



NEWS BRIEF

SAYYID THEYAZIN TO PRESIDE OVER OMAN EQUESTRIAN FESTIVAL

Muscat - H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over Oman Equestrian Festival 2022 on Wednesday. The first edition of the festival, jointly organised by Oman Equestrian Federation and Royal Cavalry, will be held at Al Rahba Farm Racetrack in Barka, starting 2pm.



French author Dominique Lapierre dies at 91

'Green hydrogen projects will create parallel economy'

Green Hydrogen Summit kicks off, exhibition opened

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Green hydrogen projects will contribute to achieving Oman's zero-neutral strategy which will not be possible unless there is a clean alternative to the energy currently used, H E Salim Nasser al Awfi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated on Monday.

Hydrogen is one of the derivatives of clean energy and can be used to export solar energy and wind energy to local industries and to the rest of the world. "Green hydrogen will create an economy parallel to the oil and gas economy currently existing in Oman," he said.

He was speaking at the Green Hydrogen Summit that kicked off at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday. During the opening ceremony of an accompanying exhibition held under his patronage, the minister underscored the importance of the hydrogen sector in transitioning carbon-based energy to renewable and



The three-day event commenced with the opening of an accompanying exhibition in which 30 local and international establishments specialising in green hydrogen are taking part

clean energy.

H E Awfi described the response and participation in the exhibition, in terms of local and international companies, whether in manufacturing processes or technology-bringing operations, as "excellent".

He also informed that student

competitions resulted in new ideas contributing to the development of concepts related to renewable and hydrogen energy.

He explained that renewable energy is the clean alternative to electricity and hydrogen for local gas-dependent industries, and therefore the existence of hydro-

gen is essential to the energy transition and zero neutrality by 2050.

The three-day event commenced with the opening of the accompanying exhibition in which 30 local and international specialised establishments are taking part, showcasing their projects, programmes and modern technologies in the field of green hydrogen.

The exhibition will promote the exchange of experiences and provide a platform for advances in the field.

Through its pavilion at the exhibition, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals is displaying its projects in the field of green hydrogen and available investment opportunities.

The ministry is also introducing the National Strategy for Energy Transition and the most important minerals used in the production technologies of green hydrogen.

Oman seeks to position itself as leader in green hydrogen production in the world. Accordingly, the ministry has worked on developing a strategy to ensure the growth of a green hydrogen economy.

The ministry is also promoting this sector in the context of energy sources diversification. Additionally, it is an opportunity for Omani and global companies to cooperate and participate in supporting energy security and realising economic diversification.

A session of discussions, organised for participants in the summit, will address several key issues in the green hydrogen value chain.

The main event of the Green Hydrogen Summit - a conference titled 'Strategy and Technology' - will be held on Tuesday.

More than 20% have suffered violence, harassment at work: UN

Geneva, Switzerland - More than one in five people in employment worldwide have experienced some form of workplace harassment or violence, according to a survey released by the United Nations on Monday.

"Violence and harassment at work is a widespread phenomenon around the world," the UN's International Labour Organization said following the ILO's joint study with the safety charity Lloyd's Register Foundation and pollsters Gallup.

The survey was the first attempt to produce a global overview of the magnitude and frequency of the problem, and the barriers that prevent people from talking about it.

It found that 22.8 per cent - which would amount to 743mn people in employment - have experienced "at least one form of violence and harassment at work during their working life", according to data collected last year.

Nearly a third of victims said they had been subjected to more than one form of violence and harassment, and 6.3 per cent had experienced it in all three forms - physical, psychological and sexual - during their working life. AFP

DO MORE

FESTIVAL of DREAMS!

+ YOU ARE WELCOME TO A WORLD OF ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

BE DELIGHTED!
TEST DRIVE AN MG,
WIN A SMART PHONE

WIN BIG!
BUY AN MG, WIN ANOTHER MG
8 CARS TO BE WON, ONE EVERY WEEK!

GET MORE!
GET FREE REGISTRATION,
INSURANCE & SERVICE

OFFER VALID FROM 06/11/2022 TO 31/12/2022 ONLY FOR CUSTOMERS BUYING MG VEHICLES FROM MHD DEALERSHIP. FREE INSURANCE 1ST YEAR (OMAN & UAE), FREE 1ST YEAR REGISTRATION, FREE SERVICE IS FOR 30,000 KM. "FESTIVAL OF DREAMS" COUPON APPLICABLE ONLY ON PURCHASE OF MG CARS. THERE WILL BE A TOTAL OF 8 DRAWS (1 MG5 STD EACH) ON 03/01/2023. TEST DRIVE COUPON - CUSTOMER IS ENTITLED TO WIN NOKIA PHONE C21 MOBILE PHONE THROUGH A RAFFLE DRAW THAT WILL TAKE PLACE ON 03/01/2023. IMAGES ARE FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY.

* T&C APPLY

CR NO. 1001990

Cyclist pedals 726km to mark UAE's 51st National Day

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Omani cyclist Faisal al Mamari spread the message of love and peace to celebrate the 51st National Day of the United Arab Emirates through a five-day tour from Oman to the UAE.

Mamari's tour started in the wilayat of Saham, North Batinah, on Thursday, December 1 and ended on Monday, December 5.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily* from the UAE, Mamari said, "I started preparing for the trip two months ago. My love for my country and the brotherly people of the UAE prompted me to embark on this trip."

He added, "It aimed to celebrate the 51st National Day of the UAE and spread the message of peace and love."

About his preparations for the trip, Mamari said, "I exercised a lot to keep myself fit. I walked for at least three hours a day."

The cycle trip covered different cities in Oman and the UAE, including Saham, Buraimi, Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Khor Fakkan, Fujairah and back to Sohar.

"I carried the national flags of both countries, Oman and the UAE. Every day, I set off at 6:30am and cycled till 6 pm."

Besides securing funding, strong winds were among the biggest challenges Mamari encountered on the road. "But I was determined to overcome whatever problems I faced with patience. I took breaks to eat sandwiches and drink water dur-



(Supplied photos)



I plan to have more such tours to promote Omani tourism and create awareness on the importance of sports among community members

FAISAL AL MAMARI

ing the day."

Having started cycling at childhood, Mamari has set off on several tours covering various governorates of the sultanate. However, he describes the latest tour as the “most beautiful” owing to the message of love and peace. “My tours aim to promote tourism in wilayats and spread the culture of cycling.”

Mamari was accompanied by adventurer Ibrahim al Farsi on this trip, to who he is grateful for the support.

"I plan to have more such tours to promote Omani tourism and create awareness on the importance of sports among community members," Mamari said.



865 water licences issued in Oct: MAFWR

Our Correspondent

Muscat

A total of 865 water licences were issued in October 2022, according to data released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

An official at MAFWR said, "The licences issued include requests for registering wells, dams and aflaj, for drilling wells, and development projects in various governorates."

According to the official, the highest number of licences – 258 – were issued in Dhahirah, followed by 189 in Dakhliyah, 124 in South Batinah, 101 in North Batinah, 88 in North Sharqiyah, 35 in Buraimi, 32 in Muscat, 30 in South Sharqiyah, four in Musandam, three in Dhofar and one in Al Wusta.

MAFWR strives to facilitate and simplify procedures for granting water licences, while preserving aflaj as a natural

The licences issued include requests for registering wells, dams and aflaj, for drilling wells, and development projects in various governorates

MAFWR OFFICIAL

water resource, the official informed.

He added that the ministry is currently undertaking maintenance and restoration work of 56 aflaj in North Sharqiyah, spread over several wilayats of the governorate. This restoration work will cost over RO409,000.

According to the official, aflaj maintenance and restoration projects aim to support farmers and improve irrigation services.

Oman has 4,112 aflaj spread over its governorates.

HILAL ONLINE

Gaming PC vs consoles: What's better?

Gaming is one of the most popular means of entertainment in our daily lives. It's been a thing for a really long time now, dating back to 1958. From Atari, to old-school Nintendo, to the two biggest gaming console companies in the world, Xbox and PlayStation, gaming has come a long way, and is still moving forward. There was once a time a few years ago when I begged my father to sell my PlayStation 4 and get me my own gaming PC. However, it never really worked out as he disagreed, but with some really good points on why keeping a console would be more suitable.

Firstly, let's start off with prices. Today a PlayStation 5 costs around RO230, and comes with a controller, too. On the other hand, a decent gaming PC would cost around RO400-500. Another factor with gaming PCs is that as new games release, with better graphics and higher frames, your computer components get outdated and unable to handle these new games, forcing you to either play with lower frames or graphics, or purchase new components in order to support new games. But buy-



HILAL TARIQ AL BARWANI
IS A YOUNG COMPUTER
ENTHUSIAST WHO
ENJOYS WRITING AND
SPEAKING ON COMPUTERS
AND TECHNOLOGY

ing new components isn't cheap; for example, an MSI RTX 3080 costs around R350, which is about the price of a decent gaming PC. However, with a PlayStation, all games supported by PlayStation get to 120FPS, which is honestly really good. This brings me to another point, with a gaming PC, and with

the right components, your PC could easily reach more than 240FPS, which consoles currently don't support.

Another problem console gamers, including me, are facing is how some games aren't supported on some consoles. For example, I used to love playing Forza back in the day, when I used to have an Xbox 360. However, as I moved to PlayStation, none of the racing games I've played matched the experience of Forza, and sadly, it isn't available on Sony consoles. On the other hand, with a gaming PC, you could basically get hold of any video game you could think of, including Forza. And with Xbox and PlayStation currently clashing over Call of Duty, there's a chance we could see the franchise disappear from all Xbox consoles.

Another major factor I should mention is portability. Back when I was younger, I used to always take my PlayStation along with me whenever we wanted to visit Dubai. I even had a special bag for it, and I could take all the cables along with the PlayStation. These would all fit into the bag with ease. However, unless you own a gaming laptop, it is very difficult and stressful to

take a whole gaming PC around with you when you travel, or even if you simply want to sleepover at someone's home. The average computer case itself weighs about 30 pounds. If you add the components, it'll obviously be much heavier.

In my personal opinion, if you're just going to be gaming for fun, in order to pass time, or to simply enjoy yourself whenever you're free, you should make your life easier and go ahead and purchase a gaming console. However, if you're thinking of taking gaming seriously, and you want to start streaming and playing full time as a profession, and you have the money, why not go for a gaming PC?

With all points covered, I'll leave it to you to decide on what's more suitable for you. I hope you enjoyed reading this. There's more coming soon!

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of **Muscat Daily** or Apex Press & Publishing. The writer can be reached at hilal@tariq.net

oman OASIS
BALANCED DRINKING WATER

sifir
GODIM FREE DRINKING WATER

mai
Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water

**THIS SEASON
BUY MORE
WIN MORE**

Get a chance to win amazing prizes when you shop from your nearest hypermarket.

Find the raffle coupon inside the carton/pack and register the unique number at

www.omanoasis.com/winmore

OFFER VALID FOR

Oman Oasis: 1.5 Ltr / 500 ml, 330 ml carton & pack, 200 ml pack.
SIFIR: 300 ml carton, 1.5 Ltr & 500 ml pack.
Mai Alkaline: 1.5 Ltr & 500 ml pack.

400 PRIZES ON RAFFLE DRAWS

20 won
iPhone 13 128 GB

10 won
Laptop

10 won
Laptop

10 won
Smart GPRS 8 GB

350 won
Gaming PC with 8GB RAM

Offer valid from 1st October to 31st December 2022. Raffle draws will be held at Oasis Water Company, Araba with a total of 3 raffle draws. Dates: 3rd November, 31st December 2022 and 4th January 2023. Winners will be intimated directly. Oasis Water Company employees are not eligible to participate in this promotion. Gifts shown are for illustrative purpose only. Actual may vary. Promotion at Lulu, Nesto, Carrefour, Makkah Hypermarkets & The Sultan Center.

MM/06/028/2022
C.R. No. 1365452

SCAN & REGISTER

**CALL TOLL-FREE
800 71 222
or GSM: 9275 5522**





Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water



HYDRATE SMARTLY

- ✓ Ultra-hydrating
- ✓ Revitalizing
- ✓ Energizing

pH 9.1 to 9.5

oman
OASIS



Toll-free
800 71 222 or
☎ **9275 5522**

C.R. No.: 1365452

OMAN, SINGAPORE DISCUSS SECURITY ISSUES



Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Monday met with Teo Chee Hean, Singaporean Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security, during the former's visit to Singapore. The two sides explored areas of cooperation pertaining to security cooperation and exchange of expertise. They also touched upon regional and international developments of common interest in a manner that contributes to enhancing international peace and security. Maj Gen Idris Abdulrahman al Kindi, Secretary General of the National Security Council, was also present in the meeting (ONA)

Wadi Dayqah Dam to release 20mn cubic metre water from today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) announced that it will open the Wadi Dayqah Dam gates on Tuesday and release 20mn cubic metre of water gradually till December 19.

Located in Quriyat, 75km from Muscat, Wadi Dayqah prides itself in having one of the largest dams in the Arabian Peninsula.

Dayqah Dam was built in 2012 to harvest rainwater from the surrounding mountains and channelise the water flowing through the villages below. The result is a stunning fresh water lake and a stream flowing 7km from the main body of the dam.

A statement issued by MAFWR said, 'The ministry will open the Wadi Dayqah Dam to



release about 20mn cubic metre of water. The dam has a storage capacity of 100mn cubic metre with a height of 75m.'

The ministry explained that the aim of opening the dam was to feed underground reservoirs for the farms in Daghmr and

Hail al Ghaf regions. It called on citizens to stay away from the wadi and abide by safety instructions to avoid any eventuality.

According to MAFWR, Oman falls short of 316mn cubic metre of water every year. The annual renewable water resources of

the sultanate is estimated at about 1,318mn cubic metre and the pressure on these resources has been increasing, especially for agriculture which requires a share of approximately 83 per cent of the annual water needs of the country.



S Korea, Oman hold green hydrogen forum to discuss energy transition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The South Korean Embassy and the H2KOREA (Hydrogen Convergence Alliance of Korea) co-hosted a forum on the sidelines of the Oman Green Hydrogen Summit, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Monday.

To contribute to the summit process, the Korea-Oman Green Hydrogen Strategy Forum 2022 was organised with the involvement of Omani and Korean sponsors including HYFLY, Birba

Energy and KOTRA.

H E Salim al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals graced the forum with officials from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other public authorities.

The forum proved to be an effective platform to exchange perspectives and strategic insights of the key public and private stakeholders in Korea and Oman.

A number of high profile firms of Korea and Oman including POSCO, Samsung Engineering, KOGAS, OQ, and Oman LNG, to name just a few participated in

the forum.

The forum provided the participants with an opportunity to share their outlooks and assessment on materialising cooperation in green hydrogen projects.

The participants reached a common perception on three important matters. First, they agreed that green hydrogen economy represents huge industrial and environmental opportunities. Second, they recognised the collective progress in pursuing solutions for creating an enabling environment to realise the green hydrogen industry while

addressing challenges. Third, they acknowledged that the shared priorities and commitment of the two countries to the development of green hydrogen industry would open up promising opportunities.

South Korean Ambassador H E Kim Kiejoo underlined that building on the traditional energy bridge, "Korea and Oman could further create a 'green hydrogen bridge' by sharing their respective priorities of exploring green hydrogen economy and leveraging corresponding advantages in a mutually-beneficial way."

MoCIIP launches 'Made in Oman' campaign in N Batinah's Khabourah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support Omani products, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) on Monday inaugurated a 'Made in Oman' campaign in one of the commercial centres in the wilayat of Khabourah, in North Batinah governorate.

The inauguration was held under the patronage of Sheikh Ishaq bin Salem al Rawahi, Wali of Al Khabourah. The corner included many food and consumer products, luxury items, household products, and other Omani produce.

The 'Made in Oman' national campaign has contributed to cre-



ating marketing outlets for Omani products across all governorates in the sultanate.

The campaign is run by MoCIIP, in partnership with the Authority of Small & Medium Enterprises Development, Consumer Protection Authority, Madayn and OCCI, as well as

representatives from the business community.

MoCIIP launched the campaign as part of its activities to encourage consumers to buy local products. The campaign promotes and raises the profile of a wide range of products grown and made in the sultanate.

Organisers expect over 1500 people to gather for Indian dance event

Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 1500 spectators are expected to attend the first ever mega dance event by a WhatsApp group at Al Falaj Hotel on December 16.

Glowing Stars, a group created for the artistes in Oman, conceptualised 'Glowing Star Nite' event to present Vineeth Sreenivan, an all-time favourite from the Malayalam film-industry, along with his team. The team consists of gifted artistes such as Al Samad, Neethu Faisal, Vishnu Siva and Samson Selven.

Dr Ashiq Nawal of D4 Dance fame will also be there, the organisers said. D4 Dance is a pop-



ular Indian dance reality series, which premiered on Mazhavil Manorama and has completed five seasons of its series.

