



Our Correspondent

Omani and Jordanian officials and businessmen have stated that the visit of King Abdullah II Ibn al Hussein of Jordan on Tuesday will increase cooperation in various fields, especially the private sector, in the two brotherly countries.

H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said that the visit of King Abdullah II will boost trade and investment exchange and cooperation in various fields between the two countries.

"The Omani-Jordanian Joint Committee has ongoing discussions on mechanisms to enhance economic, commercial and investment cooperation in various fields," H E Yousef said in an interview to ONA. Oman and Jordan offer investment opportunities and incentives to enhance trade exchange in various fields.

According to H E Yousef, the volume of trade exchange increased 33.8 per cent to RO61.855mn in 2021, compared to RO46.26mn in 2020.

He informed that there are 621 Jordanian companies in the sultanate, most of which are engaged in trade, services, industry



H E QAIS AL YOUSEF

REDHA JUMA AL SALEH

Muscat - Schools in Muscat will close early on Tuesday owing to the visit of the King of Jordan. A statement issued by the Ministry of Education (MoE) said, 'All schools in the wilayats of Muscat, Bausher, Muttrah, Seeb and Amerat will close at 11.30am on Tuesday. Parents have been asked to make necessary transport arrangements for their children at 11.30am.'

'Evening classes will be suspended in all schools in the wilayats of Seeb and Amerat.'

and construction.

Redha Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said, "The visit of King Abdullah II will enhance the establishment of joint projects and build relations between businessmen in the two brotherly countries."

"There are many proposed

areas of cooperation, such as joint exhibitions, establishing joint tourism projects, especially medical tourism, holding promotional seminars on the investment environment and opportunities, and signing more economic agreements that would support investment cooperation between the two countries."

spokesperson for the Jordanian Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply, informed that his country is looking forward to strengthening economic cooperation with the sultanate in various fields in a way that serves common interests and maximises benefits from the opportunities available in both countries.

The value of Jordan's exports to Oman until July amounted to about US\$30mn, while its total imports from the sultanate amounted to about US\$39mn.

Barmawi stressed the importance of strengthening trade relations between the private sectors of the two countries in order to develop economic cooperation, increase the volume of trade and establish investments.

Nael al Kabariti, Chairman of Jordan Chamber of Commerce, informed that the chambers of commerce of the two countries organise visits to identify investment opportunities and take advantage of the facilities offered to investors to stimulate investment in a safe environment.

"We are also looking to intensify efforts by the private sector in both countries to raise the volume of trade exchange," Kabariti said.

Haitham al Rajbeh, a Jordanian businessman, described the Omani market as "attractive" and "stimulating" for foreign investment. "Investing in Oman is attractive because of factors such as strategic location, political and economic stability, good infrastructure and logistics, customs exemptions, international agreements and freedom of capital."

Muscat - The Ministry of Information, represented by Oman News Agency (ONA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Asian News International (ANI) on Monday for exchange news and information.

The MoU was signed on the premises of the Indian Embassy in Muscat by Ibrahim Saif al Azri, Director General and Editor-in-Chief of ONA, and H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman. The ceremony was attended by V Muraleedharan, Indian Minister of State for External Affairs.

The MoU provides for cooperation in sharing images, videos and news bulletins in English, and visits of experts.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has stated that the value of real estate transactions in the sultanate in August amounted to RO192mn, including RO107mn from mortgages and RO82mn from sales.

Fees collected for completed legal transactions amounted to over RO5mn, of which RO579,000 was collected for mortgages, RO47,000 for swap contracts and RO2mn for sale contracts.

The total number of legal transactions was 12,830, including 6,463 sale contracts, 112 swap contracts, 2,056 mortgage contracts, 1,859 grant contracts, 537 inheritance contracts, 998 mortgage release contracts and 805 dividing contracts.

The number of title deeds issued in August reached 22,776 across the governorates, of which 4,420 were in Muscat, 1,614 in



Dhofar, 199 in Musandam, 601 in Buraimi, 2,738 in Dakhliyah, 3,904 in North Batinah, 3,573 in South Batinah, 1,913 in South Sharqiyah, 1,942 in North Shar-

qiyah, 1,612 in Dhahirah and 259 in Al Wusta.

As many as 110 titles were issued to citizens of GCC countries, of which the highest number are in Muscat, followed by North Batinah and South Batinah.

As for plots of land registered for the first time, the total number amounted to 4,857 and the number of applications for proof and registration of ownership was 1,163.



Advertisement No.(36 / 2022)

Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/084	2022/MM/QS-57	Supply & Installation of Pedestrian rail at al Ghubrah (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/094	2022/MM/QS-58	Supply of Equipments and hearse (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/103	2022/MM/QS-59	Proposed Public Walkway in ALAmrat (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/115	2022/MM/QS-60	Consultancy Services for Design of Epidemiological Deaths Building (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	First
PRE/22/116	2022/MM/HQ-13	Design & Construction of Storm Water Drainage at Falaj Al Sham Area (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	First
PRE/22/118	2022/MM/QS-61	Design and Construction of Pedestrian Bridge and Embankment Protection Works in Airport Heights (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	First
PRE/22/120	2022/MM/QS-62	Design & Construction of Riprap Channel and culvert In Al Amerat (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	First
PRE/22/121	2022/MM/HQ-14	Design & Construction of Storm Water Drainage in Wilayat Boshier (E- Tender)	Rail 47	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	Excellent
PRE/22/124	2022/MM/QS-63	Treatment of Water Stagnation for Masar Project at Al Amerat (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	Second
PRE/22/127	2022/MM/HQ-15	Design & Construction of Drainage Woks at Al Mubaila South Phase -9 (E- Tender)	Rail 30	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	First
PRE/22/129	2022/MM/QS-64	Design & Construction of Channelization and protection works of Wadi Boshier (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	First
PRE/22/134	2022/MM/QS-65	Supply of Decorative Plastic Safety Barriers (E- Tender)	Rail 25	23/10/2022	13/11/2022	Specialist

Tender Conditions :-

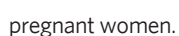
1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.

- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtci.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

Our Correspondent

To prevent flu infection, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has announced that seasonal influenza vaccines will be available at its health centres.

In a statement, it said, The Ministry of Health is administering the seasonal flu vaccine to the following target groups - people over the age of 50 years and those with chronic diseases (respiratory, heart, renal, liver, neurological, blood, and metabolic disorders, including uncontrolled diabetes and obesity) among adults and children, pilgrims and workers in the health sector. and



'The ministry calls on all the groups mentioned above to head to the nearest health centre to receive the seasonal flu vaccine to avoid the influenza infection affecting the respiratory system, which can cause serious complications.' MoH also said that the vaccine is available in private



OWS holds symposium on impact for cyclones

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Water Society (OWS), in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of North Batinah, opened the Fifth Symposium on Tropical Cyclones and Flash Floods in the wilayat of Khabourah on Monday.

The two-day symposium is being held under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Batinah, with an aim of reducing the impact of cyclones in the sultanate.

An official of OWS said, "The symposium was launched under the title 'One year after Shaheen - Preparedness, Integration and Adaptation'. It aims to discuss preparations and experiences gained in facing cyclones and storms."

The symposium provides a platform to discuss how to reduce the impact of cyclones, the

role of civil society institutions and the media in reducing the impact, and reducing the risk of floods. Additionally, it will discuss the economic and social impacts of cyclones, besides their effect on infrastructure and water facilities.

"The symposium will also shed light on government and social organisations' efforts undertaken during Cyclone Shaheen, the challenges faced in delivering aid, ways to develop a system of joint action, and identify the measures and preparations that have been achieved by the concerned authorities to confront such natural phenomena in the future," the official said.

According to the OWS official, 14 government agencies, private companies and civil institutions are participating in the symposium. Participants will also review the experiences of competent authorities in the sultanate in confronting cyclones and floods.

MHT launches winter competitions to stimulate tourism in N Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) in cooperation with the Quick Challenge Company (QCC) is organising winter sports competitions in North Sharqiyah governorate with an aim to promote heritage and tourism sites in that region.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, QCC founder Hazza al Jahmani said that the competitions, which would run from October 14 to November 25, would include a number of sporting activities that would see a big tourist inflow in the governorate.

As part of the series of event, a mountain race will be held in the wilayat of Bani Khaled on October 14, while a bicycle race has been planned for the wilayat of Ibra on October 28. The Wadi Dayqa Challenge race in the wilayat of Dima Wa al Tayeen will take place on November 4.

"A cross-country race will be held in the wilayat of Mudhaibi on November 18 and a sand race in the wilayat of Bidiyah on November 25. All races will start at 7am," Jahmani informed.

"The competitions are aimed at promoting tourist sites, boosting domestic tourism, and spreading awareness about the



importance of various sports such as hiking and swimming. The competitions will shed light on adventure tourism, discover Omani talents in various sports and help them enhance their skills."

Talking about the company's goals, he said the company holds many sports events and competitions with the aim of stimulating the tourism movement in the sultanate. In 2019, the company, in cooperation with MHT, held the

first pentathlon in Oman. "It was a great success," Jahmani said.

"In 2020, our company received the Youth Excellence Award from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. We will continue to hold sporting events

and competitions and request everyone to participate in those competitions," he added.

Those wishing to participate in the competitions can contact QCC through 95222519 or 97247557.

MAHATMA GANDHI'S STATUE UNVEILED



Indian Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan (right) unveiled the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the embassy complex on Monday. The statue, first ever in the sultanate, has been installed to honour the global peace icon's legacy of courage, truth and brotherhood (Supplied photo)

IAEA, Unesco to attend science festival

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Monday announced its readiness for the upcoming Oman Science Festival from October 10 with the participation of several global agencies including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Unesco.

"The Oman Science Festival is a forum for science and scholars, which will be held over a period of six days at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, gathering more than 70 scientific corners with 452 activities in different fields," said H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Chairman of the Main Committee of the Oman Science Festival.

Addressing a press conference on the third edition of the festival, H E Ambosaidi informed that a number of international organisations such as IAEA, the World Food Organization (FAO), Unesco, ISESCO, the University of Glasgow and the Calcio Institute of Technology from Germany have confirmed their participation in the event.

A large number of governmental, private, military and security institutions of Oman are also taking part in this mega science festival, he added.

The festival, which has entered its third edition this year, will present a number of scientific concepts, scientific competitions and workshops, and technologi-



The Oman Science Festival is a forum for science and scholars that will gather more than 70 scientific corners for 452 activities in different fields

H E DR ABDULLAH
BIN KHAMIS AMBOSAI

cal devices and applications in an attractive and enjoyable way for students, teachers and general members of society.

"The festival aims mainly to communicate science to students and members of the society in an easy and interactive way that stimulates creative thinking, and to create a positive trend towards science, innovation and scientific research. The festival also aims to keep pace with global trends

based on the dissemination of science and technology and the expected future changes and developments," the undersecretary explained.

This year's festival - themed 'With science we meet again' - will host four scientific discussion sessions that address contemporary global issues over two consecutive days, bringing together a group of professors and academics from international organisations and government institutions from Oman and outside.

H E Ambosaidi thanked and appreciated all the sponsoring companies of Oman Science Festival for their "good care and active participation in the success of this scientific event". He also lauded the government, military and security institutions, government companies, private sector players, and the media agencies for their active cooperation in holding this festival. He extended thanks and apprecia-

tion to all the staff at the MoE.

A promotional film for the festival was also launched during the press conference, after which Dr Maya al Azari, the Head of the Scientific Committee of the Festival, gave a presentation on the vision, goals, activities, and pillars of the six-day event.

Dr Maya is the educational expert in the Minister's office and the acting director of the Innovation and Scientific Olympiad Department in the ministry.

During her presentation, Dr Maya said that the festival - to be held over an estimated area of 12,000sqm - aims to spread scientific culture among the various segments of society, whether they are school students, students of higher education institutions or simply those who are interested in science.

"The festival represents a link between students and sectors concerned with science and innovation," the chief of the organising committee added.

