert Helenius in their heavyweight bout on Saturday.

Joshua, 33, looked ponderous in the early stages and the British boxer was jeered by his London home crowd. But he finished the fight with a thunderous knockout of Finland's Helenius at the O2 Arena.

Victory kept Joshua on course for a bout with fellow former world heavyweight champion Deontay Wilder.

"People need to leave me alone, this is my time in the ring," Joshua told DAZN.

"Let me keep doing what I want to do. Helenius, I told him to come again. I think he can cause people a lot of problems."

As for a bout with Wilder, twice world champion Joshua joked: "My back's gone, is there a doctor in here? I want to carry this heavyweight division to the top!"

Helenius was only drafted in after fighting in Finland last weekend when Dillian Whyte was ruled out of what would have been an all-British clash following "adverse analytical findings" in a doping test.

The 39-year-old Helenius, who entered the ring with 32



Anthony Joshua

wins and four defeats from his 36 professional bouts, was knocked out in the first round by Wilder in October. He avoided a repeat of that embarrassing reverse on Saturday although, with Joshua making a cautious start, boos rang out from a capacity crowd during the third round.

Joshua, however, landed with a left hook and then hit Helenius with a right to the face later in the round. The local hero rocked Helenius again in the fourth before the veteran caught Joshua with a jab.

But the fifth round left Helenius with a bloodied nose and although Joshua made him stumble with a left uppercut, he survived and got through an uneventful sixth round.

CLASSIFIEDS

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Contact: +968-91793559
mammmckenzie13@gmail.com

An Indian male having an MBA with 3.5 years of experience in payroll is looking for an opening in Accounts, HR, Admin.

Contact: +968-78829919
Eldhosebabu9745@gmail.com

A male accountant, MBA Finance and a certified SAP FICO Consultant with seven years of work experience in Finance Department in Oman, is looking for a suitable position.

Contact: +968-99685330
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MISSION MOON

RACE IN SPACE

After the launch of Chandrayaan 3 by India last month, the race to the Moon hots up with Russia launching Luna 25 last week and other nations waiting in the wings

Russia's plan to launch its lunar lander - Luna 25 - on Friday is the latest in an international push to return to the Moon that includes the world's top powers but also new players. Technology, science and politics are all essential factors in the Moon race. Here are the latest players:

China's great leap
China is pursuing plans to send a crewed mission to the Moon by 2030 and plans to build a base there. The world's second-largest economy has invested billions of dollars in its military-run space programme in a push to catch up with the United States and Russia. China was the third country to put humans in orbit in 2003 and Tiangong is the crown jewel of its space programme which has also landed rovers on Mars and the Moon. The unmanned Chang'e-4 rocket landed on the far side of the Moon in 2019, with another robot mission to the near side raising the Chinese flag there in 2020. That moonshot brought rock and soil samples back to Earth, the first time that has been done in more than four decades.

NASA's Artemis
NASA's Artemis 3 mission is set to return humans to the Moon in 2025 including its first woman and first non-white astronaut. Under the Artemis program, NASA is planning a series of missions of increasing complexity to return to the Moon and build a sustained presence in order to develop and test technologies for an eventual journey to Mars. The first - Artemis 1 - flew an uncrewed spacecraft around the Moon in 2022. Artemis 2, planned for November 2024, will do the same with crew on board. NASA sees the Moon as a pit stop for missions to Mars and has done a deal with Finnish mobile firm Nokia to set up a 4G network there. However, NASA said this week that the Artemis 3 mission may not land humans on the Moon, depending on whether certain key elements, including the landing system developed by SpaceX, were ready. Elon Musk's firm won the contract for a landing system based on a version of its prototype Starship rocket, which remains far from ready. An orbital test flight of the



uncrewed Starship had ended in a dramatic explosion in April.

Russia's Luna-25
Russia's launch of Luna-25 on Friday will be its first to the Moon since 1976 and marks the beginning of Moscow's new lunar project after 47 years. President Vladimir Putin is looking to strengthen space cooperation with China after ties with the West broke down following the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

New players
Recent technological progress has reduced the cost of missions and opened the way for new players in the public and private sector to get involved. India's latest space mission Chandrayaan-3 entered the Moon's orbit in August ahead of the country's second attempted lunar landing later this month. Getting to the Moon, however, is not an easy task. Israeli non-profit SpaceIL launched its Beresheet lunar lander in 2019, but it crashed. And in April this year, Japan's Ispace was the latest company to try, and fail, at the historic bid to put a private lunar lander on the Moon. Two other US companies, Astrobotics and Intuitive Machines, are set to try later in the year.