Speaking at a press conference, Swapna Baby, co-ordinator of Glowing Stars said, "The group started with the intention of having a platform for artistes to in-

teract and share ideas and experiences. However, during the worst phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, stage performers and other artistes who depended on events to make a living, found it difficult to make ends meet.

"Glowing Stars stood by them as a pillar of support. This was done with the whole-hearted contribution of the group members who were well-to-do, to make sure that the less fortunates were not in trouble," she added.

The event will start at 7pm, entry tickets for which have been priced at RO5 and RO10. Tickets can be availed through Team Alpha at 77037385 and 96694273, the organisers said.

Ministry launches first official advertising agency

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Information launched the sultanate's first official advertising agency - Izdihar (Prosperity) - on Monday.

The agency will provide media and advertising services for local and global use in line with market requirements.

Izdihar was launched by H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in the



presence of H E Dr Abdullah Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

"The Ministry of Information organised the first advertising forum on Monday with the aim of strengthening partnerships be-

tween the ministry and various private sector institutions in the sultanate by providing media and advertising services and benefiting from the ministry's services through its visual, audio and print channels and electronic platforms," ONA said in a statement.

"Izdihar has been launched at the right time to organise advertising work between companies, institutions and various media to obtain the best type of advertising at competitive prices," H E Yousef noted.

On the sidelines of the launch, the ministry signed eight agreements worth RO400,000 with private sector enterprises tapping media and advertising services. These were signed by H E Mohammed Said al Balushi, Under-secretary in the Ministry of Information, and representatives of the private sector companies.

At the launch, H E Yousef also felicitated the top ten companies that posted the maximum number of advertisements via the ministry's channels this year.

Bring Home your Exchange

Download our App Today!



PURSHOTTAM KANJI
EXCHANGE



شركة برشوت
كانجي للصرافة



99101314, 99849289 customersupport@pkexchange.net
www.pkexchange.com pkexch @pkexchange1



MARKET WATCH

MSX304,663.46

Sensex62,834.60

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian	212.62
Pakistan	583.19
Bangladesh	267.89
Philippines	145.39
Sri Lanka	954.42

Rates as on December 05

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Glencore to pay \$180mn to DR Congo over graft claims

Swiss mining giant Glencore said Monday it has agreed to pay US\$180mn to the Democratic Republic of Congo to cover corruption allegations, the latest payment in a series of graft cases it has faced worldwide. The company said the settlement with DRC covers "all present and future claims arising from any alleged acts of corruption" by the Glencore Group between 2007 and 2018. The settlement with DRC is related to investigations by the country's authorities and the US Department of Justice, Glencore said.

"Glencore is a long-standing investor in the DRC and is pleased to have reached this agreement to address the consequences of its past conduct," Glencore chairman Kalidas Madhavpeddi said.

Glencore disclosed in 2018 that the US Justice Department had launched a corruption investigation linked to the group's business in Nigeria, Venezuela and DRC.

OQ to study feasibility of producing green ammonia, methanol



The agreement was signed on the sidelines of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman 2022 on Monday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ - Oman's global integrated energy group - has signed a memorandum of cooperation with global shipping giant AP Moller-Maersk, Japan's Sumitomo Corporation and Oman's Asyad Group to study the feasibility of producing and supplying green fuels at Salalah and Duqm ports.

The memorandum - which was signed on the sidelines of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman 2022 on Monday - aims to discuss the commercial and technical feasibility of producing and supplying green ammonia

and green methanol at the ports of Duqm and Salalah for the use in port operations as well as the possibility of exporting them abroad in the future.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Issam bin Nasser al Shaibani, vice president of sustainability at Asyad Group, said that the feasibility study will place Oman on the global green fuel map.

He explained that the selection of the ports of Duqm and Salalah to supply green ammonia and green methanol came due to the availability of vast lands and the establishment of most green hydrogen-related projects near these ports, which will reduce

the cost of transporting green fuel.

OQ's Alternative Energy Unit also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Oman-India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) to study the feasibility of producing blue ammonia in Sur and its use in OMIFCO's production operations.

Qassim bin Mohammed al Balushi, director of sustainability and strategic planning at OMIFCO, explained that the MoU came to take advantage of modern technologies in the field of renewable energy and low carbon technologies, in order to reach blue ammonia production at the company.

Oil prices jump as Russia price cap comes into force

London, UK - World oil prices rallied Monday after more easing of strict Covid containment measures in China and as a price cap on Russian crude agreed by the EU, G7 and Australia came into force.

Main contracts Brent North Sea crude and WTI advanced nearly three per cent, also after OPEC and its Russia-led allies decided at a weekend meeting to maintain oil output levels.

Brent North Sea crude rose 2.6 per cent at US\$87.83 per barrel in London, while US benchmark West Texas Intermediate jumped 2.8 per cent at US\$82.22 per barrel on Monday.

Higher oil demand is expected from China after businesses reopened and testing requirements were relaxed in Beijing and other cities as the country tentatively eases out of a strict zero-Covid policy that sparked nationwide protests.

It has also seen major cities including Shanghai locked down for months, a decision blamed for a sharp slowdown in economic growth this year that sent shudders through financial markets.

"Uncertainty is coming in waves in energy markets as the choppy tides of supply and demand push up the oil price but keep a lid on big gains," noted Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at



Hargreaves Lansdown.

"There are expectations that there will be less crude available to buy as the US\$60 cap on Russia oil takes effect."

The Kremlin on Monday insisted the cap would not affect Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine.

The US\$60-per-barrel price cap aims to restrict Russia's revenue while making sure Moscow keeps supplying the global market.

"From the OPEC+ perspective, it can't be easy to make reliable forecasts against that (Russia) backdrop and the constantly evolving Covid situation in China, which currently looks far more promising from a demand perspective," said Craig

Erlam, senior market analyst at Oanda trading group.

Major oil-producing countries led by Saudi Arabia and Russia on Sunday agreed to maintain their current output levels in a climate of uncertainty.

The prospect of China, the world's number-two economy, kicking back into gear helped traders overcome data on Friday showing far more jobs than expected were created in the United States in November.

A big jump in wages added to concerns that the economy remained hot, meaning the Fed still had plenty of work to do to get inflation down to its two-percent target.

AFP

Renaissance wins RO57mn MoH contract

Muscat - Renaissance Services has been awarded a three-year RO57.3mn contract by the Ministry of Health (MoH) for soft facility management (FM) services at 44 hospitals across Oman.

Adil Bahwan, chief operations officer at Renaissance, said, "We have been serving Oman's health institutions for over two decades and thank MoH for its continued trust in Renaissance's commitment to quality, safety, efficient service delivery and care."

While serving a combined capacity of over 7,500 beds, the contract will continue to contribute towards Renaissance's In-Country Value goals through local procurement from SMEs.

Under the contract mobilising on January 1, 2023, Renaissance will provide catering, cleaning, laundry and pest control services



Adil Bahwan

at 23 hospitals and eight renal dialysis units, cleaning and pest control services at 11 extended health centres and cleaning, laundry and pest control at two health centres.

Investcorp to acquire US-based Marble Point

Muscat - Investcorp, a leading global alternative investment firm, on Monday announced it has agreed to acquire Marble Point Credit Management Company, a leading US-based specialist asset management firm.

Specific terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

"The proposed acquisition of Marble Point is a significant milestone in Investcorp's 40-year journey of growth through diversification, geographic expansion and building scale. With US\$50bn in total firm assets under management after completion of this acquisition, Investcorp is well-poised for the next phase of its evolution and development," said Mohammed Alardhi, executive chairman of Investcorp.

With US\$7.8bn of assets under management, Marble

Point is a specialist asset manager focused exclusively on managing collateralised loan obligations (CLOs) and portfolios of broadly syndicated leveraged loans. Marble Point is led by Thomas Shandell, a 38-year veteran of the credit markets, and Corey Geis, with 27 years of experience. Marble Point is an affiliate of Eagle Point Credit Management.

"We are excited to be joining Investcorp," said Tom Shandell, who will lead the combined US CLO and broadly syndicated loans business for Investcorp. "Investcorp's credit business has been one of the primary engines in its impressive global expansion and provides an ideal platform to realise the next exciting phase of our continued growth and advancement as a leading credit manager."



Mohammed Alardhi

"Our combined platforms represent a formidable player in the credit markets, significantly enhancing our profile in the eyes of capital markets participants," added Corey Geis, who will serve as director of capital markets, head trader and portfolio manager at Investcorp.

Thomas Majewski, founder

and managing partner of Eagle Point added, "Over the past seven years, Tom and Corey have built Marble Point into a very strong platform. It has been an absolute pleasure working with them and I believe their new combined platform is well positioned for the future."

Upon closing of the transaction, Marble Point will be combined with Investcorp Credit Management, a global credit platform with US\$14.2bn in assets under management and an 18-year history of investing across credit markets worldwide. The combined platform will manage US\$22bn in assets and rank among the top 15 CLO managers globally by assets under management.

Rishi Kapoor, co-chief executive officer of Investcorp with oversight of its credit businesses

said, "This is an exciting moment for us and we are looking forward to having Tom, Corey and the entire Marble Point team join us at Investcorp. This strategic acquisition reaffirms our commitment to continue to grow and expand Investcorp's credit management platform and be a leading global provider of an array of credit-focused products and solutions to our clients."

Jeremy Ghose, global head of Investcorp Credit Management, added, "This acquisition will result in a US\$22bn total assets management business with meaningful scale across both US and Europe, and we look forward to further growing the business."

The transaction, which is expected to close in the first quarter of 2023, is subject to customary regulatory requirements and closing conditions.

Saudi crown prince eyes investment in Credit Suisse spin-off: Report

Zurich, Switzerland - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is considering investing around US\$500mn in a new Credit Suisse investment bank spin-off, CS First Boston, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Citing unnamed sources familiar with the matter, the US financial newspaper listed several potential investors in the new unit.

In addition to the Saudi crown prince, the potential investors include Atlas Merchant Capital, a private-equity firm run by British banking giant Barclays' former chief Bob Diamond, which was also considering pumping US\$500mn into the unit, according to the sources quoted by WSJ.

Credit Suisse itself has previously said it had US\$500mn committed from an unnamed investor, and its chairman said last week that it has other firm com-



Mohammed bin Salman

mitments, the daily reported on Sunday.

The bank has yet to receive a formal proposal from the Saudi entity, WSJ's sources said.

Credit Suisse unveiled a dramatic restructuring plan at the end of October, focused on radically transforming its investment banking unit, at the heart of a string of scandals.

Among the changes, it decided to revive its First Boston brand, named after an US investment bank it absorbed in 1990, where its capital market and advisory activities will be brought together.

Switzerland's second largest bank is raising US\$4.2bn in new stock as part of that restructuring, which will separately make the

Saudi National Bank its largest shareholder.

It now owns 9.9 per cent of the Credit Suisse group.

WSJ said it remained unclear whether Prince Mohammed aimed to make his investment through that bank or through "another investment vehicle".

Contacted by AFP on Monday, Credit Suisse refrained from commenting on the WSJ report.

The bank's share price has plunged 77 per cent since March 2021 but the rumours swirling around Prince Mohammed's investment interest sent it soaring.

Shares gained more than seven per cent in morning trading Monday before slipping back a bit.

By 1230 GMT, Credit Suisse shares were trading 3.69 per cent higher at 3.06 Swiss francs, while the Swiss stock exchange's main SMI index was down 0.14 per cent.

AFP

UAE, Ukraine to discuss economic partnership

Dubai, UAE - Dr Thani bin Ahmed al Zeyoudi, UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Trade, and Yulia Svyrydenko, First Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, Minister of Economy of Ukraine, on Monday signed a joint statement announcing their intention to initiate negotiations towards a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

The signing affirms the commitment of both countries to strengthen bilateral economic ties and build on the strong trade and investment flows between the UAE and Ukraine.

The announcement of CEPA negotiations follows the more than US\$3bn in trade and investment pledges made during Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to the UAE in February 2021. It also repre-

sents another key component in the UAE's efforts to help re-invigorate the national economy of Ukraine, which is one of the Middle East's most important sources of grains such as barley and wheat.

Zeyoudi said that the UAE's first CEPA with a European nation demonstrates the breadth of its new foreign trade agenda and underlines Ukraine's long-term significance to the UAE as a trade and investment partner.

"A CEPA with Ukraine offers a raft of new opportunities for our exporters, investors, and manufacturers while also opening up access to new markets in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East for Ukraine's agricultural and industrial output. We are committed to negotiating a mutually beneficial deal that can not only help drive Ukraine's

economic recovery but also foster long-term growth and opportunity," Zeyoudi stated.

Yulia Svyrydenko added, "Concluding CEPA between Ukraine and the UAE will unlock the full potential of our cooperation in trade and investment, helping our business communities to grow and take advantage of the new opportunities."

The UAE's CEPA negotiations with Ukraine will commence in the coming weeks and follow the conclusion of CEPAs with India, Indonesia, and Israel. CEPA negotiations with Türkiye, Georgia, and Cambodia are ongoing. The UAE's CEPA agenda is part of its national strategy to help the nation double the size of its economy from AED1.4tn to AED3tn by 2030.

WAM

Russian oil price cap put to the test

Brussels, Belgium - The price cap on Russian oil agreed by the EU, G7 and Australia came into force on Monday. It aims to restrict Russia's revenue as punishment for its invasion of Ukraine, while making sure Moscow keeps supplying the global market.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday the measure would contribute to a destabilisation of world energy markets and would not affect Russia's military campaign in Ukraine.

Embargo and cap

The cap took effect alongside an EU embargo on maritime deliveries of Russian crude oil, which comes several months after an embargo imposed by the United States and Canada.

Russia is the world's second-largest crude exporter and without the cap it would be easy to find new buyers at market prices.

The measure means only oil sold at a price equal to or less than US\$60 per barrel can continue to be delivered.

Companies based in the EU, G7 countries and Australia will be banned from providing services enabling maritime transport, such as insurance, with oil above that price.

The G7 nations - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States - provide insurance services for 90 per cent of the world's cargo and the EU is a major player in sea freight.

This means they should be



able to pass on the cap to the majority of Russia's customers around the world, making for a credible price cap.

There is a transition period, and the cap will not apply to cargoes loaded before December 5, and a further cap on oil products will come into effect on February 5.

Market impact

The West has adopted the cap of US\$60, well above the current cost of producing oil in Russia, so Moscow will have an incentive

to continue pumping crude. Russia will continue to earn revenue, even if it is reduced.

"Russia must retain an interest in selling its oil" or risk reducing global supply and causing prices to soar, said one European official, who did not believe the Kremlin's threats to stop deliveries to countries complying with the cap.

The official said Russia would remain concerned about maintaining the state of its infrastructure, which would be damaged if production is halted, and keep-

ing the confidence of its customers, including China and India.

Experts are worried about a leap into the unknown and keeping a close eye on the reaction of the 23-nation OPEC+ group of oil-producing countries led by Saudi Arabia and Russia.

"We will sell oil and oil products to countries that will work with us on market terms, even if we have to reduce production somewhat," Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said after an OPEC+ videocon-

ference on Sunday.

"We are currently working on mechanisms to prohibit the use of the price cap tool at any level," Novak added, warning that the cap can only cause "further market destabilisation".

But Brussels insists the cap will help stabilise the markets and "directly benefit emerging economies and developing countries", which will be able to get hold of Russian crude at a lower cost.

The market price of a barrel of Russian Urals crude is currently

hovering around US\$65 dollars a barrel, suggesting the measure may have only a limited impact in the short term.

Ukraine said the cap should have been set even lower, arguing that US\$60 is not enough to penalise the Kremlin.

A revisable cap

The cap will be reviewed from mid-January and then every two months, with the option to modify it according to price changes.

The principle is for the cap to be at least five percent below the

average market price.

Any revision would need the agreement of the G7, Australia and the EU.

All countries are invited to formally join the measures. States that do not adopt them can continue to buy Russian oil above the price cap, but without using Western services to acquire, insure or transport it.

"We have clear signals that a number of emerging economies, particularly in Asia, will observe the principles of the cap," said a European official, adding that Russia is already "under pressure" from its customers to offer discounts.

It would be very complicated to find alternatives for services provided by European companies, which dominate tanker transport and insurance, the official said. Improvised substitutes, including insurance for oil spills, would be "extremely risky", he said.

Each EU and G7 state will have to monitor companies based in its territory.

If a ship flying the flag of a third country is identified carrying Russian oil at a price above the cap, Western operators will be banned from insuring and financing it for 90 days.

While Russia could be tempted to create its own fleet of tankers, operating and insuring them itself, Brussels believes "building a maritime ecosystem overnight will be very complicated" - and such make-do measures could have trouble convincing customers.

AFP

UK to allow employees to request flexible working

London, UK - UK workers will be able to request flexible employment from the first day of a job under government plans announced Monday.