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MOH No: 558/2022

Engineering graduate develops biosensor for pollution detection

Our Correspondent
Muscat

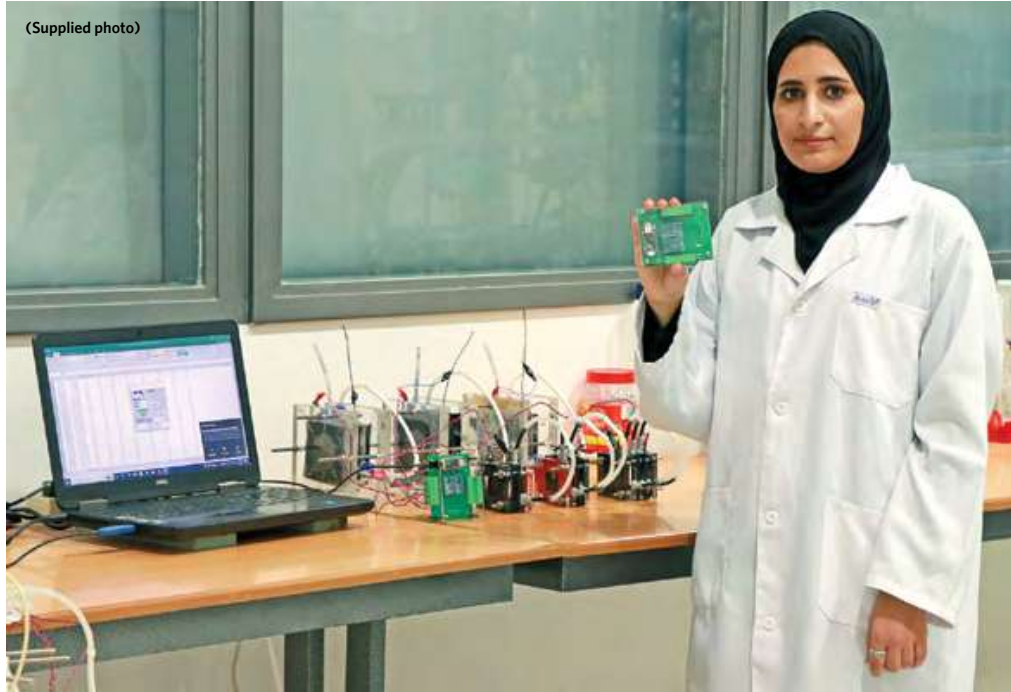
Maira Ahmed al Qaidi has developed a low-cost chemical oxygen demand (COD) real-time biosensor that provides a unique solution for detecting pollutants in wastewater.

A process engineering graduate of International Maritime College in Liwa, Maira will represent the sultanate in the final round of the Falling Walls Lab to be held on November 7 in Berlin, Germany.

Maira's project, titled 'Breaking the Wall of Unsustainable Wastewater Quality Monitor', was adjudged the best entry in the Falling Walls Lab Oman 2022 competition.

Organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) in collaboration with the Falling Walls Foundation in Germany, the Oman round of the competition saw 20 finalists fighting for the top three honours.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Maira said, "We developed a low-cost COD real-time biosen-



If we have the chance to collaborate, we can improve our product and facilitate localisation and the commercialisation process

MAIRA AHMED AL QAIDI

sor to monitor industrial wastewater plants based on the emerging technology of micro-

bial fuel cells. We provide a unique solution for detecting polluting contents in wastewater.

The research can benefit our region and the world, assisting in the transition to a greener and safer environment."

According to Maira, research and development of new technologies always have some challenges. While she has managed to overcome her challenges, "further support from MoHERI and

the industry to expand our work will be appreciated".

About her journey so far, Maira said that she attended the three-minute Falling Walls competition in her college and was among the winners. "I also attended one national competition which was held by the National University of Science and Technology, where I won first place. Additionally, I participated and won the first prize in one of the biggest undergraduate competitions in MENA, which was held in Abu Dhabi University."

About her plans for the future, she said, "This type of product can facilitate environmental management. If we have the chance to collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Recourses and the Environment Authority or any organisation connected to this field, we can improve our product and facilitate localisation and the commercialisation process. We can also fabricate biosensors for other parameters such as heavy metals, biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and toxicity, and customise these."



EA to set up new nursery for wild saplings in Al Wusta

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A new nursery will be set up in Al Wusta in line with the ongoing efforts to protect and propagate native plant species in the sultanate.

Environment Authority (EA) is calling for tenders to establish a nursery for wild saplings in Al Wusta to increase the green cover.

A statement issued by EA said, "As part of the national initiative that started in 2020 to plant 10mn wild trees in ten years, the authority is floating a tender to establish a nursery in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm."

The deadline for submission of bids is October 31.

In September, EA invited bids to establish two nurseries for wild saplings in Musandam.

In January 2020, EA, in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman, launched the initiative to plant 10mn wild trees in the next ten years. The wild tree species include ghaf, sumr, sidr, shue, tiq, talh, mitan, sarh and alalan.

Besides increasing the number of wild trees and green cover, the authority hopes to raise awareness on the importance of preserving indigenous species of trees among the community members through this project.

Registration open for 72nd Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting

Muscat - The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has announced that registration for the 72nd Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting dedicated to physiology and medicine is open till 2pm on October 13, 2022.

The 72nd Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting will be held from June 25 to 30, 2023, in Lindau, Germany. Three young Omani scientists will have the opportunity to interact with about 40 Nobel laureates as well as 600 young scientists from over 80 countries. This unique annual gathering is exclusive for outstanding undergraduate, Master's and PhD students, as well as post-doctorate researchers in the fields of physiology and medicine.

For selection, interested applicants should show excellence in their principal field of studies, ie in physiology and medicine and related disciplines (being among

the top five per cent of their class), show genuine interest and engagement in science and research, receive a letter of recommendation from an academic advisor and/or an internationally renowned scientist who knows the applicant very well, present a

Three Omani scientists will have the opportunity to interact with 40 Nobel laureates and 600 young scientists

comprehensive CV together with an application, be fluent in English and be willing to actively participate in discussions with laureates and young scientists. Other evaluation criteria include age (not older than 35 years of age at the time of the meeting with excep-

tions for special cases, eg maternity leave), not have participated in previous Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings, submit a fully completed application, and commit to being present in Lindau for the full duration of the meeting.

Interested applicants can register through <https://www.trc.gov.om/trcweb/topics/research/programs/6696>

For further inquiries, applicants can email lindauM@trc.gov.om or call 22305548.

The Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings aim to build the capability of Omani researchers, transfer knowledge and exchange experiences, refine the scientific and research skills of Omani youth, give them the opportunity to get acquainted with Nobel laureates, know the latest scientific developments, and create partnerships and links with scientists from different countries of the world.

NO INJURIES REPORTED IN SHOP FIRE IN SALALAH



The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said on Monday that firefighters managed to extinguish a fire that broke out in a commercial shop in the Wilayat of Salalah. According to CDAA, no injuries were recorded. 'The authority calls on institutions and companies to adhere to safety requirements in commercial shops to avoid risks,' CDAA said in statement (Supplied photo)

Al Khabourah Castle to be privatised

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is looking to partner with the private sector to develop Al Khabourah Castle in North Batinah as part of its plan to privatise management of forts and castles.

The castle is located less than 2km from the main centre of Sohar. It has a courtyard in the centre, with the main entrance on the northern side.

The ministry stated that interested companies can submit a proposal that includes information on how it will promote the castle commercially and culturally. Bids must highlight the architectural uniqueness of the castle and involve the local community in various cultural events.

The deadline for submission of tenders is November 24.

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*Rates as on October 03
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US inflation index shows signs of slowing in August

A closely-watched measure of US inflation showed the annual pace of price increases slowed slightly in August as energy costs fell and increases in food costs eased, according to government data.

But while the data moved in the right direction, it may not provide much comfort to President Joe Biden or the Federal Reserve since inflation remains at the highest level since the early 1980s.

The Fed's preferred inflation measure, the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, increased 6.2 per cent from August 2021, down slightly from the pace in July and from the 7.0 per cent peak in June, the Commerce Department reported.

Inflation picked up speed last year and has accelerated this year as global supply chain snarls and worker shortages pushed prices higher - factors worsened by Russia's war on Ukraine, which sent food and energy prices soaring worldwide.

Energy prices increased 24.7 per cent over the past year while food prices are up 12.4 per cent, the report showed.



Operations begin at new power and water project in SEZAD

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Centralized Utilities Company (Marafiq) - a joint venture between OQ and Gulf Energy Development Corporation of Thailand - on Monday announced the partial commissioning of the Integrated Power and Water Plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The new plant will supply electricity and desalinated water for Duqm Refinery (OQ8) and Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO).

This outstanding achievement comes in line with Marafiq's efforts to develop the utilities sector in Duqm under the central utilities services agreement with SEZAD, the company said in a statement to Oman News Agency.

Marafiq had established a subsidiary company, Duqm Power Company, to develop the

The potential capacity of the Duqm Integrated Power and Water Plant is 326MW of electricity and 36,000 cubic metres of water per day

Duqm Integrated Power and Water Plant and a 132kV high-voltage line project to transmit electricity from the plant to Ras Markaz Oil Storage Project, which is located around 80km away.

The plant has completed major commissioning tests and started supplying electricity and water to Duqm Refinery (OQ8).

According to Eng Abdullah Mohammed al Hashmi, executive director of Marafiq, the potential capacity of the Duqm

Integrated Power and Water Plant is 326MW of electricity and 36,000 cubic metres of water per day. The plant includes a seawater intake facility with a supply capacity of 1.5mn cubic metre per day.

"This project boosted Marafiq's contribution to the In-Country Value with over US\$56mn invested in local products and services. Furthermore, nearly 60 training opportunities were provided for Omanis and five other training-for-employment opportunities were offered for the community in Duqm," Hashmi said.

He stressed that the Duqm Integrated Power and Water Plant marks one of the significant investments for OQ Group and Oman Investment Authority in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. It comes among a number of other investments aimed at thriving the investment environment in the economic zone.

OPEC+ tipped to make big cut in oil output

London, UK - Major oil-producing nations led by Saudi Arabia and Russia are expected to make this week their biggest output cut since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in efforts to buttress prices.

Energy prices soared after Russia invaded Ukraine earlier this year, pushing inflation to decades-high levels that have put pressure on economies across the world.

But crude prices have fallen in recent months on concerns over demand amid a slowdown in the global economy.

The 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), led by Riyadh, and their 10 allies headed by Moscow will hold on Wednesday their first in-person meeting at the group's headquarters in Vienna since March 2020.

Collectively known as OPEC+, the alliance drastically slashed output by almost 10mn barrels per day in April 2020 to reverse a massive drop in crude prices caused by Covid lockdowns.

OPEC+ began to raise production last year after the market improved - output returned to pre-pandemic levels this year, but only on paper as some members struggled to meet their quotas.

The group agreed last month on a slight cut of 100,000 bpd from October, the first in more than a year.

Analysts now expect OPEC+ to decide to take one million bpd out of the market from Novem-

Oil prices jump 5% on OPEC+ cut hopes

Hong Kong, China - Oil prices jumped nearly five per cent on Monday as reports said OPEC and other top producers considered slashing output.

Around 1230 GMT the price of a barrel of Western Texas Intermediate (WTI) oil was up 5.0 per cent at US\$83.48, while the price of Brent oil was 4.5 per cent higher at US\$88.95 per barrel.

The jump in prices on Monday comes after both main contracts suffered hefty losses in recent months on demand



fears caused by an expected recession in major economies.

The losses caused prices to hit levels last seen in January, having wiped out all the gains following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

AFP

ber at Wednesday's meeting.

"There's been plenty of rumours about how the alliance will respond to the deteriorating economic outlook and lower prices," said Craig Erlam, analyst at trading platform OANDA.

"A sizeable cut now looks on the cards, the question is whether it will be large enough to offset the demand destruction caused by the impending economic downturn," he added.

After soaring close to US\$140 per barrel in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, oil prices have dropped below the US\$90 mark.

According to the UBS bank, a cut of at least 500,000 bpd would be necessary to stop the price plunge.

In anticipation of Wednes-

day's meeting, oil prices jumped nearly five per cent on Monday, with Brent North Sea crude, the international benchmark, reaching US\$88.55 - still far from its March peak.

Stephen Brennock, an analyst with PVM Energy, said OPEC+ would "want to reassert its influence" when the group meets this week. "After all, the producer group has lost control over the oil market in recent weeks," he said.

It remains to be seen how the United States and other major oil consumers will react to any OPEC+ decision to slash output.

Consumer countries have pushed for OPEC+ to open taps more widely to bring down prices - calls which the group has largely ignored.

AFP

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OQ Gas Network and GPS sign deal for maintenance services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ Gas Network has signed a long-term agreement with Gulf Petrochemicals Services Company (GPS) for maintenance and engineering services.

As per the agreement, GPS will provide the entire gamut of day-to-day maintenance portfolio related to OQ's gas network assets across Oman.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Mansoor al Abdali, managing director of OQ Gas Network said, "This long-term service contract is vital to our business as it contributes to our goals towards reliability and availability. This agreement will serve as an effective platform to bring innovation and efficiency in serving our customers.

"The scope and scale of this contract is significant. We are happy to partner with GPS as this reinforces our commitment to nurture and mature domestic organisations having capabilities of competing locally and internationally and supporting the country's economic growth.



OQ Gas Network is delighted to support such organisations to deliver sustainable outcomes in our facilities - safely and proficiently."

Abdali further said, "We strongly believe that this contract will immensely contribute to our drive to create value through localization and enhancing In-Country Value. With long-standing business relationship,

we believe GPS is well aligned with OQ's expectations and priorities."

Naveen Chana, general manager of Gulf Petrochemicals Services, said, "We are honoured that OQ Gas Network has selected us again to provide them with ongoing maintenance services.

We will continue to provide top-notch service as we continue

to renew this new business partnership."