Russian Space Agency Roscosmos launches a Soyuz 2.1b rocket with the Luna-25 lander from the launch pad at the Vostochny cosmodrome on August 11. (Below) Chandrayaan 3 launch - July 14





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BORDERS WITH BELARUS



Cars and people with bicycles wait at the border crossing point Sumskas between Lithuania and Belarus

Risky Ride

Travellers fret as Lithuania tightens its border with Belarus, making travel across a risky proposition

Under the clear skies of Sumskas nestled at Lithuania's border with

Belarus, several dozen cars lined up on Saturday, awaiting passage.

What for years has been a convenient journey to get cheaper goods and pay family visits will, however, likely soon turn into a more challenging endeavour. Next week, Lithuania will shut two of its six border checkpoints with Belarus, including the crossing in Sumskas.

The decision came as a response to escalating tensions between the neighbours, with Vilnius warning of a provocations threat by Minsk - and the Wagner fighters now based in Belarus following their short-lived rebellion in Russia.

For casual travellers, the move will mean extended waiting times at the remaining checkpoints, which will now also be shared with buses and trucks.

Some Lithuanians say they would need to abandon their excursions to the neighbouring state completely. Among them is 73-year-old pensioner Jadvyga, who crosses the border on her bicycle several times a year to buy cheaper medication.

This week, the government installed banners at all border checkpoints with Belarus bearing the inscription "Do not risk your safety - Do not travel to Belarus. You may fail to come back."

"By granting shelter to the Wagner military group, Belarus has become a state that harbours a terrorist organisation," Lithuanian Deputy Foreign Minister Mantas Adomenas told reporters.

"New security challenges have emerged and we must take them into account," he added.

The officials in Vilnius say Minsk may be trying to recruit some travellers to Belarus for espionage, exert psychological pressure, or even blackmail the Lithuanian citizens by performing checks on their phones and social media.

"Every citizen of Lithuania who goes to Belarus must assess all the risks, including those to their health and life," said Rustamas Liubajevs, head of the border guard service.

ANGER AND DISSENT

For many Lithuanians travelling to Belarus, however, the new restrictions only cause anger and disappointment.

Sergey, a construction worker who declined to give his full name, used to go shopping



A large number of people ride bicycles across the border crossing point Sumskas, between Lithuania and Belarus, every day



Lithuania will shut two out of its six existing border checkpoints with Belarus. Boards warn people not to risk getting stuck on the other side

"They sell this drug for one and a half euros (US\$1.64), while here (in Lithuania) it costs from 10 to 12 euros," she told AFP while she queued at the Sumskas checkpoint. "But now I won't go," she added.

SAFETY RISK

Lithuanian authorities say around 230,000 Lithuanian citizens went to Belarus in the first half of 2023 despite political tensions and multiple warnings from the government to stay away from the authoritarian state.

The surge in illegal migration from Belarus to the European Union, coupled with Minsk hosting Russian tactical nuclear weapons and letting Moscow use its territory to conduct strikes on Ukraine, has left Lithuania uneasy.

in Belarus once a month and said he had never encountered anything that Lithuanian authorities warn of.

"What can happen there? It's nonsense, it's funny," he said.

The middle-aged man said political tensions are meaningless to ordinary people.

"It would be more beneficial to foster friendly relations with our neighbours, but for some reason they make a confrontation. Who is it good for?" Sergey asks.

Also, 33-year-old Violeta Porsatovic said she didn't back the new restrictions but felt there was nothing she could do about it.

"Regular people will suffer. How can we support this if we are suffering?" she said.

AFP



Building No: 115, Plot No: 330, Block No: 146, Way No: 4202, Greater Muttrah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24730939, Website: www.nligulf.com

Directors' Report For The Six-Month Period Ended 30 June 2023



Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Life & General Insurance Co SAOG & its subsidiaries (the "Group" or "NLGIC"), it's my pleasure to present to you the unaudited consolidated results of the Group for the six-month period ended 30 June 2023.

Performance Highlights for the Six-Month Period Ended 30 June 2023

Our financial results for the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 reflect the consolidated financial position and performance of NLGIC following the acquisition of Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance (ME) BSC (c) ("RSA ME") on 7 July 2022.

Gross Written Premiums and Net Underwriting Results

Gross Written Premiums ("GWP") grew by 92% to RO 181.6 million in the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 as compared to RO 94.6 million in the corresponding period of the previous year. This is primarily driven by the acquisition of RSA ME as well as the successful renewals of key partnerships and new wins during the half year, with significant growth of our medical portfolio in the United Arab Emirates ("UAE").

Net Underwriting Results ("NUR") grew by 108% to RO 19.2 million for the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 as compared to RO 9.2 million in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Investment Income

The Group's investment income increased by 161% to RO 5.7 million as compared to RO 2.2 million in the corresponding period of the previous year, this is mainly due to synergies of consolidation with RSA ME. Our investment strategy is designed to deliver a well-balanced and diversified portfolio encompassing debt and equity instruments to achieve an effective balance of risk and superior returns while maintaining adequate liquidity to meet statutory and necessary obligations.