It comes after millions of mainly office workers continue to work from home, at least part of the week, in the wake of the Covid pandemic.

"Millions of employees will be able to request flexible working from day one of their employment, under new government plans to make flexible working the default," a statement said.

"Flexible working doesn't just mean a combination of working from home and in the office - it can mean employees making use of job-sharing, flexitime, and working compressed, annualised, or staggered hours."

The Conservative government of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak added that a "raft of new measures will give employees greater access to flexibility over where, when, and how they work, leading to happier, more productive staff."

"Flexible working has been



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

found to help employees balance their work and home life, especially supporting those who have commitments or responsibilities such as caring for children or vulnerable people," the statement added.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady, while welcoming the news, said the change "should give workers the legal right to work flexibly from their first day in a job - not just the right to ask."

Greater flexibility could meanwhile help women to earn higher salaries. Data on Monday revealed that the gender pay

gap remains at its widest for Britain's oldest workers.

"Caring responsibilities, the burden of which still falls disproportionately on women, means women can miss out on salary progression during their careers - which compounds as time goes on, widening the gender pay gap as we age," said Stuart Lewis, chief executive of Rest Less, an organisation that advises people aged over 50.

According to Rest Less, men earn 31 per cent more on average than women when both are in their fifties.

AFP

Apple faces critics over privacy policies

Paris, France - Apple presents itself as a white knight on the subject of privacy, but critics say its own advertising ambitions are built on anti-competitive practices.

Two developers going by the name 'Mysk' claimed last month that Apple was tracking users' every tap on the App Store, with no way of disabling the function.

A class action lawsuit was subsequently filed in California, claiming that Apple's "promises regarding privacy are utterly false".

The company has not commented and did not respond to questions from AFP.

But Apple has made protection of user privacy central to its image, and long opposed ads on its platforms.

It threw a spanner in the works of the surveillance capitalism system last year when it gave users the power to easily block apps from collecting data on them.

That move was a nightmare for many apps - from giants like Facebook to small start-ups - who use that data to sell targeted ads.

Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, warned in early



2022 that the change could shave US\$10bn of its revenue for the year, and it has no doubt played a part in its tanking share price (down 38 per cent on the year) and decision to axe 11,000 staff last month.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said last week that Apple's approach was a "conflict of interest" since it was designed to

undermine rivals.

"It's problematic for one company to be able to control what app experiences end up on a device," he said. "(The) vast majority of profits in mobile ecosystem go towards Apple."

The first legal pushback against Apple was launched in France, where an association of online advertisers and content

publishers filed a complaint with the Competition Authority.

The judges dismissed the idea that Apple's rules were inherently anti-competitive, but are still investigating whether Apple is applying those rules more favourably for its own apps compared to others.

French app developers have also lodged a case with privacy watchdog CNIL (the National Commission for Technology and Freedoms).

Similar cases have since been launched in Germany and Poland.

Apple refuses to say how much it makes from advertising on its App Store.

Analysts at Wedbush Securities estimate it is US\$4.5bn annually, and this could rise to US\$30bn if it starts putting ads on its Maps and Apple TV apps, rivaling the big players of Google, Meta and Amazon.

For advertisers, waiting for a legal response is painful.

"It's not going fast enough considering the very strong impacts on competition," said Nicolas Rieul, president of France's Digital Alliance, which represents online marketers.

AFP

Vodafone CEO to step down after 4 years at helm

London, UK - Vodafone chief executive Nick Read is stepping down, the British telecoms group said Monday, after a four-year tenure marked by a steep fall in the company's share price.

Read will leave his role at the end of December following more than 20 years at the group, a statement said.

He will be replaced on an interim basis by Vodafone's chief financial officer Margherita Della Valle, who will continue her current role while Vodafone seeks out a permanent replacement.



Nick Read

His surprise resignation comes after Vodafone recently announced flat earnings for its

first half and follows a near 20-per cent drop in its share price this year.

"I agreed with the board that now is the right moment to hand over to a new leader who can build on Vodafone's strengths and capture the significant opportunities ahead," Read said in the statement.

He departs with Vodafone in talks over merging its UK operations with rival Three UK, owned by Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison.

Vodafone believes a combi-

nation would accelerate the roll-out of 5G telecoms technology in the UK, which has been partly hampered by Britain banning Chinese giant Huawei from involvement in the technology offering faster downloads than 4G.

Vodafone's share price was flat at 91 pence following Monday's announcement.

"With the shares languishing at their lowest levels in more than 20 years it is hard to describe departing Vodafone CEO Nick Read's tenure as anything other than a disappointment,"

noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell.

"Read's final set of results last month did him absolutely no favours, as Vodafone downgraded full-year guidance."

However, Read "helped to steer the telecoms giant through the challenges of the pandemic, aiding connectivity when individuals and households were forced to stay home during strict lockdowns", said Victoria Scholar, head of investment at Interactive Investor.

AFP

WANTED
For a Telecom/IT/Security/Electronic
System Integrator Company

Sales/Marketing Executives

Engineer in the above fields is required with 4-5 years of sales/marketing/business development experience. Must be Muscat based with Omani Driving License & transferable visa.

**Please send your CV to
jobsvacancy000001@gmail.com**

Jain group celebrates Diwali in spirit of light

Bhaktamber Jain group Muscat along with their friends and members of MP group celebrated Diwali get together recently at Al Bahja Hall, Jungle Restaurant Qurm. According to a press note released by Nikhilesh Shahlot, the event witnessed the presence of around 100 members including families with full enthusiasm. Solo dances, group dances, couple dances and singing marked the celebration, the press note said. Rajat Jain, Neelesh Sogani and Neeta Shahlot were MCs of the event, while Saurabh Jain and Riaz Shaikh with Swapnil Jain were the DJs. The highlight of the event was the attendance of 4 international cricket players of Oman national cricket team.

OPAZ records 82% customer satisfaction

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has recorded around 82 per cent of customer satisfaction rate at the end of November. The rate included evaluating a number of services provided by OPAZ in its affiliated Zones, such as services for providing building permits, demarcation, environmental permits, amending building permits, project plans, and investors relation management system. OPAZ Call Centre (1919), which was launched in September this year, received more than 270 calls in addition to other inquiries received via online communications. All calls and inquiries have been managed and communicated with the concerned departments, a release said.

Hamptons hosts Retailer's Event

Hamptons International & Partners LLC, Oman's leading real estate consultancy, hosted a Retailer's Event as part of their Quarterly Insights to share market updates and to announce the upcoming developments in Madinat Qaboos. The event was hosted at the very exquisite yet traditional Souq al Madina in MQ. The event was graced by the presence of top retailers in Oman who were eager to discuss the challenging environment faced in Oman over recent years. "2022 has proven to be a better year since the end of the pandemic," said Hamptons International general manager Daniel Sellu.

W Muscat gets into football action

In the coolest spot to feel the frenzy of football is the FANZONE BY MEDUSE in W Muscat, where guests can immerse themselves in a sea of football fans, and enjoy the fiesta together with MEDUSE flavours, mega screens, exciting eats, and bevies with a minimum spend of RO15. By booking their spots now, football enthusiasts can show their favourite team some love at the FANZONE which is open from 1pm to 1am. Reservations can be made by calling 71919140.

Ministry of Education signs cooperation agreement with OQ8

The Ministry of Education (MoE) signed an agreement with the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company, OQ8, to fund the third edition of the English language development programme for students of Duqm schools, grades (10-12) in Al Wusta governorate.

The agreement was signed on Sunday by Majid al Sinawi, Director General of Education in Al-Wusta governorate, and Jassim al Ajmi, Head of Corporate Identity and Work Culture of the company, in the presence of H E Majid bin Saeed al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and Nasiha bint Muhammad al Falahi, Executive Vice President for Affairs of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries OQ8, in the office of the Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs.

In the current academic year 2022-23, the programme targets 60 students and will last for seven months. It is implemented during the evening period by the Department of Educational Studies and International Cooperation at the ministry, in partnership with the British Council, to provide qualitative support in learning the English language, represented in providing students with English language skills, self-development, time management,



teamwork and other 21st century skills. The agreement aims to strengthen partnership with private sector institu-

tions, develop cooperation with these companies in international educational initiatives, programs and projects, sup-

port student learning in Al Wusta governorate, and develop their English language level, given its importance in

their professional future. "The ministry appreciates the initiative of the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company OQ8 in supporting efforts aimed at finding educational opportunities for students in the English language, and keeping pace with the rapid transformation in the curricula and skills of the labour market, indicating that this partnership comes to emphasise the important role and desired effective contribution of the private sector in the next stage, and to achieve Oman Vision 2040," Majid al Sinawi said.

Jassim al Ajmi, Head of Corporate Identity and Work Culture at Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries OQ8, said: "This initiative is part of the company's social investment initiatives, which are primarily based on strengthening the capabilities of human cadres, developing them, and raising their efficiency."

Ellie Kennedy Maclean, Director of the British Council in Saudi Arabia, and Acting Director of the British Council in Oman, said, "We are pleased to support the implementation of the Schools Development Programme in the Wilayat of Duqm. This initiative will support the aspirations of a promising vision by creating educational opportunities for Omani youth."



Bank Muscat's Asalah, Al Jawhar organise customer meets in Nizwa

Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking from Bank Muscat recently hosted special customer events in Nizwa to introduce to them various exclusive services, banking facilities and offers, said a press release.

The events were attended by Abdulnasir N al Raisi, General Manager, Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, bank officials and a large number of Premier Banking customers. It was the latest in a series of customer meets organised by the bank this year to strengthen its partnership with customers and get their feedback regarding new services, products and offers.

"We are delighted to host our valued customers today as we constantly endeavor to listen to their feedback and

comments on new services and products which are constantly launched by the bank," said Bank Muscat general manager Taya Eid Bait Sabeea.

"Promptly responding to customer feedback and having a strategy of keeping pace with global trends are key to Bank Muscat's continued leadership in the financial services sector in Oman and the bank continues to working on constant betterment of the customer experience as part of its mission to provide a world-class banking experience. We take this opportunity to thank each one of our valued customers for their strong confidence in the bank and their continued patronage."

Asalah Priority Banking customers enjoy a range of unrivalled benefits in-

cluding access to a team of dedicated Relationship Managers, 39 Asalah Centres across Oman and a dedicated 24/7 Asalah Call Centre. Exclusive lifestyle benefits for its clientele include the Asalah Entertainer App, which has more than 3,500 'Buy 1, Get 1 Free' offers in Oman and at international destinations as well as rewards of indulgence and merchant discounts across fine dining, entertainment, leisure, and the beauty and wellness segments.

As for customers of Al Jawhar Privilege Banking, they are eligible for 2-for-1 deals on food; entertainment and shopping that are available through the 'xperience with the Entertainer' app on their smartphones.

Sohar International, Sohar Islamic finance Sanvira



Sohar International participated at the official opening ceremony of Sanvira Carbon - a large-scale manufacturing project for which Sohar International and Sohar Islamic are the financing partners, said a press release.

The inauguration of the factory, which is located at Sohar Port and Freezone, was held under the patronage of H E Salim bin Nasser bin Said al Afi, Minister of Oil and Gas. Representing the bank at the inauguration was Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer, Sohar International, along with other senior members from the bank.

The milestone opening ceremony also witnessed the presence of several business leaders associated with the project, key government delegates, and representatives from the media.

Bank's Chief Executive Officer Ahmed al Musalmi said, "Sohar International is committed to supporting mega national projects that contribute to the Sultanate's economic development and diversification while simultaneously boosting the country's energy independence, self-reliance, and resilience. Such projects are not just critical to the development of manufacturing industries, but also have the potential to strengthen the local communities by generating new job opportunities, creating in country value and new value chains.

"The support to this project is a reflection of the bank's alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and reiterates our determination to take concrete steps to achieve integrated development in the country."

VisitBritain promoting UK as destination in GCC

VisitBritain is taking the opportunity to promote 'destination Britain' and inspire travel from GCC during the Qatar World Cup and beyond.

VisitBritain's latest consumer sentiment research shows strong pent-up demand for travel from the GCC with valuable opportunities to influence destination choice and bookings. Flight bookings to the UK from the region are also showing strong recovery, currently tracking at more than three-quarters of 2019 levels.

VisitBritain is supporting the UK Government's programme of events running throughout the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, including The Garden of GREAT UK pavilion in Doha. Open throughout the tournament, The Garden of GREAT is a showcase of UK creativity and diversity in music, art, design, fashion and food, as well as all the exciting experiences to come and enjoy in Britain right now. Follow The Garden of GREAT on Twitter @GREATBritain and Instagram



@GREATCampaign.

Research shows that visitors from the GCC already enjoy dining in Britain's high-end restaurants, shopping, sightseeing at its famous monuments and buildings, visiting parks and gardens, museums and art galleries.

With football at the centre of events, VisitBritain is also taking the opportunity to highlight Britain's amazing

tourism offer as the 'home of football' across its digital and social channels, inspiring visitors to come and explore its vibrant football cities and associated visitor attractions and experiences. VisitBritain research demonstrates the increasing importance of football in driving tourism to the UK. Overseas visitors who went to a football match spent £1.4 billion across the UK in total

during their trip in 2019, up 84% on the £742 million spent in 2011 when the research was last conducted.

VisitBritain's Interim Deputy Director Carol Maddison said:

"The GCC is a very important tourism market for Britain. With the UK Government's The Garden of GREAT and programme of events for the World Cup we have a timely and valuable opportunity to highlight our outstanding tourism offer and the amazing experiences that GCC visitors - including football fans - can only have in Britain.

"We know there is pent-up demand for travel from the GCC and we want Britain to be the destination of choice. We also want to deliver a world-class welcome. The introduction of the Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme for GCC visitors in 2023, alongside our strong airline and route connectivity, will make it even easier to visit the UK, boosting our competitive tourism offer to the region.

"We're also very excited to be

launching a new marketing campaign across the GCC early next year, showcasing the great reasons to choose Britain in a year of landmark events, set to be global tourism draws. We also continue to work closely with travel trade and partners in market to convert the inspiration to visit Britain into bookings, highlighting messages of reassurance and welcome, as part of the World Cup and beyond."

VisitBritain will be rolling out a new GREAT Britain marketing campaign across the GCC in early 2023 to drive bookings, inspiring visitors to 'See Things Differently' by positioning Britain as a dynamic, adventurous and inclusive destination and promoting messages of warm welcome.

The campaign will be capturing the major events in 2023 including the Coronation of King Charles III in May, with an additional Bank Holiday also now announced. Britain's renowned heritage, royal legacy, pomp and pageantry are proven tourism draws.

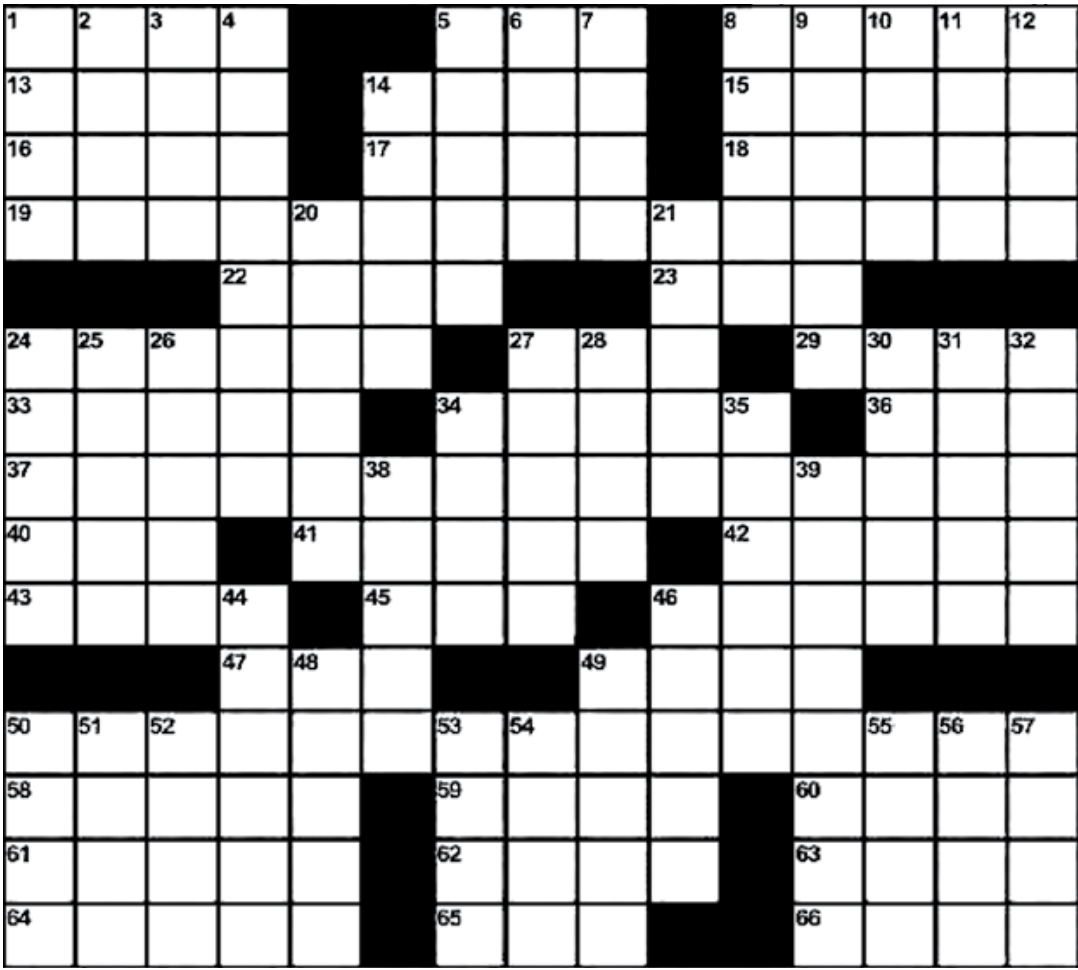
OAB launches payment solution on phones

OAB continues to drive its digital transformation agenda forward with its latest digital solution targeting small businesses. OAB has partnered with Visa, global leader in digital payments, to launch the OAB Point of Sale (Mobile Pay) Payment Solution for all small business owners and SMEs.