The contract scope comprises preventive, corrective and predictive maintenance, call-off services and third-party services and also incorporates management and execution of minor scale EPC projects (new pipeline connection) which facilitates quicker project initiation and rapid mobilisation.

CBO participates in Gulf Payments board meeting

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Gulf Payments Company's (GPC) board of directors held its 11th meeting on Monday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The meeting was attended by H E Tahir Salim al Amri, executive president of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and deputy director of Gulf Payments Company.

The meeting discussed the agenda items, the decision-implementation follow-up report,



update of the articles of association of the Gulf Payments Company and the activities of the auditing and review committee.

The meeting also reviewed AFAQ Payment System, which aims at providing RTGS service between GCC central banks, supporting transactions using GCC local currencies and facilitating clearing and financial settlement processes.

ONA

UK drops tax cut for wealthy in budget U-turn after uproar

Birmingham, UK – Britain's under-fire Conservative government on Monday announced a dramatic U-turn on a controversial tax cut for high-earners, part of a debt-driven economic package that has bombed with the markets, electorate and much of the ruling party.

The abrupt reversal by Prime Minister Liz Truss and finance minister Kwasi Kwarteng raised questions about their right-wing policy agenda less than a month after taking power and a day after both vowed to stay the course.

"We get it, and we have listened," the pair tweeted almost simultaneously, as they revealed the 45 per cent top rate of income tax would remain.

But their contentious plans still comprise axing a cap on bankers' bonuses and reversing a planned rise in corporation tax, as well as a recent hike in national insurance contributions.

At the same time, they have refused to rule out cuts to spending and benefits amid Britain's worst cost-of-living crisis in generations.

The perceived unfairness of the package has ignited a political storm as the Tories gather for their annual conference in Birmingham.

On the markets, the intention to pay for the tax cuts with billions more in extra borrowing had sent the pound tumbling to a record low against the dollar and UK government bond yields soaring.

The pound rebounded Monday as they partially reversed course, with Kwarteng arguing in a series of broadcast interviews



Britain's Prime Minister Liz Truss (right) walks with No 10 Special Advisor Clare Evans, as she arrives to attend the second day of the annual Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham on Monday (AFP)

that the top rate tax cut had become a "massive distraction".

"We've decided not to proceed with that because it was drowning out the elements of an excellent plan," he insisted, pointing to a popular if costly scheme to cap energy bills.

Asked if he had considered resigning, Kwarteng told the BBC: "Not at all."

The finance chief was hastily rewriting his speech later Monday at the Tory conference, when he had been due to say: "We must stay the course".

On Sunday, Truss had admitted communication errors in how the September 23 economic

package had been presented, but agreed she was "absolutely committed" to abolishing the top tax rate.

Within 24 hours, the 47-year-old prime minister – only in the role since September 6 – had performed one of most striking government U-turns in recent memory. Truss told the BBC she had not discussed axing the high-earners' tax band with her cabinet, who only seemed to learn of the reversal along with the public on Monday.

She also appeared to distance herself from the move by claiming "it was a decision that the chancellor made", but her

Grant Shapps, who was refused a cabinet job by Truss, welcomed her scrapping the tax cut, which he told BBC radio had been planned with "grossly insensitive timing".

'Pragmatism'

With the U-turn, the stakes have soared for Truss as she prepares to close the party conference with a speech Wednesday.

A raft of polls have found Truss and her economic package deeply unpopular, alongside plummeting ratings for the Tories.

Some surveys showed Labour with mammoth leads of up to 33 points – its biggest since the heyday of its former prime minister Tony Blair in the late 1990s.

Labour's finance spokeswoman Rachel Reeves said the climbdown "comes too late for the families who will pay higher mortgages and higher prices for years to come" following the recent market turmoil.

"The Tories have destroyed their economic credibility and damaged trust in the British economy," she said.

Party members in Birmingham appeared more divided.

"We did see some pragmatism this morning," Sarah Smith, 47, a councillor in southern England, told AFP, adding it would have been "more damaging" to persevere.

She said Truss needed to refocus on the electorate that handed her predecessor Boris Johnson an 80-seat majority in 2019, and "deliver a certain agenda. It wasn't this one," she noted.

AFP



EU ministers urge unity to deal with energy crisis

Luxembourg – EU finance ministers on Monday pleaded for unity after Germany announced a 200-billion-euro (US\$195bn) plan to help German households and businesses pay for high energy prices, amid accusations that the EU's biggest economy was acting alone.

Europe is struggling with historically high energy prices as it faces an early autumn cold snap and a coming winter almost certainly to be endured without crucial Russian gas supplies because of the war in Ukraine.

Many EU countries have announced national programmes to shield consumers from the high prices. But Germany went the furthest on Friday when it announced its mammoth plan, which will see help pouring to Germans for two years.

Arriving to talk with his euro-zone counterparts, German Finance Minister Christian Lindner insisted the spending was "proportionate" to the size of Germany's economy and said his goal was to use as little of the money as possible.

But Germany's largesse ranked several EU capitals, some of which feared their industries could take severe blows while Germany's sits protected, deforming the EU's single market.

Outgoing Italian prime minister Mario Draghi has slammed

Berlin for its lack of solidarity and coordination with EU partners.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire, without directly criticizing Berlin, called on partners to agree a common strategy against the price shock and for countries to refrain from going it alone.

"The more this strategy is coordinated, united, the better it is for all of us," he said.

Others pointed to the unprecedented solidarity shown in the Covid-19 crisis in which the 27 EU nations, against all expectations, approved a jointly financed 750bn-euro recovery plan.

"Solidarity is not only on the German shoulders, I think this is something that we have to deliver at European level," said EU economics affairs commissioner Paolo Gentiloni.

"We have very good examples from the previous crisis on how solidarity can react to a crisis and also reassure financial markets. I think that this is our goal," he said.

While a Covid-style recovery plan is not in the cards for now, Le Maire said 200bn euros in loans and 20bn euros in aid should be devoted to REPowerEU, a programme to help countries break their dependence on Russian gas.

AFP



Gas stopped leaking from Nord Stream 1: Swedish Coast Guard

Stockholm, Sweden – Sweden's coast guard said Monday it could no longer see any leaks from the Nord Stream 1 pipeline in the Baltic Sea, but a smaller leak from Nord Stream 2 was still visible.

"The larger leak is now no longer visible on the surface while the smaller one instead has increased slightly," the coast guard said in a statement.

The observations were made during an overflight on Monday at around 8:00 am (0600 GMT) of the two pipelines suspected to have been damaged in an act of sabotage, it added.

"At that time, the smaller leak was approximately 30 metres in diameter," the coast guard said.

A spokesman for the operator of the Nord Stream pipelines, Nord Stream AG, said Saturday that the leaking from the Nord Stream 2 pipeline had stopped because an equilibrium had been reached between the gas and water pressure.

Gazprom, which owns 51 per cent of the pipeline project, said

Monday "it was working to lower the pressure in the B line of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline" by pumping out the natural gas of the pipe, so that the pipeline could be examined safely.

Both Nord Stream 1 and 2 are made up of two lines and both leaks on Nord Stream 2 were on the A line.

The Russian energy giant added that it did not rule out the possibility that the Nord Stream 2 B pipeline could still be used to deliver gas.

"If the decision is taken to start deliveries via the Nord Stream 2 B-line, natural gas will be pumped into the pipeline after the integrity of the system has been checked and the supervisory authorities have confirmed such a possibility," Gazprom said in a statement on its Telegram channel.

Built in parallel to the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, Nord Stream 2 was intended to double the capacity for Russian gas imports to Germany.

But Berlin blocked the opening

of the newly-completed Nord Stream 2 in the days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

All of the leaks, which were discovered on Monday last week, are in the Baltic Sea off the Danish island of Bornholm.

Both Washington and Moscow have denied responsibility.

Danish authorities had estimated that all the gas trapped in the pipelines would have escaped by Sunday.

Two of the leaks are located in the Swedish exclusive economic zone, and the two others in the Danish one.

The Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, which connect Russia to Germany, have been at the centre of geopolitical tensions as Russia cut gas supplies to Europe in suspected retaliation against Western sanctions following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

While the pipelines are not currently in operation, they both still contained gas before they fell victim to apparent sabotage.

AFP

Europe must lower winter gas consumption: IEA

Paris, France – Europe must ramp down gas consumption to survive the winter given perilously low stocks amid fears of a total cut off of Russian supplies, the International Energy Agency said Monday.

Prices have exploded over recent months with a slump in Russian provision – Moscow's riposte to sanctions imposed for invading Ukraine – leaving Europe to seek alternative sources, led by massive procurement of imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Norway.

The IEA warned of "unprecedented risks" of shortages unless demand is reined in, estimating cuts of nine percent are needed compared with the average of the past five years if the continent is to make it through to the spring with "adequate" provision.

"The outlook for gas markets



remains clouded, not least because of Russia's reckless and unpredictable conduct, which has shattered its reputation as a reliable supplier. But all the signs point to markets remaining very tight well into 2023," the agency warned in its latest quarterly report. The Paris-based IEA said diversification had at least enabled gas stockage facilities to stand at almost 90 per cent of

capacity at the end of September but warned of the potential consequences of an entire shut-off of Russian pipeline taps.

A complete Russian shut-off from November 1 would require demand to drop 13 per cent to sustain adequate storage levels in the context of an "artificial scarcity," the IEA said.

It warned that in such a scenario, "implementing gas saving

measures will be crucial to minimise storage withdrawals and keep inventories at an adequate level until the end of the heating season".

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine and sharp reductions in natural gas supplies to Europe are causing significant harm to consumers, businesses and entire economies -- not just in Europe but also in emerging and developing economies," said Keisuke Sadamori, the IEA's Director of Energy Markets and Security, given current "extreme" price levels.

Overall gas consumption fell more than ten percent across Europe – and 15 per cent in industry – between January and August compared with the same period last year, as many firms cut production to allay soaring fuel costs, the IEA said.

AFP

Tesla says deliveries increased in Q3

Washington, US – New vehicle deliveries by Tesla increased in the third quarter, beating the previous three months during which its Chinese factory was shuttered for multiple weeks, the US electric automaker announced Sunday.

Between July and September, Tesla delivered a total of 343,380 vehicles around the world, the company led by Elon Musk said in a statement.

That represents an increase of 43 per cent over the same period last year, and 35 per cent more than the second quarter of 2022.

While the Q3 results show a return to growth for Tesla deliveries, the total number was at the very bottom end of analyst esti-



mates, which were between 343,000 and 370,000.

The company said it was facing headwinds with regard to "vehicle transportation capacity," which it hoped to resolve with better distribution among its factories – including recently

opened sites in Berlin and Austin, Texas.

Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives described the quarter as "nothing to write home about" in a note to investors, while the market would likely be "disappointed by the softer delivery

number in 3Q."

"That said, we view this more of a logistical speed bump rather than the start of a softer delivery trajectory," he added.

Tesla has managed to increase deliveries every quarter since the beginning of the pandemic, with the exception of Q2 this year, when the company was forced to close its Chinese factory. Tesla also reported an increase in auto output, with 365,923 vehicles produced in the third quarter – 54 per cent more than the same period last year, though a pace that would likely prevent it from reaching 1.5mn vehicles total for the year, as Musk had estimated in April.

AFP

Alizz Islamic Bank, Etihad offers 12% discount on tickets

Alizz Islamic Bank and Etihad Airways have announced exclusive 12 per cent discounts on Etihad Airways economy and business class tickets for any destination in for all Alizz Islamic Bank retail or corporate debit and credit card holders.

This discount can be received by visiting the Alizz Islamic Bank website or the bank's social media account and clicking the direct link (<https://www.etihad.com/alizzar>) to the Etihad Airways website. The customer will be requested to enter certain details of their Alizz Islamic Bank card and then they will immediately receive a 12 per cent discount on the base ticket price. For example, if a customer buys a ticket with RO300 as base ticket price, he/she will receive an RO36 discount on the total ticket price.

The discounts shall apply until October 31 and is valid for the purchase of any ticket that can be used for travel anytime until the end of June next year. Mohamed al Ghasani, AGM - Chief Consumer Banking Officer at Alizz Islamic Bank, said, "This partnership with Etihad Airways comes within the framework of an exclusive variety of discounts and offers for our customers. We are proud to always offer the best sharia'a compliant services."



ISACA Muscat chapter celebrates CommuniTy Day

ISACA Muscat chapter has on Saturday marked its CommuniTy Day in a day-long celebration that the members say left a 'long-lasting impression' in their minds.

'It was a huge success with heartwarming stories, amazing photos, and long-lasting impressions we left on each other and those around us,' an ISACA statement said.

ISACA CommuniTy Day became an annual event since 2019 when ISACA Global 50th anniversary year was celebrated.

ISACA CommuniTy Day offers an opportunity to celebrate their purpose as digital trust professionals by enabling the positive potential of people.

'When ISACA members, staff, families and friends spend a few hours one day a year giving back to their local communities, we can truly change the world,' it added.

ISACA Muscat chapters organised local activities on October 1 beginning with a cycling event flagged off at 5.30am.