Net Performance After Tax

The Group posted a consolidated Loss After Tax (attributable to shareholders of NLGIC) of RO 1.5 million during the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 as compared to Profit After Tax of RO 3.1 million in the corresponding period of 2022.

Despite the challenges faced by reduced profitability in motor insurance and medical insurance in the first quarter of 2023, the Group has recovered in the second quarter of 2023 by achieving profit after tax of RO 1.1 million compared to loss after tax of RO 2.6 million in first quarter of 2023. The primary factors driving the turn around are disciplined underwriting, alongside minimising risks, with strong processes and tools to maintain business quality and strength. We are encouraged by the strong and profitable growth seen in the second quarter of 2023.

Outlook

At NLGIC Group, our primary focus continues to be achieving profitable growth, as evidenced by the positive trend observed in second quarter of 2023. We are actively implementing remediation measures across all lines of business to rebalance portfolios affected by post-Covid market conditions in key markets.

In the motor segment, the second quarter of 2023 showed early-stage improvements following portfolio pruning, enhanced segmentation, and increased pricing sophistication. Our main attention remains on effectively managing the Oman motor market and addressing changing dynamics related to bodily injury claims. As for the non-motor sector, we are continually re-balancing our actions to foster accelerated growth in existing profitable segments, aligning with key market trends across our core regions.

There is positive momentum across our business due to the ongoing integration and we remain optimistic about the future. The synergies and efforts we've invested in over the past 12 months are expected to emerge in the second half of this year. This significant milestone will further support our position as a leading insurer across the GCC region. By expanding our products and services in key markets and across all business lines, we aim to streamline operations and implement best practices that come with achieving scale in a cost-controlled manner, which will form part of our competitive advantage.

Innovation remains at the core of our strategy, and we are committed to delivering added value to our partners and customers. This year marks the introduction of enhanced claims adjudication technology across the medical book, which promotes ongoing cost control, efficient case management, and streamlined supply chain operations.

We are actively optimizing investment income to achieve high yields, which will bolster our technical results. We expect further improvement during the second half of the year, supporting our delivery at year-end.

Training and Skill Development

We continue to invest in our people and held several training and development initiatives in the period.

Soft skills on project management training was held which was provided by the Pmwares Company. The training was provided to all the employees and included modules on importance of project management.

A virtual training session was organized on IFRS 17 for all finance department employees which was aimed to update the employees on the new standard on insurance reporting which will be implemented during the year.

Further, Customer Communication & Business Etiquette training session was held in our Dubai Office for our staff in UAE to enhance their soft skills and communication skills with goal of delivering great customer service and driving business growth.

Recent Awards

I am proud to share with you the following recognition received during the quarter, which are a testimony to the Group's quest for customer trust and service excellence.

- "Fastest growing Commercial Insurance Company" in the UAE by Global Business Outlook

- "Excellence in Insurance Services Award" at New Age Banking Summit, Oman
- "Industry Leader in Sustainability in Insurance award" at AIWA Sustainability Leadership Awards 2023, Oman

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Group, I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his dynamic and progressive leadership. Under His Majesty's visionary leadership, we pray for the continued steady growth, stability, and

ending prosperity of our great country.

I would like to thank our esteemed shareholders, partners and regulators for their continued support and trust. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the management and staff of NLGIC for their professionalism, dedication and commitment.