"With this new solution, merchants will be able to transform their smartphones into a payment terminal and accept contactless payments from their customers using an NFC-enabled Android device," a press release said.

Small business owners or SMEs with a corporate account at OAB, can access the payment solution by simply downloading the Mobile Pay app. Once the registration process is complete on the app, the bank will activate the service within 24 hours. The business owner will receive a verification code to confirm the registration and will be able to start using this payment solution.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Surveyor's product
5) Sky- (TV news chopper)
8) Angry
13) "Take one!"
14) Curly leafed veggie
15) Draw the route again
16) Demonic
17) Horace volume
18) Informed
19) What rumors of war may cause
22) Butter for 33-Across
23) " _ the ramparts ... "
24) Big name in trains
27) "Smoking or_?"
29) Connect these
33) Governor in Mogul India (Var.)
34) "Concentration" puzzle
36) Paid player
37) Be scared to death
HORROR STORY
40) Historic period
41) Baker's need
42) Eagle's home

- 43) Comedy legend Dick Van
45) Be nosy
46) Duo of a children's rhyme
47) After expenses
49) Ukrainian capital
50) Act the coward
58) Cartoon art fonn
59) Act as lookout
60) It's in a jamb
61) Bush-league
62) Fibber's forte
63) Harp's cousin
64) Great balls of fire
65) Supennan's insignia
66) Pull hard
DOWN
1) "That was a close one!"
2) Jeans name
3) Desiccated
4) Pre-fax communique
5) Close-knit group
6) Sheltered, at sea
7) City near Phoenix
8) Mourning band
9) Poster heading
10) Arab League member
11) Rani's dress
12) Architectural detail
14) Coin in 49-Across
20) Hardly well kept
21) Coffee break snack
24) Chipped in a pot
25) Get a spouse
26) Fine-tune
27) Informational
28) Final notice, briefly
30) Drama at La Scala
31) Blue eyes or baldness, e.g.
32) Tender spots
34) Behind
35) Woodworking tool
38) Greek penny, once
39) With passion
44) Inflame with love
46) Strains, as flour
48) Decorative pitchers
49) They bend for proposals
50) Butts
51) Apartment, to a super
52) Ship that sailed "the ocean blue"
53) Ivy League campus

- 54) Leggy wader
55) "Naked Maja" painter
56) Brass instrument
57) Long hike

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

People don't always practice what they preach, and it might seem as though someone has an ulterior motive when they make a huge effort to help others today. This person's enthusiasm might not make any sense to you right now, but that doesn't necessarily mean that anything fishy is going on. Keep mum about your suspicions for now, and wait at least until the afternoon before sounding any alarm bells. Being a tattletale isn't really your style anyway.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today is a day to mix things up a bit. Whip up something extravagantly uncommon for breakfast, or try a physical activity you haven't explored before. Follow your whims wherever they take you. Getting caught up in a routine can be comforting, and having things your way makes this crazy world feel a little bit more manageable. But over time a routine can come dangerously close to creating too much monotony in your life.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You will need to prioritize all your assignments very carefully today. If you get up early, you may have some trouble getting your feet off the ground. But if you sleep in too late, you will miss out on a lot of productive time. Your energy will be released slowly as the day moves forward, so you'll have a lot of drive in the afternoon. Take care of the smaller details early on and save ambitious projects for later in the day.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

The energy of other people, even people you aren't particularly fond of, is vital if you want to create a delightful day today. Even if you feel as though you could make better progress on your own, don't go it alone right now. Going solo does promise a great deal of independence, but it can also bring a great deal of loneliness. Learning from what other people say and do is exactly what you need right now, so get in the middle of a group and soak it in.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

There could be an unusual or heated exchange between you and another person in the morning, and it might leave you feeling confused for the rest of the day. It isn't often that the opinions of others stay with you like this. Could it be that it's time to reevaluate how you feel about this issue? Have the courage to explore the information you're basing your thoughts on, and double-check that you're on the right side of the argument.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Music or art can make for an excellent escape, so keep that in mind when someone or something starts bugging you today. When you want to get away from stress, put on your headphones and let the tune of your current favorite song take you away. Or leaf through an art book and contemplate each image. Stepping outside of your everyday world and focusing on another person's self-expression will be a tonic for your soul.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The way you dress always affects how other people see you, but today this fact is especially important. You need to create an outfit that says exactly what you want it to say. Making the right impression is vital. If this requires a quick shopping trip, so be it. But keep in mind that dressing to impress doesn't always mean a power suit. If you want to send a signal of relaxed self-assuredness, grab your favorite pair of jeans and strut your stuff.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today, making a grand gesture might bring you high visibility and a boatload of appreciation. But will these things truly make you happy? Probably not. You will find greater satisfaction in a short and sweet conversation, a perfect tangerine, or a breathtaking sunset. You are in tune with the simpler things in life, the things that people often take for granted. Turn away from flashy spectacles and turn toward small pleasures.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Money is on your mind today. A glimpse at your bank statement might make you wonder whether some person is playing a cruel joke on you. The numbers don't lie, and what they're telling you isn't terribly wonderful news. Don't worry. Your lifestyle doesn't have to significantly change, though your attitude sure does. Continue to reprioritize your needs, and try to make little changes (such as eating out less often) that will make a big difference.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Having an unpredictable mind isn't a bad thing! Your ability to move off the roadmap of established ideas and delve into unexplored territory is one of your best qualities, and it's going to win you several fans today. Alas, it might earn you one or two enemies too, at least temporarily. Leadership sometimes inspires jealousy, so when you step forward with an invincible plan, you have to be prepared for people to envy your courage.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The level of romance in your life is about to go up! The sky's the limit when it comes to the amount of chemistry between you and a very special someone. Most of the explanation can be found in your brimming confidence. People who have a strong sense of self are very attractive to others. Your creativity is also extremely appealing, so use it to convey your feelings in an unexpected (and very flattering) way. This is a period of new beginnings and exciting conversations.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There could be a strong connection between you and someone very surprising today. This person might make an observation about you that is right on the mark, and the ensuing conversation will prove that the two of you have a lot in common. You'll be the center of attention in this dynamic (try not to blush). Indulge yourself today. When you do something nice for yourself, you are showing the world that you value yourself, and others find that very attractive.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In the British version of "The Apprentice", which first went to air in February 2005, who do the contestants try to get a job with?

- A. Alan Sugar (Lord Sugar)
B. Richard Branson
C. Nick Hewer
D. Karren Brady

02. Who was known as "The Waltz King"?

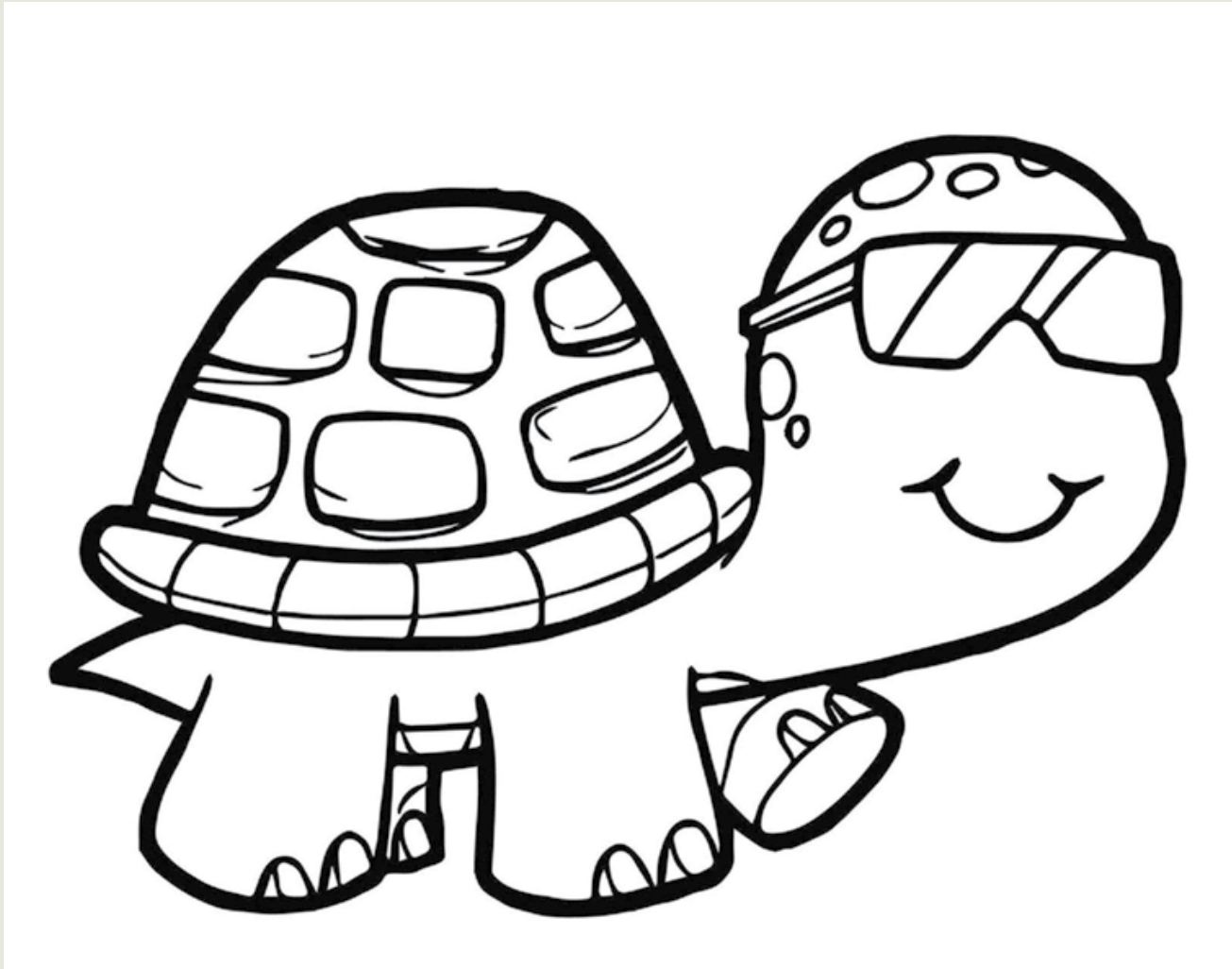
- A. Johann Strauss
B. Johan Sebastian Bach
C. Ludwig van Beethoven
D. George Frideric Handel

03. Which Olympic Games was the most northerly to be held?

- A. 1952
B. 1976
C. 1994
D. 1956

Answers: 1. A 2. A 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

D	E	S	U
B	A	T	E
H	Qu	E	K
A	E	A	C

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

West African leaders agree for a regional force

Regional force will intervene in the areas of security, terrorism and in restoring constitutional order

Abuja, Nigeria - West African leaders agreed on Sunday to create a regional force to intervene against militancy and in the event of coups, a senior official said.

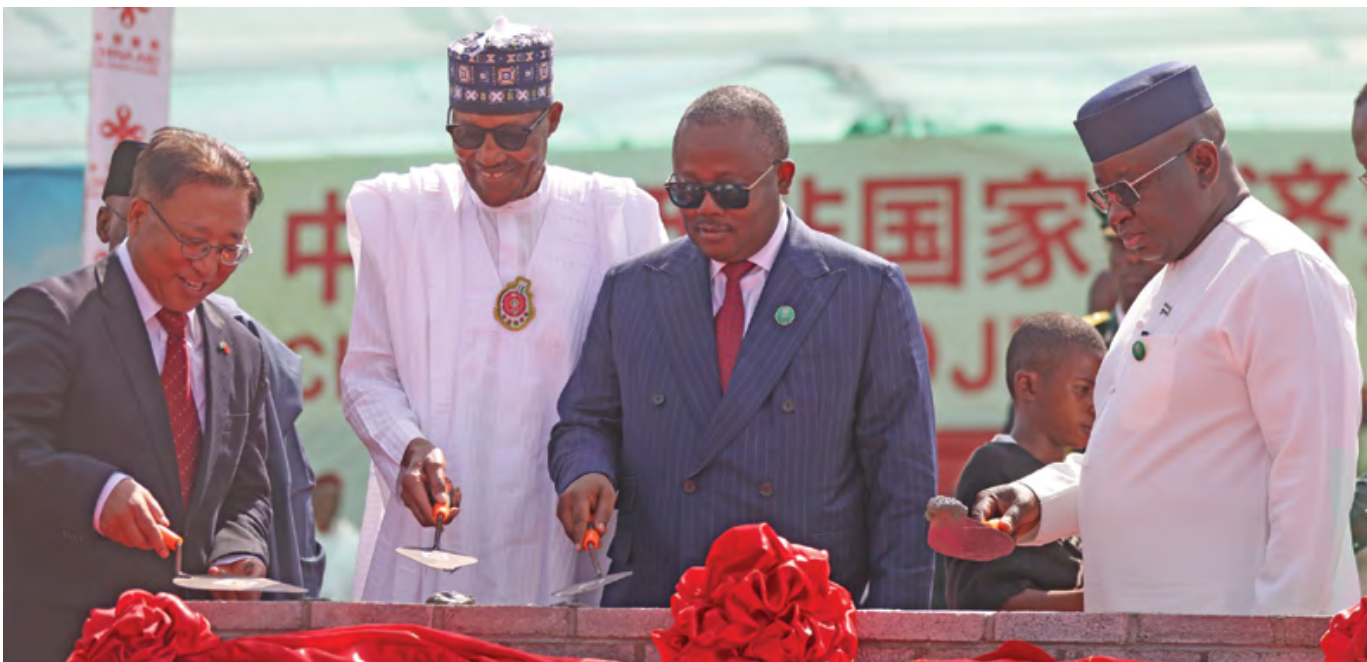
Leaders of the Economic Community of West African States had decided to act to 'take care of our own security in the region', Omar Aliou Touray, president of the ECOWAS commission, told journalists at a summit in Nigeria.

They are 'determined to establish a regional force that will intervene in the event of need, whether this is in the area of security, terrorism and restore constitutional order in member countries,' he added.

Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso have all been hit by military coups in the last two years.

Several countries in the region are also suffering from the spread of militancy, including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and southwards to the Gulf of Guinea.

National armies, largely powerless against the militant forces operating across borders, have been cooperating with external actors such as the UN, France



L-R: Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria, Cui Jianchun, Nigeria President Muhammadu Buhari, Guinea Bissau and outgoing ECOWAS President, Umaro Sissoco Embaló and Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio at the construction site of the ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja on Sunday (AFP)

and Russia.

But Touray said this decision would 'restructure our security architecture'.

The modalities of the planned regional force will be considered by defence chiefs in the second half of January, 2023, Touray said.

The funding of the force must also be decided, but the

ECOWAS official stressed that such an operation could not be solely dependent on voluntary contributions.

Pressure on Mali

Addressing another regional problem, the West African leaders told Mali's ruling junta to release 46 Ivorian troops it has held since July.

"We ask the Malian authorities to release the Ivorian soldiers by January 1, 2023 at the latest," said Touray, at the Abuja summit.

The Gambian diplomat said the West African bloc reserved the right to act if the soldiers were not released by January 1.

If Mali fails to do so, ECOWAS will impose sanc-

tions, a West African diplomat told AFP.

Togolese President Faure Gnassingbe, who has been mediating between Mali and Ivory Coast on the issue, will travel to Mali to 'demand' the release of the soldiers, the diplomat added.

The Ivorian troops were arrested on July 10 on their arrival

at the airport in Mali's capital Bamako.

Ivory Coast says the troops were sent to provide backup for the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, MINUSMA, and are being unfairly detained.