In 'Bring a Smile' initiative carried out by Musanna College of Technology-UTAS, the team members distributed gifts to people and captured their smile of happiness and joy.

Later in the evening, the ISACA Muscat team distributed organic bags in Lulu Hypermarket Ruwi to spread awareness against the use of plastic and the importance of going green.

Sporting events to boost ME tourism by 30%: Musafir.com



Musafir.com, a leading online travel agency headquartered in the UAE, has revealed in its bi-annual travel trend report that sporting events will augment the tourism and hospitality economy up to 30 per cent in the region.

The Middle East is becoming the world's fastest-growing sports tourism destination valued at an estimated US\$600bn, according to the World Trade Organization. Major events such as FIFA World Cup Qatar, Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, etc. will give Gulf tourism a boost in the last quarter of the year.

Amongst the GCC countries, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar will see the majority arrival of travellers mainly from Asia, Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the UK.



Floward unveils Qatar World Cup official licensed products

Floward, the go-to online flowers and gifts delivery destination in MENA and UK, announced its appointment as an official FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 licensee, making the first ever company to be awarded this license in the flowers industry.

Floward made the announcement at an extravagant event held at The Ritz Carlton Doha on September 28. Excitement electrified the attendees where the official licensed product line was unveiled.

The event was attended by different officials, dignitaries, celebrities, and football legends including Ricardo Kaká, David Villa, Didier Drogba, Iker Casillas, coach and former player John Terry, and Qatar's own Khalfan Ibrahim Khalfan.

The Official Licensed Products line includes exclusively designed premium arrangements, embossed with the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 official emblem. The main star of the show was the golden football vase, revealed as the lotus-shaped pedestal unfurled. While all items in the product line will be available on Floward's website and app, the golden football vase will be put up for auction at a later date. Further details are to be announced soon.

Floward Chairman and CEO Abdulaziz B al Loughani said, "We are proud to be the first in our industry to get this



We are proud to be the first in our industry to get this license from FIFA and be involved in an event with the magnitude of the FIFA World Cup. We pride ourselves in always being active in our communities and taking part in their events

Abdulaziz B al Loughani

license from FIFA and be involved in an event with the magnitude of the FIFA World Cup. We pride ourselves in always being active in our communities and taking part in their events and

and we thank the Qatari government for the support they always give us and wish them all the success in hosting this event."

The event, hosted by Qatari comedian Hamad al Amari was a lavish event suitable for the occasion. Attendees were serenaded by classical music as they had the opportunity to interact and take pictures with the football legends in attendance. There was something entertaining to see in every corner, from flower adorned still walkers to live painting and other activities. Guests left with specially designed Floward souvenirs from the event that commemorate the event.

The official collection line is now available for viewing and purchase on Floward application and website.

Established in 2017, Floward is a full-fledged e-commerce solution that offers prime fresh-cut flowers sourced from the best growers and farmers around the world and arranged locally by a team of florists, and designers. Floward also offers cakes, chocolate, and perfumes curated by the region's most exciting designers bundled with its flower arrangements and manages last-mile same-day delivery to ensure the best customer experience.

The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 is scheduled to take place from November 20 to December 18 across eight stadia hosting 32 teams.

Al Hayat Hospital marks World Heart Day

Al Hayat International Hospital celebrated the World Heart Day on September 29 holding several events linked to heart health.

'World Heart Day is an opportunity for everyone to think about the best ways To use the heart to support humanity, preserve the environment and your own health,' the hospital stated.

AL Hayat has completed 26 years of its glorious journey in healthcare sector and is committed to provide quality healthcare with affordable price, the hospital said in a press statement.

Hospital chairman Dr K P Raman (renowned cardiologist), National Heart Centre director Dr Mohammed Deeb (senior interventional cardiologist), Medical Director Dr Zaheerudeen Mohammed, senior operations manager Avinash Prasannan, and operations manager Pradeep Kumar took part in the celebration, the statement added.

Dr Raman, who has a legacy of more than 30 years of service



in the field of cardiology, said that this year's World Heart Day theme 'Use heart for every heart' "inspires us to provide equal opportunities and facilities for every heart patient and communities".

"It tells us the importance of preventive heart care. I urge everyone to take a pledge on this World Heart Day to adopt heart healthy practices: Good diet, exercises, quitting bad habits and regular heart screening," he ex-

horted, further informing that as part of their social commitment Al Hayat would be providing free cardiology consultation with ECG on October 8 and 9.

On his part, Dr Deeb said, "World Heart Day is an important occasion to raise awareness on cardiac diseases and encourage people to maintain a heart-healthy lifestyle."

This year's theme comes with harnessing the power of digital

health to improve awareness, prevention and management of cardio vascular diseases.

Medical Director Dr Mohammed pointed out that at the Al Hayat Hospital, "we play a key role in educating and spreading awareness to the public community".

Senior operations manager Prasannan said Al Hayat Hospital would be focusing on quality healthcare at affordable rates.

Zubair EDC hosts 'Tajribati' session to discuss SMEs' growth

The Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC) recently hosted its 'Tajribati' session at Bait Al Zubair shedding light on ways to invest available resources to foster further enterprise development.

Ishaq Hilal al Shariyani, CEO of the Eghna Academy for Economic Consulting and Training, was the guest speaker at the event attended by several entrepreneurs.

The session, moderated by Ali Shaker, the head of Business Development and Partnerships at Zubair EDC, delved into a number of topics including a detailed overview of the products and services offered by Zubair EDC, together with advice on how to invest resources into the technical, marketing, administrative, financial, and legal aspects of a business, as well as on how to invest into social resources to boost consumer confidence.



The 'Tajribati' session highlights topics that contribute to the growth and development of an entrepreneur's business.

To achieve this, the forum examines several successful project management outcomes and models to provide SME owners with helpful knowledge and information for the optimal management of their enterprises and commercial projects.

"We are grateful for Ishaq al

Shariyani's participation in the Tajribati session. His experience and expertise have been invaluable in helping us achieve our goals for this session, which shed light on the most effective ways to manage available resources within a business," said Ali Shaker, adding that several other entrepreneurs also shared their experiences developing their businesses and using available resources to maximise profits.

ICAO assembly to focus on sustainability, preparedness

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) urged the 41st Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to address top industry issues, which include agreeing to a Long-term Aspirational Goal (LTAG) for the decarbonisation of international aviation, strengthening of the landmark Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) and implementation of lessons learnt from the economically and socially painful destruction of global connectivity due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The industry’s expectations for the 41st ICAO Assembly are ambitious but realistic given the challenges that we face. For example, governments must learn the lessons of COVID-19 so that the next pandemic does not result in closed borders bringing social and economic hardship. We also need governments to support the industry’s commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 with their own commitment and corresponding policy measures on decarbonization. The right decisions by governments can accelerate the recovery from COVID-19 and strengthen the foundations for aviation’s decarbonisation,” said Willie Walsh, IATA’s Director General. IATA has submitted or sponsored over 20 papers on the assembly’s agenda.

New Lamborghini Urus S defining luxury, versatility

Automobili Lamborghini announces the Urus S: the successor to the original Urus that established a new Super SUV niche in the luxury segment. The Urus S delivers increased power combined with luxurious versatility and presence to confirm its status as the ultimate lifestyle Lamborghini Super SUV, alongside the new Urus Performante for those seeking maximum sports performance.



“The Urus has proven its appeal for those seeking the decisive combination of the sportiest SUV and a Lamborghini to drive every day: the Urus S sits perfectly alongside the new Urus Performante, for those choosing the purest sublimation of performance, luxury and versatility,” said Stephan Winkelmann, Chairman and CEO of Automobili Lamborghini.

“The Urus’ commercial success, with more than 20,000 vehicles produced, is testament to its credentials as the first and enduring Super SUV: The Urus S elevates that reputation.”

Oman Air conducts 500 simulator training sessions



Continuing to set benchmarks in quality and safety, Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, has carried out almost 500 simulator training sessions, 83 courses for pilots, and 230 cabin crew courses over the first half of 2022 alone.

The airline also saw the promotion of seven First Officers to Commanders and 11 Second Officers to First Officers. With all training provided in-house at Oman Air’s Flight Training Centre (OAFTC) in Muscat, it continues to enhance its operational capabilities in line with international standards, provide rewarding job opportunities to talented young Omanis, and drive the development of Oman’s aviation sector.

Captain Nasser bin Ahmed al Salmi, Chief Operating Officer at Oman Air, said, “In order to meet the demands of a constantly evolving industry, we continue to invest heavily in training and capacity building. Our various flight operations programmes are designed to strengthen essential technical and safety skills in line with current global aviation standards. Furthermore, where we used to have to send trainees abroad, we are now able to provide all the training they need at our on-site facility.”

Global Collage conducts graduation ceremony



The Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) in Muscat held its second graduation ceremony at Madinat Al Irfan Theatre, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, on September 28.

The ceremony was officiated by Professor Steve West, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol, United Kingdom and attended by H E Dr Abdullah Abbas, Chairman of Board of trustees of GCET, Professor Geoffrey Elliott, Dean of GCET, members of board of trustees and board of directors of GCET, representatives from government and private sector, and embassies.

Professor Steve West expressed his

pride in this graduation saying that the ambitions with which the UWE had commenced its partnership with GCET in 2016 have been realised today.

“It is really wonderful!” he exclaimed. “We are continuing to enhance our partnership with GCET, which extends beyond teaching, learning, and research. UWE supports GCET in achieving its strategic goals which are aligned with the National Strategy for Education 2040 and Oman Vision 2040,” the UEW vice chancellor underscored.

Over 700 students have graduated from GCET since the start of the global pandemic in early 2020, while 450 attended the second graduation ceremony last Wednesday.

Prof Geoffrey Elliott, Dean of GCET, however, reminded the students that learning does not end by graduation, it is a continuous life-long process.

“We at GCET hope that graduates have developed their skills and gained knowledge and have made life-long friendships. We at GCET, in partnership with the University of the West of England, continue to be committed to providing a caring, modern, and quality-driven, higher education experience in the Sultanate of Oman,” Prof Elliott added.

Salim al Nabhani, a fresh graduate in Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering said that he was very proud to be part of this prestigious ceremony

where he celebrated his graduation as part of the second batch of GCET.

“This day is a day to remember and the harvest of all the efforts, long nights, hard work, and continuous quest to achieve big dreams and ambitions. We are moving today towards achieving higher and bigger goals, to be a part of this wonderful country and work together to achieve the best and the good of Oman and the world utilising our education, talents, skills, and capabilities we developed during our study time.”

Of the total 450 graduates, 430 were awarded Bachelor’s degrees and 20 with Master’s degrees.

GCET offers diverse and unique academic programmes and study options.

Shumoukh building opens in South Mabella

Al Rawnaq Al Zahabi celebrated the opening of its debut investment in the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday by inaugurating its new building (Al Shumoukh building) in South Mabella in the capital city Muscat.

The 11-storeyed building comprising 43 flats and commercial stores was developed by Shawamikh Golden Gulf to offer a qualitative leap in South Mabella area due to its proximity to all services, a press release said.

The new project is in line with Oman Vision 2040 which encourages investment and enhances the role of the private sector.

The opening ceremony included holy Quran recitation followed by a speech delivered by Dr Mohammed bin



Musalam bin Ham al Amri of Al Rawnaq Al Zahabi. Dr Amri expressed his delight to take part in laying a brick in the foundation of the Omani-UAE relationship. He noted that a number of residential

and commercial units will be made available at competitive prices over the upcoming period.

Addressing the event, Said al Shueili, Chairman of the Board of Directors of

Shawamikh Golden Gulf, expressed sentiments of allegiance and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. He elaborated on the project’s unique advantages and distinguished location.

Al Shumoukh building is a testimony of a successful collaboration between the firms which made a great effort to complete the construction in a record time of less than a year using post-tensioning technique.

On the sidelines of the opening ceremony, an agreement was inked between Al Rawnaq Al Zahabi, represented by Dr Mohammed bin Ham al Ameri and Shawamikh Golden Gulf, represented by Said bin Salim bin Khanfour al Shueili, for the construction of a nine-storeyed mall in the same area.

Aster Medcity in Kochi excels in robotic surgery, ranks 4th in world

Aster Medcity, Kochi announced the successful completion of 1750 minimal access robotic surgeries (MARS) using the da Vinci system in an event conducted in the southern Indian city recently.

Being one of the most active robotic surgery centres in the state of Kerala, Medcity performed 230 kidney transplants alone via MARS. Robotic surgeries are highly specialised and advanced minimal access procedures that are performed by surgeons with the help of a surgery robot like the da Vinci at Aster Medcity.

Being a minimal access procedure, robotic surgeries are safer and surgeons can ensure high precision results compared to conventional surgeries. The associated pain, complications, blood loss and scarring are way

lesser compared to normal surgeries, which in turn translates to faster recovery.