Khalid Mohammed Al Zubair
Chairman

Unaudited interim condensed separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss for the six months ended 30th June 2023				
	Group	Parent Company		
	30 June 2023	30 June 2022	30 June 2023	30 June 2022
	RO	RO	RO	RO
	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)
Statement of profit or loss				
Income				
Gross premium written	181,643,369	94,572,440	108,855,860	94,572,440
Gross premium earned	155,892,942	78,766,968	87,560,562	78,766,968
Reinsurance share of ceded premium Earned	(27,401,497)	(12,526,810)	(15,938,474)	(12,526,810)
Net premium earned	128,491,445	66,240,158	71,622,088	66,240,158
Commission income	2,595,874	1,671,305	2,575,648	1,671,305
Income from policy fees	660,084	676,812	660,084	676,812
Gross claims expense	(111,803,544)	(62,772,596)	(74,067,590)	(62,772,596)
Reinsurance share of gross claims expense	16,069,071	10,095,284	12,460,648	10,095,284
Commission expense	(16,811,520)	(6,666,627)	(8,451,467)	(6,666,627)
Net underwriting income	19,201,410	9,244,336	4,799,411	9,244,336
Investment income - net	5,740,808	2,196,330	2,809,208	2,196,330
Share of Profit from Subsidiaries	-	-	1,169,922	72,408
Expected credit losses on financial assets	(3,079)	(10,189)	(6,648)	(10,189)
Other operating income - net	34,621	33,768	34,571	46,410
Third party administration fees	(977,595)	(635,283)	(1,739,108)	(1,354,865)
General and administrative expenses	(23,424,944)	(7,044,200)	(6,804,889)	(6,414,956)
Finance cost	(2,072,272)	(102,422)	(2,104,618)	(102,422)
Amortisation of intangible assets	(358,609)	(11,798)	(11,798)	(11,798)
Net underwriting income	(1,859,660)	3,679,542	(1,853,949)	3,665,254
Income tax	(148,204)	(533,452)	309,450	(528,164)
(Loss) / profit for the period	(2,007,864)	3,137,090	(1,544,499)	3,137,090
(Loss) / profit for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	(1,544,499)	3,137,090	(1,544,499)	3,137,090
Non-controlling interests	(463,365)	-	-	1,931,938
(2,007,864)	3,137,090	(1,544,499)	3,137,090	
Other comprehensive income				
(Items that are or may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss):				
Exchange differences on translation of foreign operations	-	6,115	-	(8,559)
Changes in fair value of debt instruments at fair value through	-	(8,559)	-	-
other comprehensive income - net	261,768	(1,363,761)	263,517	(1,363,761)
Share of FVOCI from Subsidiaries	1,752	160,839	1,752	160,839
(Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss):				
Changes in fair value of equity instruments at fair value through	-	-	-	-
other comprehensive income - net	305,740	6,329	302,243	6,329
Other comprehensive income	575,375	(1,205,152)	573,627	(1,205,152)
Total comprehensive (loss) / income for the period	(1,432,489)	1,931,938	(970,872)	1,931,938
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE (LOSS) / INCOME for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	(970,872)	1,931,938	(970,872)	1,931,938
Non-controlling interests	(461,617)	-	-	-
(1,432,489)	1,931,938	(970,872)	1,931,938	
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	(0.004)	0.012	(0.004)	0.012

Unaudited interim condensed separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 30th June 2023				
	Group	Parent Company		
	30 June 2023	31 December 2022	30 June 2023	31 December 2022
	RO	RO	RO	RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	40,950,932	47,914,047	12,552,541	19,631,657
Bank deposits	143,953,873	147,277,552	44,241,366	42,143,517
Investment in securities	105,674,498	100,839,325	61,038,338	56,376,006
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	121,502,638	121,559,262
Insurance and reinsurance receivables	117,042,849	81,114,393	81,888,008	53,589,715
Reinsurance share of outstanding claims and IBNR reserve	24,085,438	23,262,905	7,609,982	6,498,774
Reinsurance share of actuarial / mathematical and unexpired risk reserve	18,665,874	18,082,401	16,013,783	12,165,379
Other receivables and prepayments	31,944,632	23,581,728	22,197,999	11,707,753
Loans to policyholders	41,339	47,587	41,339	47,587
Property and equipment	9,073,955	9,131,126	6,413,912	6,280,651
Deferred tax asset	956,569	638,574	716,328	398,570
Intangible assets (including goodwill)	26,344,314	26,572,822	413,657	425,455
Total assets	518,734,273	478,462,460	374,809,891	330,824,326
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
EQUITY				
Share capital	39,837,434	39,837,434	39,837,434	39,837,434
Legal reserve	9,199,031	9,199,031	9,199,031	9,199,031
Contingency reserve	17,574,687	17,531,397	17,574,687	17,531,397
Revaluation reserve	352,345	352,345	352,345	352,345
Share premium	29,176,468	29,176,468	29,176,468	29,176,468
Fair value reserve	(229,192)	(627,007)	(229,192)	(627,007)
Foreign exchange translation reserve	(39,345)	(45,460)	(39,345)	(45,460)
Retained earnings	16,364,242	13,789,249	19,139,517	16,564,524
Total equity attributable to shareholders of the Parent	112,235,670	109,213,457	115,010,945	111,988,732
Non-controlling interests	18,948,156	17,268,751	-	-
Total equity	131,183,826	126,482,208	115,010,945	111,988,732
LIABILITIES				
Gross outstanding claims and IBNR reserve	98,656,594	79,562,251	50,015,344	31,319,829
Gross actuarial / mathematical and unexpired risk reserve	131,085,283	101,738,096	83,381,841	62,086,543
Due to reinsurers	26,560,437	25,449,995	19,000,783	11,985,821
Other liabilities	47,295,041	61,219,213	29,804,555	36,030,138
Term Loan & Overdraft from Bank	77,417,961	77,093,974	77,417,961	77,093,974
Income tax payable	6,535,131	6,916,723	98,462	319,289
Total liabilities	387,550,447	351,980,252	259,798,146	218,835,594
Total equity and liabilities	518,734,273	478,462,460	374,809,891	330,824,326
Net assets per share	0.282	0.274	0.289	0.281