Mali says the troops are mercenaries and has placed them in custody on charges of attempting to harm state security.

ECOWAS had decided at an extraordinary summit in September to send a high-level delegation to Mali to try to resolve the crisis. But no progress was reported from this mission.

Coup-hit nations

The West African leaders, concerned about instability and contagion, have been pressing for months for the quickest possible return to civilian rule in the three countries which have undergone coups in recent years.

Mali and Burkina Faso have both been severely shaken by the spread of militancy.

All three countries have been suspended from the decision-making bodies of ECOWAS.

Leaders of the military juntas have pledged, under pressure, to step down after two years, al-

lowing for a transition period during which they all say they want to 'rebuild' their state.

ECOWAS has been looking to see what progress each nation has been making towards restoring constitutional order.

In Mali, 'it is essential that constitutional order returns within the planned timeframe', said Touray.

If Mali's military meets the announced deadline of March 2024 - after months of confrontation with ECOWAS and a severe trade and financial embargo that has now been lifted - the 'transition' will in fact have lasted three and a half years.

Touray urged the junta in Guinea to involve all parties and civil society in dialogue 'immediately' on the process of restoring civilian rule.

The main political parties and much of civil society there have been boycotting the authorities' offer of dialogue.

As for Burkina Faso, Touray expressed ECOWAS's 'serious concerns' about the security situation and the humanitarian crisis there, while pledging support for the country.

AFP



An artist's impression of low-frequency stations forming the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope to be built in Australia (AFP)

Australia starts building world's most powerful radio telescope

Sydney, Australia - Australia on Monday started building a vast network of antennas in the Outback, its section of what planners say will eventually become one of the most powerful radio telescopes in the world.

When complete, the antennas in Australia and a network of dishes in South Africa will form the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), a massive instrument that will aim to untangle mysteries about the creation of stars, galaxies and extraterrestrial life.

The idea for the telescope was first conceived in the early 1990s, but the project was plagued by delays, funding issues and diplomatic jockeying.

The SKA Observatory's Director-General Philip Diamond described the beginning of its construction as 'momentous'.

The telescope 'will be one of humanity's biggest-ever scientific endeavours', he said.

Its name is based on the planners' original aim, a telescope that could observe a one-square-kilometre surface, but the current South African and Australian sections will have a combined collecting area of just under half that, according to the observatory. Both countries have huge expanses of land in remote areas with little radio disturbance - ideal for such telescopes.

More than 130,000 Christmas tree-shaped antennas are planned in Western Australia, to be built on the traditional lands of the Wajarri Aboriginal people.

They have dubbed the site 'Inyarrimanha Ilgari Bundara', or 'sharing sky and stars'.

"We honour their willingness to share their skies and stars with us as we seek to find answers to some of the most fundamental science questions we face," said Diamond. The South African site will feature nearly 200 dishes in the remote Karoo region, according to the organisation.

Comparison between radio telescopes is difficult as they operate in different frequencies, according to SKA's planners.

But they have said that the two sites will give SKA higher sensitivity over single-dish radio telescopes because its arrays are spread out, forming a much bigger 'virtual dish'.

The project will help in 'charting the birth and death of galaxies, searching for new types of gravitational waves and expanding the boundaries of what we know about the universe', said telescope director Sarah Pearce.

Danny Price from the Curtin Institute of Radio Astronomy said the telescope would be extremely powerful.

"To put the sensitivity of the SKA into perspective, the SKA could detect a mobile phone in the pocket of an astronaut on Mars, 225mn kilometres away," he said. The SKA Observatory, headquartered at Jodrell Bank in Britain, has said the telescope should start making scientific observations by the late 2020s.

AFP

North Korea fires artillery barrage into buffer zone: Seoul

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired a barrage of artillery shells into a maritime buffer zone on Monday, Seoul's military said, the latest in a series of launches by an increasingly belligerent Pyongyang.

About 130 artillery rounds were simultaneously fired at 2:59pm (0559 GMT) from two separate sites, one on North Korea's east coast and one on the west coast, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. Seoul's military said the barrage was a 'clear violation' of the 2018 agreement between the North and South that established the buffer zone in a bid to reduce tensions. It said none of the shells crossed the Northern Limit Line, the de facto maritime border between the two countries. The military said it had issued 'several warnings' over the barrage, without giving any further details.

"Our military is strengthening its readiness posture in preparation for emergencies while tracking and monitoring related developments under close coop-



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attending a meeting of the Political Bureau of Workers' Party of Korea, in Pyongyang, last week (AFP)

eration between South Korea and the United States," it added.

North Korea, however, claimed the barrage was a 'tit for tat warning' against what it described as multiple artillery firings by the South.

A spokesperson for the General Staff of the North Korean People's Army said in a statement that 'dozens of projectiles supposed to be the shells of multiple rocket launchers' had been fired by the South on Monday.

North Korea's army 'will always take account of all provocative actions of the enemy

and respond with resolute and overwhelming military action,' added a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency. Seoul's military did not mention any exercises, but local reports said the South Korean and US militaries were conducting firing drills in the area.

At a summit in Pyongyang in 2018, former South Korean president Moon Jae-in and the North's Kim Jong Un agreed to establish buffer zones along land and sea boundaries in a bid to reduce tensions.

AFP

More people flee after eruption in Indonesia

Lumajang, Indonesia - Rescuers evacuated more people on Monday from nearby villages after the eruption of Indonesia's Mount Semeru, with officials warning of danger from cooling lava despite less activity from the volcano. More than 2,400 villagers have now fled their homes and taken shelter in 11 evacuation centres after the highest mountain on the country's main island of Java erupted early morning on Sunday.

"The military, police, local disaster and village officials keep evacuating people in Curah Kobokan where the hot ash cloud and cold lava might travel," Abdul Muhari, a spokesman for Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency, told local television.

"So far the total number of evacuees is 2,489."

Officials have announced a state of emergency for the next two weeks and authorities have been distributing free

masks to protect against ash in the air while setting up public kitchens for evacuees.

On Monday morning, dozens of evacuees in Lumajang district where Semeru is located ventured back to their ash-covered homes to retrieve important belongings, before returning to shelters, according to an AFP journalist.

Some shepherded livestock while others carried appliances such as TVs and refrigerators as the volcano spewed ash in the background.

Muhari said visual observation of Semeru on Monday morning indicated less intense volcanic activity but he warned of potential danger from lava flows that had cooled after heavy rain.

"What we worry about is economic activities such as sand mining. We want to make sure the route where the hot ash cloud and the cold lava might travel is completely free of activity," he said.

AFP

French author Dominique Lapierre dies at 91

Marseille, France - French writer Dominique Lapierre, the author of best-selling books on India like *Freedom at Midnight* and *City of Joy* and whose novels sold tens of millions of copies, has died.

"At 91, he died of old age," his wife Dominique Conchon-Lapierre told the French newspaper *Var-Matin* on Sunday.

She added that she is 'at peace and serene since Dominique is no longer suffering'.

Born on July 30, 1931, in Chatelaillon, Lapierre has sold about 50mn copies of the six books he wrote in collaboration with the American writer Larry Collins - the most famous being *Is Paris Burning?*

The non-fiction book published in 1965 chronicled the events leading up to August 1944, when Nazi Germany surrendered control of the French capital, and was adapted for the silver screen by Francis Ford Coppola and Gore Vidal.

His 1985 novel *City of Joy* -



French author Dominique Lapierre (AFP)

about the hardships of a rickshaw puller in Kolkata - was also a massive success. A movie based on it was released in 1992, starring Patrick Swayze and directed by Roland Joffe.

Lapierre donated the bulk of his royalties from *City of Joy* to support humanitarian projects in India.

When he visited Mother

Teresa in Kolkata in the early 1980s, he presented her with US\$50,000, admitting it was 'only a drop in the ocean of need'.

The Albanian nun reportedly replied: "If this drop did not exist, even the ocean would not."

In 2005, Lapierre said that thanks to his funding of humanitarian work, as well as donations from readers, it became 'possible

to cure a million tuberculosis patients in 24 years (and) to care for 9,000 children with leprosy'.

"It's not enough to just be a best-selling author," said the adventure-loving novelist, who spoke fluent Bengali.

"You need to fight against the injustices you write about in your books."

'Idol' in West Bengal

Born to a diplomat father and a journalist mother, Lapierre worked as a reporter for French magazine *Paris-Match* in the 1950s - a job that sent him around the world.

In West Bengal, he was 'revered as an idol' - according to a 2012 article by *Paris Match* magazine - when he banged the drum for funding for humanitarian centres as donations dried up following the economic crisis in the United States and Europe.

After *Is Paris Burning?*, he continued his fruitful partnership with Collins.

The duo specialised in highly researched dramatisations of historical events, such as the creation of Israel (*O Jerusalem*, 1972) and the Indian independence movement in *Freedom at Midnight* (1975) - largely considered a moving and seminal account of the partition of India.

Their success was credited to how they complemented each other - Lapierre had contacts in the French intelligence services while Collins with the CIA. Both authors also wrote in their respective languages, and translated each other's work.

And if Lapierre's prose tended to the lyrical, Collins insisted on a firm grounding in facts.

They also co-wrote *Or I'll Dress You in Mourning*, a biography of the Spanish bullfighter El Cordobes, and two fiction thrillers about terrorist plans to destroy New York - *The Fifth Horseman* in 1980 and *Is New York Burning?* in 2004.

AFP

Iran activists brush off claim morality police abolished

Paris, France - Campaigners backing Iran's protest movement on Monday dismissed a claim that the Islamic republic is disbanding its notorious morality police, insisting there was no change to its restrictive dress rules for women.

There were also calls on social media for a three-day strike, more than two months into the wave of civil unrest sparked by the death of Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Amini, 22, after her arrest by the morality police in Tehran.

Amini was accused of flouting Iran's strict dress code demanding women wear modest clothing and the hijab headscarf, and her death sparked protests that have spiralled into the biggest challenge to the regime since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Iran's Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, in a surprise move at the weekend, was quoted as saying that the morality police units - known as *gasht-e ershad* (guidance patrol) - had been closed down.

But activists were sceptical about his comments, which appeared to be an impromptu response to a question at a conference rather than a clearly signposted announcement on the morality police, which is run by the interior ministry.

Moreover, they said, their abolition would mark no change to Iran's headscarf policy - a key ideological pillar for its clerical leadership - but rather a switch in tactics on enforcing it.

Scrapping the units would be 'probably too little too late' for



This file photo shows an Iranian policewoman speaking with a woman regarding her clothing during a crackdown to enforce Islamic dress code in the capital Tehran on July 23, 2007 (AFP)

the protesters who now demand outright regime change, Roya Boroumand, co-founder of the US-based Abdorrahman Boroumand Center rights group, told AFP.

"Unless they remove all legal restrictions on women's dress and the laws controlling citizens' private lives, this is just a PR move," she said, adding that 'nothing prevents other law enforcement' bodies from policing 'the discriminatory laws'.

'Civil disobedience'

The guidance patrols have been a familiar sight on Tehran's streets since 2006 when they were introduced during the presidency of the ultra-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. But the clerical leadership had been

strictly enforcing the rules, including the headscarf, well before then.

Under the last shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, women had been free to dress as they wished with fashions little different from Western countries in secular areas of Tehran. His father Reza Shah had gone a step further in an edict issued in 1936, seeking to ban all Islamic veils and headscarves.

It was anger over the obligatory headscarf rule that sparked the first protests over the death of Amini, who died from what her family says was a blow to a head sustained in custody. The authorities dispute this.

But the movement, fed also by years of anger over economic grievances and political repres-

sion, is now marked by calls for an end to the Islamic republic led by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Reports from Tehran have suggested the feared vans of the guidance patrols had already become much less common or even vanished after the protests broke out. Images have also shown women smashing decades-long taboos by attending protests or even carrying out daily tasks like going shopping without headscarves.

'Pillar of Islamic republic'

The authorities have meanwhile been concentrating on battling the protests themselves in a crackdown that has left at least 448 people dead, according to Norway-based group Iran

Human Rights.

"The alleged suspension of Iran's morality police doesn't mean anything as it had already become irrelevant due to the massive level of women's civil disobedience and defying hijab-related rules," said Omid Memarian, a senior Iran analyst at Democracy for the Arab World Now.

He described the mandatory headscarf as 'one of the pillars of the Islamic republic' and said that 'abolishing those laws and structures would mean a fundamental change in the Islamic Republic's identity and existence'.

Montazeri's declaration and the confusion the comments sparked were seen as a sign of the disquiet within the regime over how to handle the protests which are continuing across the country despite the crackdown.

Within Iran on Monday there appeared to be hesitancy over the meaning of the comments with only reformist dailies putting the issue on their front page and conservative media largely ignoring it.

'The end of the morality police,' read a headline in daily *Sazandegi*. But the *Sharq* newspaper was more circumspect. 'Is this the end of the patrols?' it asked, noting the police public relations had not confirmed it.

"We should not be fooled by deceptive moves the Islamic Republic employs at times of desperation, as they might come back with other restrictive policies and measures," said Memarian.

AFP



Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani (right) meeting with Emirati President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan in Doha, on Monday (AFP)

UAE leader visits Qatar for first time since blockade

Doha, Qatar - The United Arab Emirates' president on Monday began his first visit to Qatar since the end of a nearly four-year regional blockade that put ties in the deep freeze.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan was greeted by Qatar's emir at the airport, officials said, in a trip that coincides with the ongoing football World Cup in Qatar.

It is the first state visit since January 2021, when a Saudi-led boycott of the gas-rich peninsula that started in June 2017 finally came to an end.

The visit, on the invitation of Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, 'builds on the existing brotherly relations be-

tween the two nations and their people', the UAE's official WAM news agency said.

The first World Cup on Arab soil is taking place less than two years after Saudi Arabia and its allies the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties, claiming Qatar supported extremists and was too close to Iran - allegations that Doha denied.

Saudi Arabia's de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has already met the emir during the World Cup where he was pictured wearing a Qatar football scarf. Although this is the UAE president's first visit since the blockade, ties have been gradually warming.

AFP

Turkey hails Sweden for extraditing PKK member

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey on Monday welcomed Sweden's extradition of a convicted Kurdish militant but signalled it expected more action before it would approve Stockholm's application to join NATO.

Ankara has demanded that both Sweden and neighbouring Finland take tougher stances on Kurdish groups it deems 'terrorists' in exchange for backing their NATO bids.

"The return of the PKK terrorist is a start showing (Sweden's) sincerity," Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag told state television TRT. "We hope new ones will follow," he said.

Sweden on Friday extradited Mahmut Tat, who is wanted by Ankara for membership of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is listed as a terror group by Turkey and its Western allies.

Tat, who was sentenced to

more than six years in jail by a Turkish court, fled to Sweden in 2015 but was denied an asylum by the Swedish authorities. Tat was detained by Turkish police shortly after landing at Istanbul airport and jailed by an Istanbul court.

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland and Sweden in May dropped decades of military non-alignment and applied to join NATO. The bid needs unanimous approval from all NATO members. Turkey has held back on ratifying their NATO applications despite reaching an agreement with Sweden and Finland in June.

Among its demands on the Nordic nations, Ankara says it expects to take tougher action on issues including the extradition of criminals and the freezing of terror assets.

AFP

Israeli army kills Palestinian during West Bank raid

Jerusalem - Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian man on Monday when clashes broke out during an arrest raid in the occupied West Bank, official sources on both sides said.

The Palestinian health ministry said 'a citizen was killed by live bullets in the chest in Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem' in the southern West Bank near Jerusalem.

The Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group identified the dead man as Omar Manaa, 22, and said 14 others were ar-



Palestinians carry the body of Omar Manaa, 22, shot dead by Israeli forces, at his funeral near Bethlehem city in West Bank, on Monday (AFP)

rested in overnight raids across the West Bank.

Israel's army said its troops opened fire during the arrest operation targeting alleged members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

"During the operation suspects threw stones, firebombs and explosive devices at the forces, who responded with fire," the army said.

"A hit was identified," the army added in its statement, without confirming an individual death.

The PFLP group, which has Marxist roots, has been banned by Israel and is considered a terrorist organisation by the United States and European Union.

In the northern West Bank, Israeli forces arrested Yahya al-Saadi, 'a senior member of the Islamic Jihad suspected of terror activity,' the army said.

At least 146 Palestinians and 26 Israelis have been killed so far this year across the West Bank, Israel and the contested city of Jerusalem.

AFP

Tunisians dream of moving to Germany as crisis bites

Tunis, Tunisia - Germany is becoming a key destination for disillusioned young Tunisians despite a language barrier and the North African nation's long history of ties with France.

Europe's biggest economy, with its low birth rate, is crying out for labour, and many Tunisians, exhausted by years of economic crisis, see an opportunity for a legal path to emigration.

Numbers are still small but rising fast. Germany granted 5,474 work permits to Tunisians from January to October - up from 4,462 in the whole of last year and more than double the numbers for 2020.