The hospital stay and post-surgery recovery period are minimal as well, and patients can get back to their normal lives in a very short time. Led by a team of highly skilled robotic surgery experts, Medcity offers robotic procedures in Urology, Gynaecology, Oncology, gastroenterology and liver transplant for patients of all ages.

“MARS is a highly advanced robotic procedure that performs minimally invasive surgeries with utmost precision. With the expertise of robotic tools, it is possible to perform operations on any sensitive part of the body with great precision. Therefore, complex surgeries can be completed very skillfully and successfully,” said Dr Kishore T A, senior



consultant - Urology, Aster Medcity.

Aster Medcity is the first fa-

cility in Kerala to offer high-precision robotic surgeries using the da Vinci surgery system.

One of the only facilities in the country to offer highly specialised robotic liver and pan-

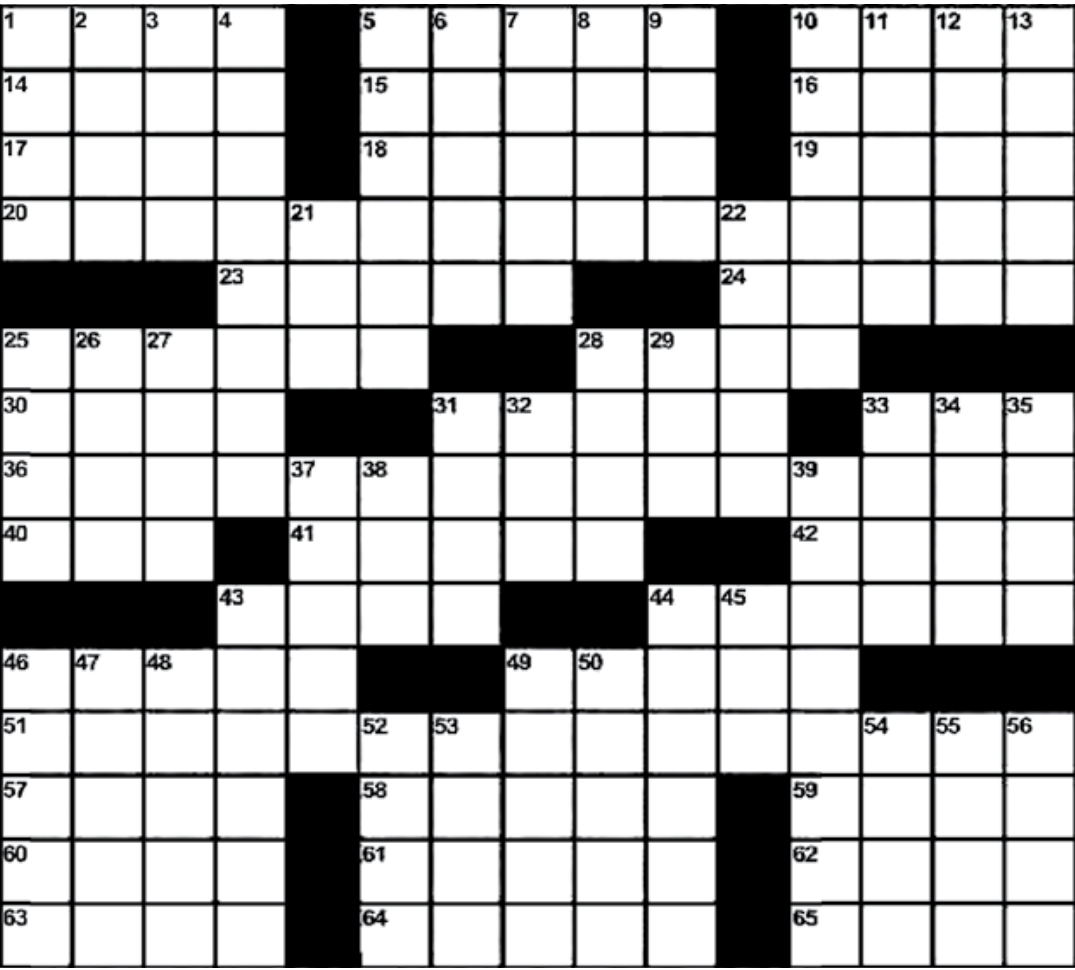
creas surgery, Aster MARS is the third centre in the world to perform a robotic transvaginal

renal transplant surgery and the first in India to perform a robotic kidney tumour removal.

“As a leader in the healthcare society, we own the privilege of introducing the best and most advanced treatment options available in the world. With our advances in robotic surgery, we will be able to be more responsible and implement advanced medical technologies like this in the future as well,” said Farhan Yasin, Regional Director of Aster Hospital, Kerala & Oman Cluster.

“This state-of-the-art facility offers our patients advanced surgical options and help them to regain and lead their normal life. With the support of Ministry of Health complex medical services similar to the present case would be done in the upcoming Aster Royal Hospital in Muscat.”

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) United voting group
5) La_ (opera house)
10) Unappetizing food
14) Turner of old Holly-wood
15) Of musical sound
16) 12-point type
17) Dec. 24 and 31
18) "Astro Boy" genre
19) Feed store items
20) Household conven-iences
23) Apres-ski drink
24) Lift the spirits of
25) Colorless, odorless fuel gas
28) Miner's exit
30) Blacken with fire
31) Athenian lawman
33) "Emergency!" at sea
36) Not bleed?
40) It may have a silver lining?
41) Toy that hums
42) Bridge toll unit
43) Camp Lejeune, e.g.
44) Fire-suppression rake
46) Human moles, e.g.

49) In a vertical direction, nautically
51) In need of a lifeboat
57) Enthusiastic about
58) Borneo ape
59) Sundial 8
60) Order to a broker, sometimes
61) Bar Harbor locale
62) Slight advantage
63) Iditarod necessity
64) Immigrants'_ Island
65) Musical symbol

DOWN

1) Used a Breathalyzer
2) Kilauea outpouring
3) Billfold bills, often
4) Emergency plastic
5) What a batter gets into
6) Zaire, today
7) Inner personality, to Jung
8) Mongolian monk
9) Guinness who was Obi-Wan
10) Pampered to a fault
11) Thick jungle vine
12) Eight people as a unit
13) Antiquated

21) Electrically charged particle
22) "Die Lorelei" poet Heinrich
25) Sound on the re-bound
26) God with a hammer
27) Alan of "Gilligan's Is-land"
28) Sax type
29) "How dumb ofme!"
31) 42 regular, e.g.
32) Lennon's bride
33) Medieval German re-gion, to the French
34) Christiania, now
35) Tool building
37) Edict of the Russian tsar
38)Faux_
39) Easy task
43) "Look at that!" old-style
44) Combines into one company
45) Truck driver's com-partment
46) Cheese choice

47) Comic-strip unit
48) Basketwork fiber
49) To no_ (worthless)
50) Old copper coin of Finland
52) Stadium with a roof
53) Like some testimony
54) Man Friday
55) Fixes, as fights
56) Program for losers

NOTE PAD

FARSIPASTAPSI
ALIENICHORHAN
TIMEMACHINEANC
PAPAYAAORTA
PUPATESICEMAN
ONAGERAURORA
WINEBIFIDCOT
ETAYEAROSEIRA
REMRAKESTSAR
ABASEDBLOTTOT
ALCOVECLASSES
BLADECOHOST
BANSTOMACHACHE
ANATWISTEDWIN
SOLYOLKSDATED

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Just when you thought you might actually be willing to leave your pet project alone for a bit and that recent intrigue might be nearing its end, things turn out to be even more complex than you thought. Someone who seems to just love irritating you is hard at work on that project, so it might be best for you to stay right where you are and keep working just as hard as ever.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Back when people started throwing around the term "dysfunctional family," you understood that just about everyone's family is dysfunctional in one way or another. In your family's case, you probably have an unusual yet successful way of handling all the freaky problems that crop up. You agree to disagree and keep on loving each other anyway. Keep that in mind now, no matter who pushes which button!

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

You've never been known for being shy, retiring, or afraid to speak your mind. You're also a great friend to have on one's side, the best anyone could possibly ask for, really, and not just when times are good. When an equally good friend comes asking for your understanding and support, and perhaps to help keep a sizable secret, you're right there for them.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Whatever is most important to you is something the rest of the world is sure to hear all about soon. That's even more true for the loved ones you're spending most of your time with, of course. There may be a few surprises on the way. In fact, it's near certain, given that things probably can't work out exactly as you'd hoped. No worries. If anyone is creative when it comes to surprising loved ones, it's you.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It's time to get social! You put lots of effort into your professional life, and now you need to start putting just as much effort into your personal life. Your mission is to accept any and all invitations without hesitation, no matter how unexciting they might sound. You are definitely one of the celebrities in your social circle right now, so take advantage of the spotlight while you have it. You can have fun with your people and relax for a while even if you're not all in the same place!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

No matter who you know or how long you've actually known them, you just can't seem to avoid being put in charge of them from time to time. Right now, what you're being asked to do by a friend amounts to them putting you in a position in which you're giving far more than you're likely to get back. Just say no, with confidence, and tell them why you're refusing

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

An intense work situation could lead you to wonder if you ought to tell all or just keep quiet, and isn't that a recurring dilemma for you? Since you might be feeling that you've kept this secret for too long, consider what might happen once the truth is revealed. The good news is that in the long run the truth always comes out. You need to decide if you want it to come out sooner or later.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your energy is driving you hard to turn your attention toward some big personal issue that is likely to end in an argument with someone. You're not crazy about engaging in that particular sport, but every now and then it's just about impossible to avoid. If money is the issue and you need to draw a line in the sand, or maybe just have a serious talk about a debt a loved one owes you, go for it ASAP.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

That so-called friend who seems to have it in for you lately and seems to be playing both sides of a certain issue is well worth watching out for more closely. Their reasons for their weird behavior may be a lot less (or a lot more) devious than you'd imagined, but either way, don't let them think they're getting away with it for any longer than you must.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You can almost always sense something brewing, even before it's officially started. At the moment, your intuition is definitely high powered, as is your temper, unfortunately! That could be a divine combination, especially since someone who's been glancing your way has been gradually (and, so it would seem, deliberately) letting those glances last just a little longer.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your infamous passion and determination to stand tough when you feel strongly about something is nothing to take lightly. It never has been, of course, but that goes double now. You're practically irresistible and just about impossible to refuse. Don't rein it in, no matter how tired you might be. Don't pretend to be interested in someone if you're not, especially if it's only to win.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There's just one person who can help you figure out what to do next, and you both know it. The thing is you probably haven't seen each other for quite some time, and you might not be quite sure where to find them. Work those detective skills of yours and figure out where to start looking. Give them a buzz, send an email, or simply show up at their door.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which of these is not one of the Seven Dwarfs?
A. Bashful
B. Spacey
C. Grumpy
D. Sleepy

02. Which sport, practised since at least the 8th century BC, is still current and was celebrated on the special €10 Greek coin minted in 2003?
A. Wrestling
B. Javelin throwing
C. Discus throwing
D. Sword fighting

03. Which of these historical figures is most associated with the year 1865?
A. Guy Fawkes
B. George Washington
C. Joan of Arc
D. Abraham Lincoln

Answers: 1.B 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

T	A	Y	T
X	L	B	A
E	I	E	C
O	E	D	Z

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

T H
E A L
T E

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Swede Svante Paabo wins Nobel Medicine Prize for sequencing Neanderthal DNA

Stockholm, Sweden - Swedish paleogeneticist Svante Paabo, who sequenced the genome of the Neanderthal and discovered the previously unknown hominin Denisova, on Monday won the Nobel Medicine Prize.

“By revealing genetic differences that distinguish all living humans from extinct hominins, his discoveries provide the basis for exploring what makes us uniquely human”, the Nobel committee said in a statement.

Paabo, director of the department of genetics at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, found that gene transfer had occurred from these now extinct hominins to Homo sapiens following the migration out of Africa around 70,000 years ago.

“This ancient flow of genes to present-day humans has physiological relevance today, for example affecting how our immune system reacts to infections,” the jury said.

COVID-19 patients with a snippet of Neanderthal DNA run



This file photo shows Swedish biologist Svante Paabo celebrating after receiving the 2018 Princess of Asturias Award for Technical and Scientific Research at the Campoamor Theatre in Oviedo, on October 19, 2018 (AFP)

a higher risk of severe complications from the disease, Paabo reported in a 2020 study.

Paabo, 67, who takes home the award sum of 10mn Swedish kronor (US\$901,500), will receive the prize from King Carl XVI Gustaf at a formal cere-

mony in Stockholm on December 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of scientist Alfred Nobel who created the prizes in his last will and testament.

Last year, the Medicine Prize went to US pair David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian for discover-

ies on receptors for temperature and touch, which have been used to develop treatments for a wide range of diseases and conditions, including chronic pain.

The Nobel season continues this week with the announcement of the winners of the

By revealing genetic differences that distinguish all living humans from extinct hominins, his discoveries provide the basis for exploring what makes us uniquely human. This ancient flow of genes... has physiological relevance today

NOBEL COMMITTEE

Physics Prize on Tuesday and the Chemistry Prize on Wednesday.