The trend has been stimulated by the fact Germany has no quota restrictions for countries of origin and increasingly recognises foreign diplomas.

Germany 'has a huge need for workers, not just in the health and IT sectors but also in hospitality, building, laying fibre-optic cables or driving heavy goods vehicles,' said Narjess Rahmani, a Berlin-based Tunisian who heads

the immigration agency 'Get In Germany'.

Some employers offer contracts to help ease the visa process and even pay for six months of language tuition to help their future workers.

Yeft Benazzouz, who runs a language school in Tunis, said demand for German classes has risen sharply since 2020.

"Before, I had groups of one or two people," he said. "Now it's gone up to six or seven."

Yeft also teaches basic German cultural norms, including the line of advice that 'puenklich ist schon spaet' - 'being on time is already late'.

High prices, few jobs

Tunisia's history as a French colony means its people are used to foreign languages, Rahmani said. "We are also very open to other cultures, through tourism and the cultural mix throughout our history."

The language school's students are often highly qualified, thanks to one of the Arab world's most reputable education sys-



Tunisian Elyes Jelassi, 28, is pictured in front of Tunis-Carthage airport on November 28, this year, as he leaves his country to travel to Germany (AFP)

tems, but cursed by unemployment affecting 30 per cent among young graduates.

Hydraulic engineer Nermine Madssia, 25, who wears a hijab, said she had chosen Germany over France, citing Islamophobia.

She said she hoped to get 'respect, consideration and a de-

cent salary', in contrast to Tunisia where the average pay is just 1,000 dinars (around 300 euros and dollars) per month.

Even highly sought-after IT technicians can expect to earn a maximum of 2,000 dinars early in their careers.

Like many who hope to leave

Tunisia, Nermine has had help from her parents in financing German lessons and the visa application. "With the increase in the cost of living, a salary isn't enough to start and support a family," she said.

Inflation topped 9.0 per cent year-on-year in October and

Tunisia has endured years of economic crisis, pre-dating even the 2011 revolution that toppled dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

With sluggish growth, vast public debt and many sectors closed off to new entrants, jobs are sparse, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and fallout from the Ukraine war.

Dangerous sea crossings

President Kais Saied's 2021 power grab, which has placed Tunisia's decade-long democratic transition in doubt, has done little to improve economic confidence.

One in every two young people wants to leave, says the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights group.

Some leave legally - including more than 40,000 engineers and 3,300 doctors in the past five years - while many thousands more attempt dangerous journeys to Italy in makeshift boats, some drowning on the way.

Among the legal departees is

Elyes Jelassi, 28, who packed a bottle of olive oil and some spices into his suitcase as he prepared for Germany.

As his family gathered in the town of Korba to wish him goodbye, he said he had never wanted to leave. But 'after three years of studies and internships in several hospitals, I decided not to make a career in Tunisia,' he said.

Jelassi already has a job contract as a senior nurse in the German city of Wiesbaden, with free accommodation for the first six months. As well as a good salary, he said he expects to find better working conditions than in Tunisia, where the health system has been crippled by the pandemic and years of neglect.

"Our hospitals suffer from a lack of equipment, which causes conflict with patients," he said. "It's really stressful."

He chose Germany over Canada, France or the Gulf because he already has friends there and will easily be able to further his studies.

AFP

Britain's Labour party vows to abolish House of Lords

London, UK - Britain's opposition Labour party vowed on Monday to scrap the unelected and 'indefensible' House of Lords as part of a constitutional revamp to redistribute economic growth after Brexit.

Labour looks set to take power in the next election, due by January 2025, streaking far ahead of the governing Conservatives in opinion polls after a tumultuous period politically and economically.

Labour leader Keir Starmer promised 'the biggest ever transfer of power from (the UK parliament in) Westminster to the British people', arguing that many voters in 2016 opted to quit the European Union because of a sense of lack of democratic control.

The party's blueprint for reform, drafted by former prime minister Gordon Brown, envisions new devolution to the UK's regions and countries including Scotland, where the nationalist government is pressing for a new referendum on independence.

Brown, who led the successful 2014 campaign for his fellow Scots to stay in the United King-



Britain's Opposition Labour Party Leader Keir Starmer speaking at the Despatch box during Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) in the House of Commons in London on November 30 (AFP)

dom, proposed greater devolution, with the Edinburgh parliament included in international agreements that involve Scottish areas.

Addressing an audience in Leeds, northern England, Starmer said a 'failure of economic growth over the past 12 years' under Conservative rule

was caused in part by the UK failing as a whole to power growth, relying too much on London and southeast England.

The blueprint is not yet Labour policy. It now goes to a public consultation, with agreed changes set to be incorporated into the party's next election manifesto.

Starmer said he hoped to push through the eventual reforms within the first five years of a Labour government, possibly including the redeployment of 50,000 civil service jobs out of London.

Tackling widespread public disgust with perceived malpractice in parliament, the proposals

The House of Lords is indefensible. Anybody who looks at the House of Lords would struggle to say that it should be kept

KEIR STARMER

would clamp down on MPs holding second jobs and create a new anti-corruption commissioner.

The 40-point plan's centre-piece is to scrap the upper house of parliament in its current guise - which is a mixture of political appointees, hereditary peers and Church of England bishops.

"I think the House of Lords is indefensible. Anybody who looks at the House of Lords would struggle to say that it should be kept," Starmer told BBC television.

"So we want to abolish the House of Lords and replace it with an elected chamber that has a really strong mission."

AFP

Sudan's military, civilian factions sign deal to end deep crisis

Khartoum, Sudan - Sudan's military and civilian leaders signed on Monday an initial deal aimed at ending a deep crisis caused by last year's military coup, prompting sceptical protesters to cry betrayal.

Army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan seized power in October 2021, derailing a rocky transition to civilian rule that began after the 2019 ouster of veteran autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

The past year has seen near-weekly protests and a crackdown that pro-democracy medics say has killed at least 121, a spiralling economic crisis exacerbated by donors slashing funding, and a resurgence of ethnic violence in several remote regions.

Divisions among civilian groups have deepened since the coup, with some urging a deal with the military while others insist on 'no partnership, no negotiation'.

The deal was signed by Burhan, paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo and multiple civilian groups, most notably the Forces for Freedom and

Change (FFC) - the main civilian faction that was ousted in the coup.

As the key players put pens to paper, hundreds of citizens rallied in Khartoum to protest against the deal.

'The settlement is betrayal' and the FFC 'sold our blood,' demonstrators cried.

"We reject this deal as it overlooked street demands for justice for the people killed since the coup," said one of those protesters, Mohamed Ali.

If the deal plays out as planned, the civilian signatories will agree on a prime minister who will steer the country through a 24-month transition.

"The ceremony today is a culmination of the sustained efforts of Sudanese stakeholders over the past year to find a solution to the political crisis and restore constitutional order," said UN special representative Volker Perthes. The initial deal was described as 'welcome' by the United States, Britain, Norway, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. AFP

South Africa's ruling ANC debates embattled president's future

Johannesburg, South Africa - The top leaders of South Africa's ruling party went into talks on Monday to discuss the fate of embattled President Cyril Ramaphosa on the eve of a parliamentary vote that could lead to his impeachment.

Ramaphosa insisted at the weekend that he would not resign after a special panel reported on an alleged coverup of a cash robbery at his farm, but his political future remains uncertain. On Monday morning the president arrived at the venue where the African National Congress' highest body - the National Executive Committee (NEC) - was meeting to discuss the crisis. He left shortly

afterwards, smiling and waving to the media.

ANC spokesman Pule Mabe said the president was recused from the meeting, in line with standard practice for a person under discussion.

"We convened the meeting because we want to seek the wisdom of the collective," said Mabe.

Forged by Nelson Mandela into the weapon that led the fight against apartheid, the ANC has been deeply divided by the affair, but after a pendulum swing a majority now seems to be backing the president.

The country marked the ninth anniversary of Mandela's death on Monday.



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa (right) leaves the NASREC Centre in Johannesburg, on Monday (AFP)

"In remembering him we are going to make sure that the (NEC meeting) concludes being

united," said Mabe. A small group of demonstrators, some supporting the pres-

ident, others calling for him to go, gathered outside the meeting in the Johannesburg area of Nasrec.

"The right thing is to tell Cyril Ramaphosa that he must step down," said ANC member Carl Niehaus, 63, a former spokesman to Mandela and critic of his successor.

He wore an ANC T-shirt and holding a framed sign reading 'Ramaphosa must go'.

But Ramaphosa supporter Maropeng Serakwana, 40, warned against any leap to judgement.

Ramaphosa 'must be treated fairly like any other citizen in this country,' he said. The bombshell report was

submitted last week to parliament, which will debate it on Tuesday - a step that could lead to a vote on forcing Ramaphosa from office.

For him to be forced out, two-thirds of the assembly must vote in favour of the removal motion. The ANC has 230 out of 400 seats.

'Phala Phala'

The scandal has become known as the Phala Phala affair, named after Ramaphosa's farm in the northeast of the country.

It began in June, when South Africa's former spy boss filed a complaint with the police alleging that Ramaphosa had concealed the theft of a huge haul

of cash from the farm. He accused the president of having organised for the robbers to be kidnapped and bribed into silence. Ramaphosa, in submissions to the three-person investigative panel, denied any wrongdoing. He said the cash - more than half a million dollars, stashed beneath sofa cushions - was payment for buffaloes bought by a Sudanese businessman. But his explanations did not convince the panel, which raised questions about the source of the cash and said he 'may have committed' serious violations and misconduct. AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

FOR RENT:

Room for rent in darsait with bathroom and kitchen the electricity and water is free the room is with sea view rent 100 RO/ T.L 99315986

AUDIT, ACCOUNTING, VAT, TAXATION

Contact:97239696/95355638

Gulf Center Consultancy & Audit
Muscat, Sohar, Salalah, Sur
Kumar@gccaoman.com

JOB VACANCY

TRAVEL CITY LLC, OMAN - MARKET LEADING TRAVEL COMPANY

is looking for qualified, experienced and talented people with minimum 3 years' experience in relevant areas in a travel agency /travel management company.

- 1- Travel consultants
- 2- Holiday Consultants
- 2- Business Development Manager
- 3- Holiday Manger
- 4- Sales Executives
- 5- IT System Engineer - To handle Desktop Admin, System Admin, Other IT Support Functions

Send in your Resume/CV to hr@travelpoint.om

FOR RENT

Available 2100 sq meter best in class Warehouse cum office Space, fully furnished ready to use, Located at Prime area of Ghala in the heart of the city having easy access to airport & express Way.

Contact: Girish Sewani - 93893596

FOR RENT

- State of the Art warehouse and office in Misfah
- Centrally located with ease of access to Muscat-Nizwa-Sohar
- 13 loading/unloading bays, with state of the art racking and centrally air conditioning @21 degree
- Cold room and Chiller room**
- 600 pallets space available on monthly/per pallet rental bases.
- 02 loading/unloading bays, with 10 mts high state of racking.
- Temp zone 05 Degree, -25 Degree Frozen.
- Office**
- 650 sq mts of office space, centralized air conditioning ready to use.
- Warehouse**
- 6000++ pallets space available on monthly/per pallet rental bases.

for more details call: 95616835

BIRTHDAY WISHES



BEENAMOL SEBASTIAN
6th December
My love for you, my dear wife, is endless. Happy birthday, my beautiful wife!

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325

www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease





OMAN-LITHUANIA

Friendly ties

People in Lithuania are well-versed with Omani hospitality and often indulge in warm cultural exchanges to highlight the cordial relations between both countries

It is a tradition in Lithuania's capital – Vilnius – to witness dozens of guests arriving for a celebration on November 18, Oman's National Day. This year, the gathering took place at the St Elisabeth Chapel, a spectacular location in the heart of the old part of Vilnius.

The host of the celebration, popular businessman Nicolas Ortiz, declared to the gathering his resolve to bring the Lithuanian public to celebrate Oman's National day for many years to come. Invited guests included representatives of the national government, diplomats residing in Lithuania, distinguished business people, and artists as well as top managers of the nation's leading tour operators.

Ladies dressed in traditional Omani gowns welcomed the guests who entered the Baroque chapel to the accompaniment of drums, with the scent of frankincense filling the air. They were offered dates and halwa as the popular part of Oman's hospitality tradition.

Speaking on the occasion, H E Boleta Senkiene, the Honorary Consul of the Sultanate of Oman in Lithuania, disclosed that, back in 2013, Lithuania was the first of the three Baltic nations to launch a representative office of an Arab country. The bilateral ties have developed considerably since, with areas of cooperation ranging from tourism and medicine to trade and student exchanges, she added.

An 'A la fourchette' party followed to give guests an opportunity to taste Omani cuisine. The venue also featured an exhibition of traditional Omani jewellery and photographs.

Education initiatives

This autumn sees the continuation of a well-established initiative that allows young people studying Arabic at Vilnius University to go to Oman for a few months to improve their language skills and get to know the culture more closely.

The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic Language to Non Native Speakers covers the travel, living and study expenses for the Lithuanian students. The



project was initiated a couple of years ago by H E Senkiene

"The most interesting thing is that this programme is carried out without contracts, purely on the basis of goodwill," said H E Senkiene. "It just goes to show that sometimes you don't even need 'papers' to cooperate."

Nearly 10 years of rapprochement

This is just one concrete example illustrating the significant intensification of bilateral relations between Oman and Lithuania over the last decade. Cooperation started to intensify less than a decade ago, after the opening of the Honorary Consulate of the Sultanate of Oman in Vilnius at the end of 2013.

Since then, Lithuania and Oman have

exchanged official visits by government delegations, with high-ranking Lithuanian officials visiting Oman and representatives of the Omani government visiting Lithuania. In mid-September, the Lithuanian Minister of Transport and Communications, Marius Skudis, visited Oman.

In meetings with the Omani Minister of Transport, Communications and IT, as well as with the heads of ports and logistics companies, the development plans and possible joint projects in these areas were discussed in detail. Bilateral ministerial consultations continue after the visit, and the Port of Klaipeda and Oman's major ports are looking for cooperation opportunities.

H E Sayyid Badr al Bausaidi, Foreign Minister, visited Vilnius in summer of this year. He received the Commander's Cross of

A few months ago in Muscat, I was quite surprised to meet a group of Lithuanians having lunch in a hotel restaurant. Ten years ago, this would have been absolutely unimaginable

H E BOLETA SENKIENE

the Order for Merit for Lithuania from President Gitanas Naus da for the successful development of bilateral relations.

Oman is also of interest to Lithuanian businessmen. Over the past decade, Lithuanian chocolate, juice, mineral water, water meters have been exported to Oman and other countries of the Arabian Peninsula, and several Lithuanian companies are considering investment in Oman, interested in the information technology and tourism sectors.

Ten years ago, Oman was almost unheard of for Lithuanians. Now, almost all serious travel agencies operating in Lithuania have included Oman in their catalogues as a recommended tourist destination. At least several hundred tourists from Lithuania visit Oman every year.

"A few months ago in the capital city of

H E Boleta Senkiene with Nicholas Ortiz (to her left) and other guests at Oman's National Day celebrations in Vilnius

Muscat, I was quite surprised to meet a group of Lithuanians having lunch in a hotel restaurant," said H E Senkiene. Ten years ago, this would have been absolutely unimaginable."

In October, a group of business people from Lithuania had visited Oman to explore the opportunities of investing into the nation's tourism sector. Lead by H E Senkiene, they met with H E Salem bin Mohammed al Mahrooqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism and Hashil Bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, head of Oman Tourism Development Company. Nicolas Ortiz very well-known businessman from Lithuania and his team were introduced to ambitious plans of Oman attracting visitors from across the planet with its stunning landscape, diverse natural resources and UNESCO protected sights.

The two sides discussed business areas and concrete projects in tourism open to foreign investment. The delegation from Lithuania had a wonderful chance to visit some of Oman's most treasured tourist landmarks. Ortiz expressed his will to invest in one of the forts of Oman, to convert it to a tourist attraction by building a boutique hotel there. The aim is not only to invest but create more job opportunities for the local people.

Arabic culture in Lithuania

At the initiative of H E Senkiene, various cultural events have been organised in Vilnius and other cities of the country in recent years to showcase Arabic traditions. Vilnius St Christopher Chamber Orchestra held a concert with performers from Oman. Arab Culture Days have been held several times while calligraphy and photography exhibitions have also been organised. Oman has also been participating in the Vilnius International Book Fair for several years.

Such events are almost always accompanied by a few traditional Omani symbols – Omani coffee, dates, halwa, and frankincense – when Lithuanians enjoy sharing the culture of Oman.

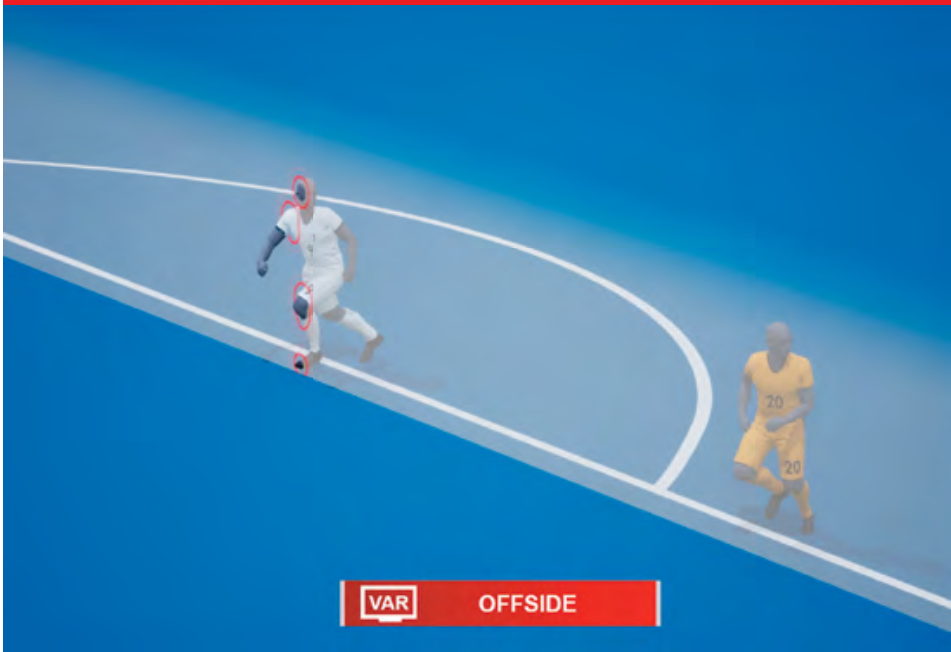
The relationship between both countries are now poised for a fillip as, in 2023, the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Lithuania celebrate the 30th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations.

Sweet is allowed NOW ..

Distributed by **CATERING SOLUTIONS TRADING LLC**
Please contact +968 22060236/237

Technology emerges as a major player at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022

SEMI-AUTOMATED OFFSIDE TECHNOLOGY



The Semi-Automated Offside Technology (SAOT) will provide an automated offside alert to the video match officials team

but not replace referee decision making. Once we start to think of technology as a support system and not as a replacement, many benefits can be availed within the sports industry.

Some football clubs use brain sensors to help players reach an optimum mental state to perform well. How can technology be used for enhancing

and draw conclusions, which is beyond both human capability as well as conventional analysis tools/methods. Therefore, with the advancement of computer vision models, such systems can potentially be trained to learn the rules of football, and to some degree, be able to officiate matches. However, AI has limitations and using it to completely replace humans in specific domains is not ideal. AI sys-

footage and make decisions introduces a level of subjectivity. To improve this, a level of intelligent automation should be introduced. This can aid VAR in making faster and more accurate calls through evidence-based decision making. This is exactly why SAOT has been proposed. Multiple cameras are set up in stadiums to provide footage of players from various angles. This data is then fed into

Tech-savvy FIFA

Once we start to think of technology as a support system and not as a replacement, many benefits can be availed within the sports industry

DR MARWA QARAAQE



Dr Marwa Qaraaqe, associate professor at the College of Science and Engineering (CSE) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), reviews the role of technology at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The capabilities of the novel technologies introduced can play a supporting role that enhances different aspects of 'the beautiful game', she asserts. Excerpts from an interview:

How would the semi-automated offside technology (SAOT) used at the FIFA World Cup Qatar impact the game - positively or negatively?

As a professor and researcher in CSE's Information and Computing Technology (ICT) Division, I am engaged in research advancing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to support decision making in the medical, government, and education sectors, among others. My opinion on the AI-driven semi-automated offside technology (SAOT) being used at the FIFA World Cup Qatar is a positive one as long as SAOT is used to support decision making and not to replace referees.

SAOT can collect and analyse vast amounts of data that would simply be impossible by a human referee or

video assistant referee (VAR). However, as with any controversial technology, the visualisation and explainability element of SAOTs (which refers to explaining the rationale behind the decision of the machine learning model) will need to be clearly shown to fans and officials to support its adoption at the FIFA World Cup 2022 and other football matches.

What is your opinion on using technology in sports, particularly in football?

Although it may be new, the use of technology in sports is not necessarily negative, as some may believe. Like any technology, its assessment depends on how it is used. For example, various technologies can be implemented to advance inclusivity for persons with disabilities. Haptic interface technology, for instance, can be used to support auditory or visual sensations to convey certain information about the match in a physical sense, such as the direction of the ball, which may be not captured through live commentary.

For athletes, computer vision methods can also be used to support their training by providing automated analysis of positions that can lead to injury. Similarly, SAOT can support

performance?

There is considerable room for technology to assist in improving the performance of coaches, players, and referees. These are examples of current or potential applications, some of which are being investigated at CSE.

Firstly, technologies such as computer vision methods and wearable technology can be used to track the motion and orientation of athletes to highlight weaknesses in their form/technique. That information can be used by athletes to improve their performance and reduce the risk of injury during training and even during competitive matches.

Secondly, AI-enabled technology can help coaches develop comprehensive and strategic game plans by analysing opponents' historic game plans and predicting future game plans.

Thirdly, personalised training and diet plans can be tailored for athletes based on their needs and physiological as well as biological responses.

Can you foresee a day when technology will officiate a match, instead of requiring a referee?

AI-based technology can simultaneously analyse diverse and large amounts of data to make predictions

tems are based on the data they are trained on and can only be as smart or effective as the quality of such data. Anything beyond that will result in erroneous outputs because they do not possess critical thinking abilities as humans do. In addition, AI has inherent algorithmic bias that affects its decisions and operates as a black box, which raises fairness issues when the output of an AI system is automatically accepted.

Therefore, developing technology that eliminates the human factor is irrational in certain applications, such as officiating a sports game, because no matter how advanced, AI cannot reach the same level of human intelligence. AI cannot replicate human qualities like experience and judgment, so the best way to exploit the benefits of AI in sports is to use it as a supporting tool.

How good is VAR, and what can be done to improve its use?

One of the limitations of VAR is the skepticism that comes from visualisation of the videos used to make important decisions or calls about goals, red-card incidents, and others. The issue of perception due to the camera angle can be limited, and the fact that remote referees need to view this

the AI system to accurately track players and their movements, automatically detect and alert on certain violations, such as offside incidents. Those alerts are subsequently shared with both, the on-field referee and VAR, for final decision making.

In addition to the near-real time detections, SAOT has the ability to provide 3D reconstructed animation to show VAR, on-field referees, and fans the position of players' limbs at the exact time the violation occurred, facilitating more transparent and explainable decision making in the games.

What other related research is underway at CSE?

CSE's research spans computer vision, action recognition, and machine learning and our project outcomes can be applied to advance football/sports as well as sporting events. As an example, I am conducting research to develop an AI-based surveillance system that uses CCTV footage to automatically recognise events that are of interest to government officials (fights, protests, large gatherings, etc.), and relay this information to the appropriate authorities for action, which helps ensure large events are kept safe.



FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 06, 2022 | MUSCAT DAILY | 13

PENALTY BLUES

Livakovic stars as Croatia reach quarters with shoot-out victory over spirited Japan

Doha, Qatar - Croatia reached the quarter-finals of the World Cup on Monday with a dramatic 3-1 penalty shoot-out win over Japan after a tense last-16 clash ended 1-1.

Goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic was the hero for Croatia, saving three of four penalties before Mario Pasalic converted from the spit to send Croatia through.

Earlier, Ivan Perisic had pulled Croatia level in the 55th minute of normal time following Daizen Maeda's opener for Japan just before the break.

Croatia now face either Brazil or South Korea in the last eight and continued midfield icon Luka Modric's stay at his fourth and likely final World Cup.

Japan's bid to reach the last eight for the first time in their history came to a crushing end after another display of the sort which saw off Spain and Germany on their way



Croatia goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic saves the penalty of Japan's Takumi Minamino during their round-of-16 match at Al Janoub Stadium on Monday (AFP)

to topping Group E.

However they could not claim one more big European scalp in the shape of the 2018 finalists and go

home in the second round, as they did four years ago, after having three of their penalties saved.

Japan could easily have been

ahead within three minutes when Shogo Taniguchi glanced a header wide from point-blank range, and 10 minutes later Daizen Maeda came

close to turning in Junya Ito's brilliantly placed low ball from the right flank.

In the meantime Perisic had let

ROUND OF 16		
	JAPAN	1 (1)
	CROATIA	3 (1)
Croatia win on penalties		

off a shot from a tight angle which led to a goalmouth scramble, but had Croatia scored they risked the goal being ruled out for what looked like a clear push on Takehiro Tomiyasu.

Bruno Petkovic then wasted a great opportunity in the 25th minute, strolling through almost unopposed onto a long through ball only to dawdle and fail to get a pass off to Andrej Kramaric who was charging into the box.

Kramaric was then too slow to latch on to Perisic's dangerous flick-on and from there Japan took control, and the lead.

Daichi Kamada had already blasted over after a superb passing move when in the 43rd minute Maeda fired in the opener after Ritsu Doan's cross was knocked down by Maya Yoshida.

Japan looked the better team and ready to inflict more damage but out of the blue Croatia's most dangerous player Perisic levelled the scores with a bullet header from Dejan Lovren's deep cross.

MODERN EXCHANGE

الصرافة الحديثة

TRANSFER MONEY EASILY AROUND THE WORLD

CANADA | EUROPE | UNITED KINGDOM | USA | AUSTRALIA

• NO BACKEND CHARGES • FASTER CREDIT • LESSER CHARGES

www.modernexchange.com

98082709 / 98082705 / 98082703

CANADA

Charges starts from OMR 3.5/-

EUROPE

Charges starts from OMR 3.5/-

UK

Charges starts from OMR 3.5/-

USA

Charges starts from OMR 5.5/-

AUSTRALIA

Charges starts from OMR 3.5/-

Portugal coach Santos 'not happy' with Ronaldo's gesture after substitution

Doha, Qatar - Portugal coach Fernando Santos said he was unimpressed with Cristiano Ronaldo's behaviour after the forward reacted angrily when substituted during the team's final group game at the World Cup in Qatar.

Santos, who said the matter was now closed, is preparing his team to face Switzerland in the last 16 on Tuesday. Ronaldo initially said he was "insulted" by a South Korean player as he was substituted in the second half of his side's 2-1 defeat to the Asian side on Friday.

But Portuguese media have shown images that suggest he used vulgar language in response to Santos's decision.

Asked how he had reacted to those images, Santos told a news conference on Monday: "I didn't like it at all. I didn't like it at all."

But he said a line had been drawn under the incident.

"Then these matters are resolved, resolved in-house," he said. "They are over. It is the end of the story regarding this issue and now we're thinking about the game tomorrow and everyone is fully focused on the match preparations."

Ronaldo's starting role in the team remains a hot topic among Portugal fans, but Santos said he was not paying attention to the debate or online polls on the issue.



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo walks past coach Fernando Santos after being substituted during their group match against South Korea on Friday (AFP)

"I do not read this type of material," he said. "It is not a lack of respect, it is simply that we have three days to train for a game and I am not looking at other kinds of news. We focus on the upcoming match."

Santos said he expected a close contest against Switzerland. Portugal beat the Swiss 4-0 in the UEFA Nations League in June before losing 1-0 in the reverse fixture.

"It won't be the first time against the Swiss, we know it will be a difficult match," he added. "They are a well-organised team with high-quality players and they know their way of playing very well."

"They are very well synced and are always focused and that is what we expect in this match - we will face a disciplined side."

AFP

Spain's fate at Unai Simon's feet in Morocco clash

Doha, Qatar - Spain's hopes of winning a second World Cup trophy in Qatar lie in the hands - and feet - of goalkeeper Unai Simon.

Luis Enrique's possession-based system demands a goalkeeper brave enough to distribute to nearby team-mates, even when under immense pressure from opposition forwards.

Sometimes it goes woefully wrong, but the coach has kept his faith in Simon, no matter the criticism received after errors.

Simon survived scares against Germany in the 1-1 group stage draw, while he was at fault for Japan's first goal in their shock 2-1 win over Spain on Thursday.

With Spain losing, for a few minutes La Roja were due to be eliminated.

They dodged that bullet when Germany triumphed, progressing in second place from Group E to set up Tuesday's last 16 clash with Morocco.

Japan laid the blueprint for the North African nation to follow, with Spain malfunctioning completely when the Samurai Blue overloaded their system.

"They scored two against us, and if they had needed two more, then they would have scored them too, I'm sure," said coach

Luis Enrique after the game.

ITV pundit Gary Neville claimed Simon seemed "a real weak point" for La Roja, later advocating Manchester United goalkeeper David de Gea.

However he was never likely to be selected, with Luis Enrique bringing David Raya from Brentford and Robert Sanchez of

If Unai didn't play well with his feet, he couldn't be the goalkeeper of national team

LUIS ENRIQUE

Brighton as Simon's back-ups, two goalkeepers more comfortable with the ball at their feet - and who create fewer headlines.

They will have low expectations of featuring, with Luis Enrique making it clear that the 25-year-old is his No 1.

"If Unai didn't play well with his feet, he couldn't be the goalkeeper of the

national team," said Luis Enrique after Spain's draw with Germany.

"Unai Simon has everything Spain's goalkeeper needs."

Luis Enrique says when Simon errs it does not worry him, as long as he is carrying out the plan set for him.



Unai Simon



FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar2022



Harry Kane celebrates after scoring against Senegal in their round-of-16 match at Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha, on Sunday (AFP)

Mature England ready for France battle, says Kane

Doha, Qatar - Harry Kane hailed England's serene progress to the World Cup quarter-finals after scoring his first goal of the tournament in a 3-0 win over Senegal in the last 16.

The Three Lions have now won a knockout game in three consecutive major tournaments for the first time to set up a mouth-watering clash against reigning champions France in the last eight on Saturday.

"Knockout games are never easy. We showed great maturity through the tournament," Kane told ITV after moving to within one goal of Wayne Rooney's record of 53 for England.

"The mentality was top from the

beginning and we took our chances when they came."

At 29, Kane is one of the senior players in Gareth Southgate's squad on a night when youngsters Jude Bellingham, Phil Foden and Bukayo Saka again showed their promise.

Saka scored his third goal of the tournament, while Foden provided two assists and Bellingham was heavily involved in the opening two goals.

"We've got some super young players that we feel it's been right to give them their head and give them their opportunity," said Southgate.

"Jude, Phil, Bukayo, they are heading in a really good direction and these

games are brilliant life experience for them. The progress they are making is phenomenal."

"The team have made a very complicated game tonight look straightforward," added Southgate. "That wasn't the case, but because of the mentality, the attitude we've made it look that way."

France will pose a much tougher test of England's hopes of winning a first major tournament since 1966.

Kylian Mbappe was in stunning form for Les Bleus as he scored twice in a 3-1 win over Poland on Sunday to move clear as the top goalscorer in the tournament with five.

"It is the biggest test we could face. They are world champions, with an incredible depth of talent and outstanding players. They are very hard to play against and score goals against," Southgate said.

"It's a fantastic challenge. It's a historic rivalry with great games from the past. It's a brilliant game for us to be involved in and test ourselves against the very best," Southgate added.

"We'll enjoy this one but then our focus turns to that, it's going to be a really tough game," said Kane. "They are reigning champions but it's a good battle."

AFP



Jude Bellingham celebrates England's round-of-16 victory against Senegal at Al Bayt Stadium on Sunday (AFP)



We were playing a very good England team and we saw that in their challenges, their physical strength. We weren't as good as we should have been

ALIOU CISSE
SENEGAL COACH



France's Kylian Mbappe scores against Poland in their round-of-16 match at Al Thumama Stadium in Doha on Sunday

World Cup is my obsession, says Mbappe

Doha, Qatar - Kylian Mbappe said Sunday he dreamed of winning the World Cup for a second time after his brace helped France to a 3-1 win over Poland which took the holders to the quarter-finals in Qatar.

"Of course, this World Cup is an obsession for me, it's the competition of my dreams," said the 23-year-old who burst onto the global stage by starring when France won the title in Russia four years ago.

"I have built my season around this competition and around being ready both physically and mentally for it. I wanted to come here ready and so far things are going well, but we are still a long way from the objective we set and that I set."

The Paris Saint-Germain superstar now has five goals in just four games at the tournament and is already France's second-top scorer ever at the World Cup with nine goals in 11 appearances overall.

Only Just Fontaine, who scored an incredible 13 times at the 1958 tournament in Sweden, has more World Cup goals for France.

However, Mbappe insisted he was not bothered about the prospect of winning the Golden Ball for the tournament's best player.