They will be followed by the much-anticipated prizes for Literature on Thursday and Peace on Friday, while the Economics Prize winds things up on Mon-

day, October 10.

Anti-Putin prizes?

For the Literature Prize on Thursday, literary critics told AFP they thought the Swedish Academy may go for a more mainstream author this year, after selecting lesser-known writers the past two years.

Last year, Tanzanian author Abdulrazak Gurnah won, while US poet Louise Gluck was crowned in 2020.

US novelist Joyce Carol Oates, France's Annie Ernaux and Maryse Conde, Russia's Lyudmila Ulitskaya and Canada's Margaret Atwood have all been cited as potential laureates if the committee has its eyes on a woman. Online betting sites however have France's Michel Houellebecq as the favourite, ahead of British author Salman Rushdie, who was the victim of an attempted murder attack in August. But it is the Peace Prize that is expected to hold special significance this year.

After Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov won the prize

last year together with his Philippine colleague Maria Ressa in the name of freedom of expression, will the Norwegian Nobel Committee award another anti-Putin prize after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine?

Not since World War II has a conflict raged between two countries so close to Oslo.

The International Criminal Court, tasked with investigating war crimes in Ukraine, and the International Court of Justice - both based in The Hague - have been mentioned as possible laureates this year.

So have jailed Russian dissident Alexei Navalny and Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya.

If the committee were to focus on the climate crisis, experts tipped Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, possibly together with British environmentalist David Attenborough or other activists such as Sudan's Nisreen Elsaïm and Ghana's Chibezé Ezekiel.

AFP

32 children died in Indonesia football stadium disaster: Official

Malang, Indonesia - At least 32 children died in Indonesia's stadium disaster, an official said on Monday, as the government ordered police to identify the 'perpetrators' of one of the deadliest disasters in football history.

The tragedy on Saturday night in the city of Malang saw a total of 125 people killed and 323 others injured after officers fired tear gas in a packed stadium to quell a pitch invasion, triggering a stampede.

Dozens of children caught in the chaos lost their lives, an official at the women's empowerment and child protection ministry told AFP on Monday.

“From the latest data we received, out of 125 people who died in the accident, 32 of them were children, with the youngest being a toddler age three or four,” said Nahar, who like many Indonesians only goes by one name.

As anger mounted against police, Indonesia's chief security minister Mahfud MD announced that a task force had been formed for an investigation.

“We ask the national police to find the perpetrators who have



Players and officials from Arema Football Club gather to pray next to flowers at a memorial for victims in Malang on Monday (AFP)

committed crimes in the next few days,” he said in a broadcast statement.

“We asked them to... take action against them and we also hope the national police will evaluate their security procedures.”

‘We want accountability’

The tragedy unfolded when fans of home team Arema FC stormed the pitch at the Kanjuruhan stadium after their loss 3-2 to bitter rivals Persebaya Surabaya.

Police responded by launch-

ing tear gas into packed terraces, prompting spectators to rush en masse to small gates where many were trampled or suffocated, according to witnesses.

“It felt like people were packed into a small tube with a tiny hole, and then they were smoked,” said 29-year-old spectator Ahmad Rizal Habibi, who escaped before the crush.

Police described the incident as a riot and said two officers were killed, but survivors accuse them of overreacting and causing the deaths of scores of spectators. “One of our messages is

for the authorities to investigate this thoroughly. And we want accountability. Who is to blame?” said 25-year-old Malang resident Andika, who declined to give his last name.

“We want justice for our fallen supporters.”

Investigators planned to question football officials on Monday as well as the 18 officers responsible for being ‘the carrier or the operator of the weapons’, national police spokesman Dedi Prasetyo told a press conference.

Paying respects

In a tearful live address, Arema FC president Gilang Widya Pramana apologised for the club's role in the tragedy.

“I, as the president of Arema FC, will take full responsibility for the incident that occurred. I deeply apologise to the victims, their families, all Indonesians, and Liga 1.”

The squad visited the site of the tragedy on Monday donned in black shirts to pay their respects and lay flowers before gathering on the pitch to pray for victims.

AFP

Inconclusive vote: Brazil wakes up to four more weeks of uncertainty

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - After an inconclusive first round of presidential elections, Brazilians woke up on Monday to another month of uncertainty in a deeply polarised political environment and with renewed fears of unrest.

Seeking to make a spectacular comeback, ex-president and frontrunner Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, 76, failed to garner the 50 per cent of votes plus one needed to avoid an October 30 runoff against far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro, 67.

Lula got 48.4 per cent of the vote in Sunday's first round, followed by Bolsonaro with a much closer-than-expected 43.2 per cent that seemed to signal a high level of enthusiasm for his conservative brand of ‘God, country and family’ politics.

Lula had gone into Sunday's first round with 50 per cent of polled voter intention, and Bolsonaro with 36 per cent. The divisive president's surprise performance likely spells a difficult time ahead, analysts said.

“I think it will be a very stressful campaign,” Leonardo Paz, Brazil consultant for the International Crisis Group, told AFP.

“Bolsonaro and Lula will



Supporters of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva react as they watch the vote count of the presidential election, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Sunday (AFP)

come... for each other, and I think Bolsonaro will double down on... saying that the system was against him.”

Bolsonaro has repeatedly sought to cast doubt on Brazil's electronic voting system and has questioned the validity of opinion polls that have consistently placed him a distant second. Now, with real-life results seeming to bear out his claims, ‘more people... may believe in what Bolsonaro is saying’, said Paz.

‘Emboldened’

The incumbent president has repeatedly hinted that he would

not accept a Lula victory, raising fears of a Brazilian version of the riots last year at the US Capitol after former president Donald Trump refused to accept his election loss.

Bolsonaro ‘will be very emboldened’, by Sunday's electoral performance, said Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue think tank. “It will give him some momentum because he's beaten the expectations... He will play on that the experts were wrong: ‘I've got the momentum and I'll defy expectations again in the second round’.”

AFP

Haiti reports first deaths from cholera in 3 years

Port-au-Prince, Haiti - At least seven people in Haiti have died from cholera, authorities said on Sunday, raising fresh fears of a resurgent epidemic in the crisis-wracked Caribbean nation.

Cholera killed around 10,000 people in the wake of Haiti's 2010 earthquake, when United Nations workers helping the response introduced it to the country.

Nearly three years after Haiti's last confirmed case of the illness, the country's health ministry on Sunday said multiple suspected cases had been detected in the capital Port-au-Prince and in the coastal neighbourhood of Cite Soleil.

At a press conference on Sunday afternoon, Laure

Adrien, director general of Haiti's public health ministry, said that seven or eight people had already died.

“Most of the victims died in the communities and could not go to hospitals,” he said.

Adrien called for roadblocks, erected throughout the country in a protest against recent gas price hikes, to be lifted so that the infected could access health facilities or be reached by ambulances.

Protests and looting have rocked the already unstable country since September 11, when Prime Minister Ariel Henry announced a fuel price hike, saying subsidies were too expensive for one of the world's poorest states.

AFP

Moroccan nomads threatened by climate change

Amellagou, Morocco - In the blistering desert of Morocco, the country's last Berber nomads, the Amazigh, say their ancient lifestyle is under threat as climate change brings ever-more intense droughts.

“Everything has changed,” said Moha Ouchaali, his wrinkled features framed by a black turban. “I don't recognise myself anymore in the world of today. Even nature is turning against us.”

Ouchaali, an Amazigh man in his 50s, has set up an encampment near a dry riverbed in barren hills about 280km east of Marrakesh.

Amid the rocky, arid landscape near the village of Amellagou, he and his family have pitched two black woollen tents, lined with old animal fodder bags and fabric scraps.

One is for sleeping and hosting guests, the other serves as a kitchen.



Amazigh women do daily chores in tents near the village of Amellagou where Morocco's last nomads reside (AFP)

“Water has become hard to find. Temperatures are going up and the drought is so harsh, but we can't do much,” said Ouchaali.

His tribe, the Ait Aissa Izem, has spent centuries roaming the country to find food for their animals, but their way of life is

steadily disappearing.

According to the last census, just 25,000 people in Morocco were nomadic in 2014, down by two-thirds in just a decade.

“We're exhausted,” Ouchaali's 45-year-old wife Ida said emotionally. “Before, we managed to live decently, but all

these droughts, more and more intense, make our lives complicated. Without water we can't do anything.”

‘Last nail in coffin’

This year has seen Morocco's worst drought in four decades.

Rainfall is set to decline by 11

per cent and average temperatures set to rise by 1.3 per cent by 2050, according to forecasts from the Ministry of Agriculture.

“Nomads have always been seen as a barometer of climate change,” said anthropologist Ahmed Skounti.

“If these people, used to living in extreme conditions, can't resist the intensity of global warming, that means things are bad.”

The drying up of water resources was ‘the last nail in the coffin for nomads’, he added.

In easier times, the Ait Aissa Izem would pass the summer in the relatively cool mountain valley of Imilchil, before heading to the area around regional capital Errachidia for the winter.

“That's ancient history,” Ouchaali said, sitting in his tent and taking a sip of sweet Moroccan tea. “Today we go wherever there's a bit of water left, to try to save the animals.”

AFP

Yemen's fate hangs in balance as UN scrambles to revive truce

Dubai, UAE - The United Nations envoy scrambled to revive Yemen's six-month truce after a missed deadline raised fears of a return to war and prompted rebel threats against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates late on Sunday.

Special envoy Hans Grundberg pledged 'relentless efforts' to reinvigorate the truce, which lapsed on Sunday after bringing a sharp reduction in clashes since it came into force in April.

Iran-backed Houthi rebels have been fighting a Saudi-led pro-government coalition since 2015 in a war that has left hundreds of thousands dead and created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the UN. Grundberg's plan to extend the truce, which was initially set to last two months and was renewed twice, to six months and to expand it to new areas of agreement was rejected by the Houthis.

His proposal included paying civil servants' salaries, opening routes into the rebel-blockaded city of Ta'ez, expanding commercial flights from the rebel-held capital Sanaa and allowing more fuel ships into the port of Hodeida, also controlled by the Houthis. It also contained commitments to release detainees, resume an 'inclusive' political process and tackle economic issues including public services.

But the northern-based Houthis, who seized the capital Sanaa in 2014 and control large swathes of the Arabian peninsula's poorest country, said the proposal 'does not live up to the demands of the Yemeni people



Fighters loyal to Yemen's Saudi-backed government take part in a military parade marking the 56th anniversary of the 1962 revolution which established the Yemeni republic, in the country's northeastern province of Marib on September 26 (AFP)

and does not establish the peace process'. "The Yemeni people will not be deceived by false promises," the Supreme Political

hostilities have been marked by coalition bombing raids and rebel drone-and-missile attacks on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia and the

during official practice sessions.

The Houthis' military spokesman Yahya Saree warned oil companies in Saudi Arabia and the UAE 'to organise their situation and leave', in a tweet late on Sunday. There was no immediate word from Riyadh or Abu Dhabi, but Yemen's internationally recognised government, via a tweet from its Washington embassy, urged the UN Security Council to deal 'firmly' with the Houthis over their 'latest threats' and refusal to extend the truce.

Grundberg, who has shuttled between Sanaa and Oman, which was acting as a moderator, said he will 'continue to work with both sides to try and find solutions'. "Ultimately, Yemenis

need an end to the conflict through an inclusive political process and a negotiated settlement," he added. "I will continue my relentless efforts to engage with the parties to quickly reach an agreement on a way forward."

As Yemen's fate remained unclear, government sources reported attacks by the Houthis south of Marib, the government's last northern stronghold and key to Yemen's oil resources. Houthi shelling was also reported in Ta'ez, Yemen's third biggest city, which has been blockaded by the rebels since 2016. Sporadic clashes have continued even during the truce period.

AFP



Palestinian protesters burn tyres near Al-Jalazun refugee camp, near the Israeli settlement of Beit El in the occupied West Bank, on Monday (AFP)

Israel forces kill two Palestinians in latest raid

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces shot dead two Palestinians during an operation on Monday targeting alleged militants near Ramallah, raising the year's mounting death toll in the occupied West Bank.

Israeli forces have been conducting near daily raids in the Palestinian territory since March, with Palestinian fatalities reaching levels not seen since in years.

The latest deaths were in the central West Bank, at the Jazalane refugee camp near Ramallah, where the army said it was pursuing 'an individual suspected of terror activity'. During the operation, Israeli troops killed 19-year-old Basel Basbous and Khaled Anbar, 20, according to the Palestinian health ministry. Raafat Habash, 19, was seriously injured, the ministry said.

The army confirmed it had 'neutralised' two people who had 'attempted to carry out a ramming attack against (Israeli) soldiers' with a vehicle.

In Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority, a general strike was called in response to the unrest and shut down much of the city, with youths patrolling the

streets demanding businesses close for the day.

Amid the unrelenting army raids, Israel's comptroller general Matanyahu Englman issued what he called an 'urgent report' on Sunday, warning that the pace of the military activity mandated new resource planning.