"The only objective for me is to win the World Cup which means now to win the quarter-final," said Mbappe, who also set up the opening goal against Poland for Olivier

Giroud.

"That is what I am dreaming of. I didn't come here to win the Golden Ball. That is not why I am here. I am here to win and help the French national team."

While the veteran Giroud netted his 52nd international goal to move past Thierry Henry and become France's all-time top scorer, Mbappe was once again France's outstanding player.

He had been named man of the match in France's opening two wins over Australia and Denmark only to shun his post-match media duties, exposing the French Football Federation to a fine from FIFA as a result.

AFP

MOMENT IN TIME



JOY UNBOUND: England's Jordan Henderson (bottom) celebrates with Jude Bellingham after a goal in their round-of-16 match at Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, north of Doha, on Sunday (AFP)

TODAY'S MATCHES

MOROCCO VS SPAIN 7 PM

PORTUGAL VS SWITZERLAND 11 PM

52

Olivier Giroud's goal against Poland was his 52nd one for Les Bleus, helping him eclipse Thierry Henry's all-time record and making him the No 1 marksman for France.



JUDE AWAKENING!

Bellingham's masterclass helps England subdue Senegal and book France clash in quarters

Al Khor, Qatar - England set up a titanic World Cup quarter-final against holders France as Jude Bellingham's masterclass inspired a 3-0 win against Senegal in the last 16 on Sunday.

Gareth Southgate's side survived a nervous start at the Al Bayt Stadium before Jordan Henderson and Harry Kane put Senegal to the sword with a pair of clinical finishes before half-time.

Bukayo Saka scored England's third, but it was Bellingham's prodigious work-rate and burgeoning quality in possession that allowed them to turn the tide.

Bellingham set up Henderson's opener and the Borussia Dortmund midfielder was involved again when England captain Kane bagged his first

goal in this World Cup.

Kane has now netted 11 times at major tournaments, overtaking Gary Lineker as England's all-time top scorer in those competitions.

But at the tender age of 19, it is Bellingham who has emerged as England's driving force.

He is the first teenager to assist in a World Cup knockout stage game since 1966, having already announced his arrival on the global stage by netting his first England goal in the 6-2 rout of Iran in their group opener.

Just two years after he was playing in the English second tier with Birmingham, the precocious Bellingham was totally unfazed against Senegal in the biggest game of his life.

ROUND OF 16		
	ENGLAND	3
	SENEGAL	0

"We made a very complicated game look straightforward. Because of the mentality, the attitude we've made it look that way," Southgate said.

"We've got some super young players and we feel it's been right to give them their head. Jude and Bukayo are heading in a really good direction."

England will need another command performance from Bellingham if they are to extend their stay in Qatar beyond the last eight.

Eyeing a third successive semi-final appearance at major tournaments, England will return to the Al Khor desert on Saturday to take on the red-hot Kylian Mbappe and company after France brushed aside Poland 3-1 on Sunday. Euro 2020 runners-up England have won only one of their last eight meetings with France, who pose a significant threat to their hopes of winning a first major title for 56 years.

"France are an outstanding team with a phenomenal tournament record and some outstanding individuals. That's a game where we've got to find our highest possible level," Southgate said.

Senegal boss Aliou Cisse added: "We have worked for years to be the

top African side but we were playing a top five team in the world and you saw the difference."

After a rocky opening when they passed too slowly and looked anxious at the back, England hit their stride to show why Southgate has such confidence in them.

African champions Senegal squandered a golden opportunity to take the lead when Harry Maguire gave the ball away and Boulaye Dia's volley deflected off John Stones into Ismaila Sarr's path, only for the Watford forward to blaze over from close-range.

Preying on England's nerves, Sarr harried Saka and Dia seized the loose ball, forcing a good save from Jordan Pickford with a fierce drive.

That proved the turning point as England snatched the lead against the run of play in the 38th minute.

Bellingham sprinted onto Harry Kane's incisive pass into the Senegal area and clipped a precise cutback into the path of Liverpool midfielder Henderson, who guided his low strike past Edouard Mendy from 12 yards.

Henderson's goal served as a jolt of adrenaline that coursed through England as they doubled their lead seconds before the interval.

Bellingham was the catalyst with his well-timed tackle and a crisp pass to Foden, whose perfectly-weighted lay-off allowed Kane to race clear for a clinical finish.

AFP

Bellingham 'has everything' but now comes biggest test yet

Al Khor, Qatar - Jude Bellingham's outstanding display in England's 3-0 World Cup win over Senegal announced the 19-year-old's arrival among the global elite but now comes the biggest test so far of his young career.

Much will be expected of the supremely talented central midfielder when Gareth Southgate's side face world champions France in Saturday's quarter-final in Qatar.

Bellingham helped create the opening two goals as England swatted aside Senegal in the last 16 on Sunday and the teenager delivered a fine all-round performance that left

seasoned observers searching for superlatives.

"I think he's a fantastic player. He has everything with and without the ball, presses really well, gets around the pitch, tackles," said captain Harry Kane.

"With the ball he can run, he can take players on, he can play a through-ball and as you saw today he was really important with our goal," said the England striker. "I like Jude a lot, he's a really good person, he's mature for his age and he's got great leadership skills as well," Kane added.

He became a full England international in November 2020, with only

Wayne Rooney and Theo Walcott having played for the country at a younger age.

It is a sign of the confidence England have in Bellingham that against Senegal he was chosen to be left back to cover the defence when the central defenders advanced for a corner.

Southgate, who has consistently been willing to give opportunities to young players, admitted that even he has been taken aback by the speed of Bellingham's development.

"I don't think we could have predicted how quickly Bellingham could mature. In the last five months that has gone to another level," Southgate said.



England coach Gareth Southgate greets Jude Bellingham



France's Olivier Giroud scores against Poland on Sunday (AFP)

Record-breaking Giroud brings goals to France's repeat World Cup bid

Doha, Qatar - Olivier Giroud was an integral part of France's 2018 World Cup-winning side, but in Qatar the striker has brought the goals missing from his game four years ago in Russia. On a night when the insatiable Kylian Mbappe scored two brilliant goals, Giroud wrote himself into the history books with his 52nd goal for Les Bleus - eclipsing Thierry's Henry all-time record.

In a last-16 tie billed as Mbappe against Robert Lewandowski, it was the evergreen 36-year-old Giroud who set France on their way to a 3-1 win with the opening goal just before half-time.

"Olivier has always been an important player. Even if four years ago with the title he didn't score - he was always important," said France coach Didier Deschamps.

"He has had difficult periods. Today he is rewarded because he has often been criticised. It is not just any old record... beyond it being Thierry Henry he has beaten.

"To score so many international goals - he was there before I even became coach so bravo to him and to his teammates who have helped him score so many goals."

With favourites Brazil sweating over the fitness of Neymar and Argentina's hopes heavily pinned on Lionel Messi, the France attack looks built to last the course of a breakneck tournament.

France had to be patient against Poland who defended deep and in numbers, but once Mbappe's sublime ball through played in Giroud to steer past Wojciech Szczensy there was only really one outcome.

Sterling to return home after armed break-in

London, United Kingdom - Raheem Sterling will return home from England's World Cup camp in Qatar with doubts over whether he will return in time for Saturday's quarter-final against France.

The English Football Association confirmed the Chelsea forward was left out of Sunday's 3-0 win over Senegal to deal with "a family matter".

According to reports in the British media, Sterling's home was broken into by armed intruders while his family were in the property on Saturday night.

"At the moment clearly the priority is for him to be with his family. We're going to support that and leave him to have as much time as he needs," said England manager Gareth Southgate.

"At the moment it's a situation he needs time with his family to deal with and I don't want to put him under any pressure with that.

"Sometimes football isn't the most important thing and family should come first."

Sterling has been a key player for England during Southgate's six years in charge.

The 27-year-old has 20 goals in 81 caps for his country, including one at the 2022 World Cup in a 6-2 victory over Iran.

However, Sterling may have already been squeezed out of Southgate's starting line-up for the last eight even if he does return to Qatar by the fine form of Bukayo Saka, Marcus Rashford and Phil Foden.



Jude Bellingham (L), and Bukayo Saka (top) after scoring against Senegal in their 3-0 win (AFP)



Liam Livingstone

England's Livingstone out of Pakistan tour with knee injury

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - All-rounder Liam Livingstone has been ruled out of the rest of England's tour of Pakistan with a knee injury, the team's management said Monday.

The 29-year-old made his Test debut Thursday in the on-going first Test in Rawalpindi, scoring nine and seven not out in England's two innings.

But he jarred his knee while fielding on day two and did not bowl in Pakistan's first innings.

Livingstone also missed the Twenty20 series against Pakistan a few months ago after

suffering an ankle injury.

England have yet to decide if a replacement will be called up.

Pakistan were chasing 343 Monday on the fifth and final day of the first Test.

England are on their first Test tour of Pakistan since 2005, having declined to visit in the interim years on security grounds.

The second Test is in Multan from December 9-13, and the third in Karachi from December 17-21.

AFP

England shine in fading light to beat Pakistan

Robinson, Anderson take four wickets apiece as England win first Test by 74 runs

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - Fast bowlers Ollie Robinson and James Anderson took four wickets apiece as England pulled off an exciting 74-run win over Pakistan Monday in the first Test in Rawalpindi.

Anderson took 4-36 and Robinson 4-50 on a placid Rawalpindi Stadium pitch to dismiss Pakistan for 268, with the stadium floodlights glowing as daylight faded.

Pakistan's last pair of Naseem Shah (six) and Mohammad Ali (nought) defied England for 35 minutes and 8.5 overs before spinner Jack Leach trapped Naseem leg-before, leaving England players ecstatic.

The win - giving England a 1-0 lead in the three-Test series - embellished England's newly adopted "Bazball" cricket, an aggressive style taken from the nickname of head coach Brendon McCullum. Skipper Ben Stokes was also active throughout the day, keeping unrelenting pressure on the Pakistan batters with close-set fields and intelligent bowling changes.

The win is England's seventh in eight Tests under the new management of McCullum and Stokes, installed in May this year.

It was achieved after dangling the carrot-like target of 343 runs for Pakistan to win in a possible 130 overs.

For a while, they had their



England players celebrate after their victory against Pakistan in the first Test in Rawalpindi on Monday (AFP)

chance. At tea, Pakistan were 257-5 - needing 86 runs to win in an intriguing last session.

England needed five wickets, and Robinson struck in the fourth over after the break, trapping Agha Salman leg-before for 30.

In his next over he claimed Azhar Ali for 40 to bring England close to victory.

At the other end, Anderson removed Zahid Mahmood (one

and Haris Rauf (nought) in the same over as four wickets fell for just seven runs.

A total of 1,236 runs were scored by the two teams in their first innings - England 657 and Pakistan 579 - before the visitors set the Test alight by declaring their second innings at 264-7 on Sunday.

Pakistan batted with caution in the first session as they pro-

gressed from an overnight total of 80-2 to 169-3, losing opener Imam-ul-Haq for 48 to pacer Anderson. Mohammad Rizwan was one of two wickets to fall in the second session for 46, putting a fighting 87-run stand for the fourth wicket with Saud Shakeel, who scored 76.

In the fourth over after lunch, Anderson had Rizwan caught behind while Robinson dismissed

Shakeel to an excellent catch by substitute Keaton Jennings at short cover.

England are on their first Test tour of Pakistan since 2005, having declined to visit in the interim years on security grounds.

The second Test is in Multan from December 9 to 13, and the third in Karachi from December 17 to 21.

AFP



Nick Bollettieri

Bollettieri, the hard as nails coach who shaped tennis stars

Miami, United States - Nick Bollettieri, the celebrity tennis coach who helped develop such icons as Andre Agassi and Monica Seles, died on Monday aged 91.

While his methods were sometimes controversial, his academy in Florida churned out top players. Agassi, Maria Sharapova, Seles, Jim Courier, Anna Kournikova and Mary Pierce all passed through his Bradenton complex.

Bollettieri also advised Venus and Serena Williams and Boris Becker.

The demanding routine for children and adolescents living and training at his academy produced results but also drew criticism. His relationship with some of his successful proteges, including Agassi and Seles, eventually soured. "I hated it at Bollettieri's academy," said Agassi.

"The only way I could get out was to succeed."

Bollettieri, though, remained unrepentant.

"I did what had to be done. Tennis is not a sport for choir-boys," Bollettieri said.

Bollettieri was born in Pelham in the New York suburbs on July 31, 1931. He studied philosophy at a small Catholic college in Alabama, saying later that was when he started playing tennis regularly. After serving in the US Army in Korea, Bollettieri started a law degree in Miami but dropped out to become a professional tennis coach.

At one stop, in Wisconsin, he coached the young Brian Gottfried, who went on to become the world number three in 1977, giving Bollettieri some visibility.

In 1978, he founded his own tennis academy in Florida. He worked his players hard.

In 1980, *Sports Illustrated* headlined a piece about Bollettieri: "He'll Make Your Child A Champ, But It Won't Be Much Fun."

Bollettieri believed in repetition. "To change a shot," he said, "you have to repeat the same

shot about 30,000 times in training. That's the rate, the union minimum."

Bollettieri also insisted he developed character.

"I'm proud most of all of how these boys became men - not just great tennis players, but even better people. Look at all the things they've done," he told *Tennis.com*. His method succeeded for some but broke others.

By the 1990s, he had become a star coach - his tanned, weathered face appeared at all the major tournaments.

"I am the best coach in the world. I have no doubt about it," he boasted in a 1994 book.

He liked to call himself the "Michelangelo of Tennis," said the Tennis Hall of Fame on his induction in 2014.

Bollettieri understood that he needed to produce top-level players to market his business, but that strategy ended with his selling to sports talent agency IMG. AFP

'He'll come home': Pele's daughters reassure fans of ill football icon

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Brazilian football superstar Pele's daughters told his fans Sunday that their father's health was not at serious risk, saying they are confident he will return home when he recovers from a respiratory infection.

The 82-year-old has been hospitalized in Sao Paulo since Tuesday amid ongoing treatments for colon cancer, which was first diagnosed in September 2021.

Pele "is sick, he is elderly, but at this point he is hospitalized for a lung infection," Kely Arantes Nascimento told the TV channel Globo.

"And when he gets better, he'll come home," she said.

"We are not saying goodbye in the hospital," she insisted, explaining that the respiratory illness was the result of a Covid-19 infection the sporting icon had contracted three weeks ago.

Her sister, Flavia Arantes Nascimento, denied reports from the daily *Folha de S.Paulo*



It's really unfair that they're saying he's at the terminal stage. It's not that, believe us

FLAVIA ARANTES NASCIMENTO

and ESPN Brazil that Pele was no longer responding to chemotherapy and was now receiving only "palliative care."

She told the news channel that her father was not in the intensive care unit, but a regular ward, and that the family was

"tired of receiving condolences" and that the cancer treatment is "delivering results."

"It's really unfair that they're saying he's at the terminal stage. It's not that, believe us," she said.

Earlier Sunday, fans of Pele - born Edson Arantes do Nasci-

mento - congregated outside the Sao Paulo hospital where the three-time world champion is staying.

More than 100 devotees prayed for the recovery of the man widely regarded as the greatest footballer of all time.

"We are a spiritual force" praying for the sporting idol as he wages "one of the toughest battles of his life," one fan, Marcos Bispo dos Santos, told AFP.

Doctors at Sao Paulo's Albert Einstein Hospital said Saturday that Pele remained "stable."

Pele "has had a good response to care without any worsening in the clinical picture in the last 24 hours," they said in a statement.

The star later struck an optimistic note in an Instagram post, saying, "My friends, I want to keep everyone calm and positive. I'm strong, with a lot of hope and I follow my treatment as usual."

AFP

Saudi sole bidder to host 2027 Asian Cup after India exit

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Saudi Arabia on Monday became the sole bidder to host the 2027 Asian Cup after India withdrew its bid.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said in a statement that the All India Football Federation had pulled out from the selection.

The statement did not provide any reasons for India's decision.

In October the AFC's executive committee shortlisted India and Saudi Arabia as potential hosts.

"The Asian Football Confederation has been officially notified by the All India Football Federation (AIFF) of their deci-



AFC Asian Cup

sion to withdraw their bid from the AFC Asian Cup 2027 host selection process," the regional body said Monday without elab-

orating. Three-time champions Saudi Arabia will now probably host their first AFC Asian Cup.

The AFC Congress will for-

mally decide the host in the Bahrain capital of Manama in February next year.

Saudi Arabia caused one of the biggest shocks in the ongoing World Cup in Qatar when they beat Argentina 2-1 in their opening match. But the team were not able to advance past the first round. The 2023 Asian Cup will also be hosted by Qatar. It was previously set to be held in China but the country withdrew because of Covid.

The Asian Cup is staged every four years. Qatar won the tournament's last edition, in 2019, which was hosted by the United Arab Emirates.

AFP