"The Israel Defense Forces are carrying out an important operation in the West Bank," he said, adding it was clear that 'it's an operation that could take a long time'. Following 'a surprise visit' to army bases, Englman urged military brass to take 'immediate' action 'to improve the logistic infrastructure for combat soldiers and reservists in the West Bank', raising specific alarm about inadequate food rations.

The army said Monday's operation included raids in several West Bank locations, with 16 people arrested overnight.

Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank this year are on track to rival a deadly 2015 phase, when Israel responded to a flurry of stabbings carried out by so-called lone wolf attackers.

AFP

Afghan classroom bombing toll jumps to 43: UN

Kabul, Afghanistan - The death toll from a suicide bomb attack on an education centre in the Afghan capital last week has risen to at least 43, the United Nations mission in Afghanistan said on Monday.

A suicide bomber blew himself up next to women at a gender-segregated study hall in a Kabul neighbourhood on Friday, home to the historically oppressed Shiite Muslim Hazara community.

"Forty three killed. 83 wounded. Girls & young women were the main victims," the UN mission said in a tweet, adding that casualties were expected to rise further.

The bomber detonated as hundreds of students were sitting a practice exam ahead of an entrance exam for university admissions.

No group has so far claimed responsibility, but the militant Islamic State group (IS) which considers Shiites as heretics has carried out several deadly attacks in the area targeting girls, schools and mosques.

The Taliban authorities have so far said 25 people were killed and 33 others were wounded in the attack.

The Islamist hardliners, accused of failing to protect minorities, have often tried to downplay attacks chal-

Iranian security forces crack down on students amid protests

Paris, France - Iranian security forces cracked down on a student protest overnight at a top Tehran university amid the wave of women-led demonstrations sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini, rights groups said on Monday.

Kurdish Iranian Amini, 22, was pronounced dead on September 16, days after the notorious morality police detained her for allegedly breaching rules forcing women to wear hijab headscarves and modest clothes.

Outrage over her death has sparked the biggest wave of protests to rock the Islamic republic in almost three years, as well as global solidarity rallies that saw people take to the



The regime's brute force is an expression of sheer fear of the power of education and freedom

ANNALENA BAERBOCK

streets in more than 150 cities at the weekend, with many symbolically cutting off their hair.

Concern grew over the latest violence at Tehran's prestigious Sharif University of Technology where, local media reported, riot police confronted hundreds of students, with officers using tear

gas and paintball guns and carrying non-lethal steel pellet guns.

"Woman, life, liberty," students shouted, as well as 'students prefer death to humiliation', Mehr news agency reported, adding that Iran's science minister, Mohammad Ali Zolfirol, came to speak to the students in a bid to calm the situation. As protests stretch into a third week, with unrest also reported at the University of Isfahan and elsewhere, ultra-conservative President Ebrahim Raisi on Sunday said that the 'enemies' of Iran had 'failed in their conspiracy'.

Iran has accused outside forces of stoking the protests, especially the United States and its

allies, and last week said nine foreign nationals - including from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland - had been arrested.

"Hard to bear what is happening at #SharifUniversity in #Iran," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock tweeted on Monday. "The courage of the Iranians is incredible. And the regime's brute force is an expression of sheer fear of the power of education and freedom."

Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights posted video apparently showing Iranian police on motorcycles pursuing students running through an underground car park and, in a separate clip, taking away de-

tainees whose heads were covered in black cloth bags.

'Don't be afraid'

In other footage, which AFP has not independently verified, shooting and screaming can be heard as large numbers of people run down a street at night.

In one clip, which IHR said was taken at a Tehran metro station, a crowd can be heard chanting: "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid! We are all together!"

The New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran said it was 'extremely concerned by videos coming out of Sharif University and Tehran today showing violent repression of protests.

AFP

West African bloc flies envoys to Burkina Faso after coup

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - Envoys from the West African bloc ECOWAS were heading to Burkina Faso on Monday after the militant-torn Sahel state underwent its second military coup in less than nine months.

The streets of the capital Ouagadougou were quiet after a two-day showdown between military rivals jousting for power and a spurt of violent anti-French protests.

The country's latest self-proclaimed leader is a 34-year-old captain, Ibrahim Traore, who seized the helm from Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, in power since January.

Religious and community mediators said Damiba on Sunday had agreed to step down, two days after Traore declared he had been forced out. Regional diplomats said he had fled to Togo. ECOWAS - the Economic Community of West African



A military vehicle is seen stationed by the National Television in Ouagadougou, on Monday (AFP)

States - issued a statement welcoming 'a peaceful settlement of their differences' and announced it would dispatch a delegation to Ouagadougou on Monday.

The team is headed by Guinea-Bissau Foreign Minister

Suzi Carla Barbosa and includes former Niger president Mahamadou Issoufou, the bloc's mediator on Burkina Faso.

Burkina is struggling with a seven-year-old militant campaign that has claimed thou-

sands of lives, forced nearly two million people to flee their homes and left more than a third of the country outside government control.

Anger within the army at failures to roll back the bloody insur-

gency prompted Damiba's coup against the elected president, Roch Marc Christian Kabore, on January 24.

Appointing himself transitional president, Damiba vowed to make security the country's top priority - but after a brief lull, attacks revived, claiming hundreds of lives.

The mounting toll was cited by Traore as justification for the latest coup. Damiba on Sunday set 'seven conditions' for stepping down, the religious and community leaders said.

These included security guarantees for him and his allies in the military; and that the pledge he had given to ECOWAS for a return to civilian rule within two years be respected. Speaking on the French radio station RFI on Monday, Traore spelt out that he would uphold the July 2024 timeline for restoring civilian rule.

This could even happen 'be-

fore that date' if conditions were right, Traore said. He said that he would simply carry out 'day-to-day business' until a new civilian or military transitional president was appointed.

The appointment would be made by a national forum gathering political and social representatives, the pro-Traore faction in the military said on Sunday.

Traore told RFI that this meeting would take place 'well before the end of the year'.

Analysts said that his position, if maintained, would be likely to satisfy ECOWAS, which has suffered five coups in three of its 15 members since August 2020.

Burkina's latest bout of turmoil coincided with a surge of violent protests against France, the former colonial power and ally in Burkina's struggle against the militants.

AFP

INDIA

Made-in-India LCH ‘Prachand’ inducted into IAF

Jodhpur, India - The first batch of indigenously-developed Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) named ‘Prachand’ was inducted into the Indian Air Force on Monday in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The induction ceremony was held in Rajasthan’s Jodhpur where newly appointed Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Anil Chauhan was also present along with the Union Minister.

While speaking on the occasion, Singh said that LCH will enhance our capability and will boost defence production and it proves India’s commitment towards self-reliance in Defence production.

“There could not have been a better timing for LCH induction than Navratri and in the land of warriors, Rajasthan,” Singh said, adding that the LCH is a result of research and development for two decades.

“For a long time, there was a need for attack helicopters and during the 1999 Kargil war, its need was felt seriously. The LCH is a result of research and development for two decades and its induction into IAF is an important milestone in defence production,” Singh further said.

The new chopper getting inducted into the force is capable of aerial combat and will help the force combat slow-moving aircraft, drones and armoured columns during conflicts. The



The newly inducted indigenously-developed Light Combat Helicopters (LCH) are capable of aerial combat and will help the force combat slow-moving aircraft, drones and armoured columns during conflicts (ANI)

induction ceremony was led by Rajnath Singh who has played a crucial role in progressing cases for buying indigenous platforms for forces. He was also present in the Cabinet Committee on Security which cleared the purchase of 15 of these LCHs for the air force and the army.

Hailing the service of the Indian Air Force, Singh said that IAF has played an important role in the nation’s security

whether it was internal threats or external war.

“IAF has always strengthened national security with their courage and bravery. The induction of indigenously developed LCH will increase the efficiency of IAF. It has always supported indigenously developed defence products like Marut, Light Combat Aircraft, Aakash Missile System, Advanced Light Helicopter and now LCH. It shows

IAF’s trust towards indigenously design and development,” Rajnath Singh said.

Defence Minister also talked about the key feature of this made-in-India LCH and said it perfectly meets the needs of our armed forces.

“LCH is capable of dodging the enemy, carrying a variety of ammunition, and delivering it to the site quickly. LCH perfectly meets the needs of our armed

forces in various terrains and it is an ideal platform for both our Army and Airforce,” he added.

Giving reference to the Ukraine-Russia war, Rajnath said: “The conflict or earlier conflicts teach us that heavy weapon systems and platforms, which are unable to move rapidly across the battlefield, have a low capability, and become easy targets for the enemy.”

He considered the defence of

the nation as the top priority and said that the government is fully committed to it.

“I can say with full confidence that in the coming time, India will be first whenever there is talk of superpowers including military power in the world,” he said.

“For the nation’s security, it is the job of the government to ensure armed forces are equipped with the best equipment and platforms. Irrespective of the geopolitical scenario, it is their job to keep National security on alert. Against the backdrop of certain events in the past, the government has focused on indigenisation in defence production and preparedness. They are getting positive responses from services, research and development, start-ups, and public and private sector industries. All are coming together to give a new height to defence production,” Singh further said.

“Time requires to shift towards such equipment and platforms that could be easy to move, more flexible and also more lethal. I like to appreciate HAL engineers for putting all these features in LCH. And don’t get confused with the ‘Light’ word associated with it but the task it will deliver is ‘heavy,’” he said.

The light combat helicopter is a dedicated combat helicopter designed and developed in-

digenously in India. It has been manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).

Of the 15 limited series production helicopters approved, 10 are for the IAF and five for the army. It can land and take off from an altitude of 5,000 metres with weapons and fuel, the officials said.

The choppers have been flown extensively in Ladakh and the desert sector to meet the requirements of the armed forces. The IAF has inducted multiple helicopters to its fleet in the last three-four years with the induction of the Chinooks, Apache attack helicopters and now the LCHs.

CCS met under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 30, this year, in New Delhi. The CCS has approved the procurement of 15 Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) Limited Series Production at the cost of Rs. 3,887 crore along with Infrastructure sanctions worth Rs 377 crore.

Light Combat Helicopter Limited Series Production (LSP) is an indigenously designed, developed and manufactured state-of-the-art modern combat helicopter containing approximately 45 per cent indigenous content by value which will progressively increase to more than 55 per cent for the SP Version.

ANI

Sonia Gandhi to join Bharat Jodo Yatra

Mysuru, India - All India Congress Committee interim president Sonia Gandhi arrived in Mysuru on Monday.

She is scheduled to join the party’s Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi which is presently in its Karnataka leg. According to the sources, Gandhi will stay at a resort in the Kodagu district for two days before joining the Yatra on October 6.

Priyanka Gandhi will take part in the Yatra the next day, according to the Karnataka Congress.

Priyanka was expected to join the Yatra earlier but due to some reasons she couldn’t join it, the sources said earlier.

It will be the first time when all three Gandhis will be present in the Bharat Jodo Yatra which started from Kanyakumari on September 7 and has travelled from Tamil Nadu, Kerala and will cover 511km of the area in 21 days. Sonia Gandhi recently



Congress Interim President Sonia Gandhi being received by Karnataka party president DK Shivakumar in Mysuru on Monday (ANI)

travelled abroad for her medical checkup.

The march is aimed to cover as many as 12 States in five months. It recently reached Karnataka on Friday (September 30) and will be here for the next 21 days before moving north.

The Padyatra (march) is covering a distance of 25km every day.

According to Congress, the ‘Bharat Jodo Yatra’ is being held to combat the divisive politics of the BJP-led Centre and to awaken the people of the coun-

Sonia Gandhi, who arrived in Mysuru on Monday, will join the Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi, which is presently in its Karnataka leg, on October 6

try to the dangers of economic inequalities, social polarisation and political centralisation.

The Yatra includes Padayatras, rallies, and public meetings. The Congress suffered a debacle in the assembly polls held earlier this year and the Yatra is seen as an attempt to rally the party rank and file for the upcoming electoral battles.

ANI

Mahatma Gandhi-lookalike ‘asura’ at Kolkata Durga Puja Pandal sparks row

Kolkata, India - Organisers at a Durga Puja pandal in Kolkata provided a wig and a moustache to the ‘Mahisasura’ idol, which bore an uncanny resemblance to Mahatma Gandhi and stoked a controversy, prompting police to intervene after a complaint was filed.

Put up as part of the pandal display by the All India Hindu Mahasabha at the city’s Ruby by-pass the ‘asura’ idol was a bespectacled, dhoti-clad bald man with a walking stick, which according to complaint bore resemblance to the Father of the Nation. West Bengal Congress leader Koustav Bagchi on Sunday made a complaint with the Kolkata Police to lodge a Zero FIR in connection with the matter. Bagchi said that portraying Gandhi as ‘asura’ is an ‘act of sedition’ and had sought the immediate stop of



The idol resembling Mahatma Gandhi is seen remade to look like an ‘Asura’ after a complaint, in Kolkata on Monday (ANI)

the Puja.

Candrachud Goswami who is the organiser of the Puja Pandal said that they changed the appearance of the idol after a lot of calls and that they have not done so willingly.

“The idol of Asura did resemble MK Gandhi, we do not

deny it. It has been changed. We have been made to change it forcefully. We do not accept the changes. Our freedom of expression has been curtailed. People should know that nobody called Gandhi the father of the nation.

ANI

Australia to repatriate citizens from Syria

Sydney, Australia - Australia’s government said Monday its ‘overriding priority’ is to protect its citizens, following reports that it will repatriate dozens of women and children from detention camps in Syria.

Australian media, led by a weekend story in *The Guardian*, reported that the government had decided to bring home about 20 Australian women and 40 children from the camps.

A spokesperson for Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neil did not confirm the reported repatriation, saying only that the government would protect its citizens.

AFP

Tired of power cuts, blockaded Gaza turns to solar

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Palestinians living in the Israeli-blockaded enclave of Gaza have long endured an unstable and costly electricity supply, so Yasser al-Hajj found a different way: solar power.

Looking at the rows of photovoltaic panels at his beachfront fish farm and seafood restaurant, The Sailor, he said the investment he made six years ago had more than paid off. “Electricity is the backbone of the project,” Hajj said, standing under a blazing Mediterranean sun. “We rely on it to provide oxygen for the fish, as well as to draw and pump water from the sea.”

The dozens of solar panels that shade the fish ponds below have brought savings that are now paying to refurbish the business, he said, as labourers loaded sand onto a horse-drawn cart.

Hajj said he used to pay 150,000 shekels (US\$42,000) per month for electricity, ‘a huge

burden,’ before solar power slashed his monthly bill to 50,000 shekels. For most of Gaza’s 2.3mn residents, living under Hamas Islamist rule and a 15-year-old Israeli blockade, power cuts are a daily fact of life that impact everything from homes to hospital wards.

While some Gazans pay for a generator to kick in when the mains are cut - for around half of each day, according to United Nations data - ever more people are turning to renewables.

From the rooftops of Gaza City, solar panels now stretch out into the horizon. Green energy advocates say it is a vision for a global future as the world faces the perils of climate change and rising energy costs.

Swap to green power

Gaza bakery owner Bishara Shehadeh began the switch to solar this summer, by placing hundreds of gleaming panels on his



A view of a solar farm facility powering ‘The Sailor’ seafood restaurant, which is also used to shelter and provide oxygen for fish pools underneath, next to an agricultural field in Gaza City in the Palestinian enclave (AFP)

rooftop. “We have surplus electricity in the day,” he said. “We sell it to the electricity company in exchange for providing us with current during the night.”

Solar energy lights up the

bright bulbs illuminating the bustling bakery, but the ovens still run on diesel.

“We are working on importing ovens, depending on electrical power, from Israel, to save the

cost of diesel,” said Shehadeh.

Both the bakery and the fish farm have relied partially on foreign donors to kick-start their switch to solar, although their owners are also investing their

own cash.

But in a poverty-stricken territory where nearly 80 per cent of residents rely on humanitarian assistance, according to the UN, not everyone can afford to install renewable energy.

Around a fifth of Gazans have installed solar power in their homes, according to an estimate published in April by the ‘Energy, Sustainability and Society’ journal. Financing options are available for Gazans with some capital, like Shehadeh, who got a four-year loan to fund his bakery project.

At a store selling solar power kits, MegaPower, engineer Shehab Hussein said prices start at around US\$1,000 and can be paid in instalments.

Clients included a sewing factory and a drinks producer, which see the mostly Chinese-made technology as ‘a worthwhile investment,’ he said.

AFP

PENALTY WOES

Real Madrid drop first points as Karim Benzema spurns penalty against Osasuna

Madrid, Spain - Karim Benzema missed a penalty for Real Madrid as they finally blinked in the La Liga title race, dropping their first points of the season in a 1-1 draw with Osasuna on Sunday.

Elsewhere, Real Sociedad won 5-3 at Girona and high-flying Real Betis fell to a 1-0 defeat at Celta Vigo.

After Barcelona beat Real Mallorca on Saturday, Madrid knew they had to win to stay top but were frustrated by Jagoba Arrasate's well-organised side at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Benzema, on his return to the side after injury, won a spot-kick but then fired it against the crossbar, and also had a goal disallowed for offside as Madrid tried to force a way through.

Vinicius Junior broke the deadlock just before half-time with a cross that snuck all the way into the far corner, but Kike Garcia's well-taken header early in the second period earned Osasuna a point.

"What we were missing was scoring that penalty, normally

Karim scores them," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told DAZN.

"He had no problem playing the 90 minutes. It's been a month since he's played, he has to get his best form back. He did his part, he had the chance from the penalty. It's an accident, sometimes it happens."

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez told the club's fans at an assembly on Sunday morning that a European Super League project was essential, but Osasuna showed domestic football can still offer a significant challenge.

Benzema made his first ap-

pearance since September 6, while Andriy Lunin and Dani Ceballos started in place of injured duo Thibaut Courtois and Luka Modric.

Madrid probed promisingly down the flanks, while at the other end Abde Ezzalzouli, on loan at Osasuna from Barcelona, crashed a shot into the side netting on a bright display.

Madrid opened the scoring in fortuitous fashion, with Vinicius whipping in a low cross which caught out goalkeeper Sergio Herrera and crept in at the far post.

Osasuna complained that Benzema and Antonio Rudiger were offside and interfering with play, but their protests were dismissed.

The visitors were level five minutes into the second half, when Kike Garcia brilliantly looped a backwards header over Lunin.

The goal meant Madrid have failed to keep a clean sheet in any of the first seven league games.

"We were quite solid at the back," insisted Ancelotti. "We conceded a goal from a deep cross, it was quite strange. The team was balanced, the objective is always to be strong to avoid conceding."

AFP



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema can hardly believe his eyes as he misses a penalty during their Spanish League match against Osasuna on Sunday (AFP)

Juve ease pressure with Bologna win, Atalanta keep pace with leaders Napoli

Milan, Italy - Juventus swept aside Bologna 3-0 on Sunday to ease their recent troubles as Atalanta continued their dream start to the Serie A season with a 1-0 win over Fiorentina which kept them level on points with leaders Napoli.

A routine third league win of the season against dismal opposition will stave off questions about coach Massimiliano Allegri's future until at least next weekend, when they travel to champions AC Milan.

They are seventh, seven points behind the leading duo of Napoli and Atalanta thanks to Filip Kostic's first goal for the club midway through the first half and two more after the break from strike pairing Dusan Vlahovic and Arkadiusz Milik.

"We hadn't won a game for a month, when we got back to the dressing room we almost couldn't believe it," said Allegri to DAZN.

"We have to take it one step



at a time, hopefully we can close the gap like we did last season."

Before facing Milan they host Maccabi Haifa on Wednesday with a win over the Israelis essential for their hopes of reaching the Champions League's knock-out rounds.

Fans of Italy's biggest club are not filling the Allianz Stadium in Turin and they will not be won

over by a home win over Bologna, who are one point above the relegation zone and have shown no signs of improvement since replacing Sinisa Mihajlovic with Thiago Motta earlier this month.

However Juve did at least have a goal threat, and will be cheered both by Vlahovic scoring his first league goal since August and the continued good form of Milik, who lashed in his fourth goal in seven matches since arriving from Marseille.

It was a one-way end to an eventful day in which Maria Sole Ferrieri Caputi made history as the first woman to referee a game in Italy's top flight, Sassuolo's 5-0 thumping of Salernitana.

Sampdoria sacked coach Marco Giampaolo following their 3-0 humiliation at the hands of Monza - who leapt out of the drop zone - and Fiorentina demanded government action over offensive chants directed at their owner Rocco Comisso by Atalanta fans.

While Fiorentina raged at fans mocking Comisso's southern Italian origins, unbeaten Atalanta celebrated thanks to Ademola Lookman, who tapped in the winner from Luis Muriel's cross in the 59th minute in Bergamo.

AFP

Inter and Inzaghi at crossroads ahead of Barcelona clash

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan are teetering on the brink of full-blown crisis as they prepare for the visit of Barcelona to the San Siro, which will likely have a huge bearing on their chances of making the knockout stages of the Champions League.

Saturday's home defeat at the hands of Roma, guided by Inter legend Jose Mourinho no less, left Simone Inzaghi's side eight points off the pace in the Serie A title race and wondering what shape their season will take.

It was their fourth loss of the league season and dreadful preparation for the Tuesday's showdown at the San Siro, where Inter and Barca will tussle for second place in Group C.

Both teams are three points behind leaders Bayern Munich and the upcoming double-header will decide whether their European adventure continues as Bayern have the chance to make the last 16 with their two games with bottom side Viktoria Plzen.



Defeat would leave Inter and Inzaghi way off their objectives for the season and increase the dissenting voices around the coach despite recent assurances from the club that his job is not at risk.

Inter have already lost the same number of league matches as in the whole of last season, when they conceded their Serie A crown on the final day of the campaign following a thrilling battle with local rivals AC Milan.

As it stands Inter will have a battle on their hands to qualify for the Champions League next season.

"Us coaches are always at risk, every week," Inzaghi told reporters after a defeat which highlighted flaws that have begun to characterise their performances.

AFP



Qatar coach Felix Sanchez (C) talks to his players during a training session in Doha on Sunday (AFP)

Qatar train in Doha, enjoy rare respite from high pressure World Cup isolation camp

Doha, Qatar - Qatar's World Cup squad trained on home territory for the first time in four months Sunday as they seek to overcome some nervy displays in preparatory matches.

Hundreds of fans, mainly migrant workers, turned out to see the players make their rare appearance in a Doha stadium after being kept under wraps at camps in Spain and Austria.

Qatar, which has spent billions of dollars on new stadiums for the first World Cup in an Arab country, is desperate to see the side get past the first round

group against Netherlands, Senegal and Ecuador.

But the national team, who will make their World Cup debut against Ecuador on November 20, lost 3-0 to Croatia's under 23 team, 2-0 to Canada and this week drew 2-2 with Chile in their last three games.

"We are fully aware of the need to develop certain tactical and technical aspects that didn't unfold as we wanted," said coach Felix Sanchez.

"And we are working to correct the errors that were apparent," added Sanchez, who will

take the team back into more weeks of isolation on Wednesday when they head back to his native Spain. The players remained upbeat despite the disappointing results and being kept away from their Qatari homes.

"I think we needed this long period without the pressure that we feel here, I think all the players are ready," said midfielder Assim Madibo, who has more than 35 caps.

Madibo also acknowledged that there were "details" to correct but believed the camps were a success.

"We played a lot of games and a lot of training sessions, we boosted our body fitness," he said.

"We miss our families. I miss my family but we are happy to be back," said French-born defensive midfielder Karim Boudiaf, who has more than 110 appearances to his name.

Boudiaf acknowledged the battle that Qatar will face in Group A.

"We know that the World Cup is a very difficult competition. Our group is also tough."

AFP

Djokovic finds ‘extra motivation’ from post-Wimbledon absence

Tel Aviv, Israel - Novak Djokovic claimed his third title of 2022 and 89th of his career with an impressive straight-sets victory over Marin Cilic in the Tel Aviv final on Sunday, insisting his lengthy absence since winning a seventh Wimbledon crown in July provided “extra motivation”.

The 35-year-old Djokovic triumphed 6-3, 6-4 to add the Israeli hard court trophy to victories on the Rome clay and Wimbledon grass this season.

It was his 19th win over Cilic in 21 meetings in a rivalry stretching back to 2008. Djokovic was playing his first singles tournament since wrapping up a seventh Wimbledon crown and 21st Grand Slam title in July.

He was banned from the US Open and the entire North American hard court swing over his re-

“My approach is to win tournaments wherever I am and I’m glad that I have a team of people around me that makes sure that I am in the best shape in order to be a contender to win titles,” Djokovic told atptour.com.

“That’s why I came to Israel, was to try to win the title. First time playing here since a Davis Cup tie more than 15 years ago, so it was a really amazing experience.”

On Sunday, Djokovic broke 34-year-old Cilic in the second game of the final and pocketed the first set with a fourth ace after 47 minutes on court.

Former US Open winner Cilic, chasing a 21st career title but first of 2022, was broken in the first game of the second set and never recovered.

The Serb only faced one break

My approach is to win tournaments wherever I am and I’m glad that I have a team of people around me that makes sure that I am in the best shape in order to be a contender to win titles

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

fusal to be vaccinated before returning for Roger Federer’s farewell in the Laver Cup team event in London last month.

“I played some very good tennis. I didn’t drop a set the entire week,” said former world number one Djokovic.

“I hadn’t played a tournament in three months, so it was really extra motivation for me to really do well, particularly because people have been so friendly and so supportive of me throughout the week. I’m taking some great confidence into next week as well.”

Djokovic’s win on Sunday came in his 127th career final. It also allowed him to become the first man this year to claim titles on the sport’s three different surfaces.

point in the match which was clinched in 94 minutes.

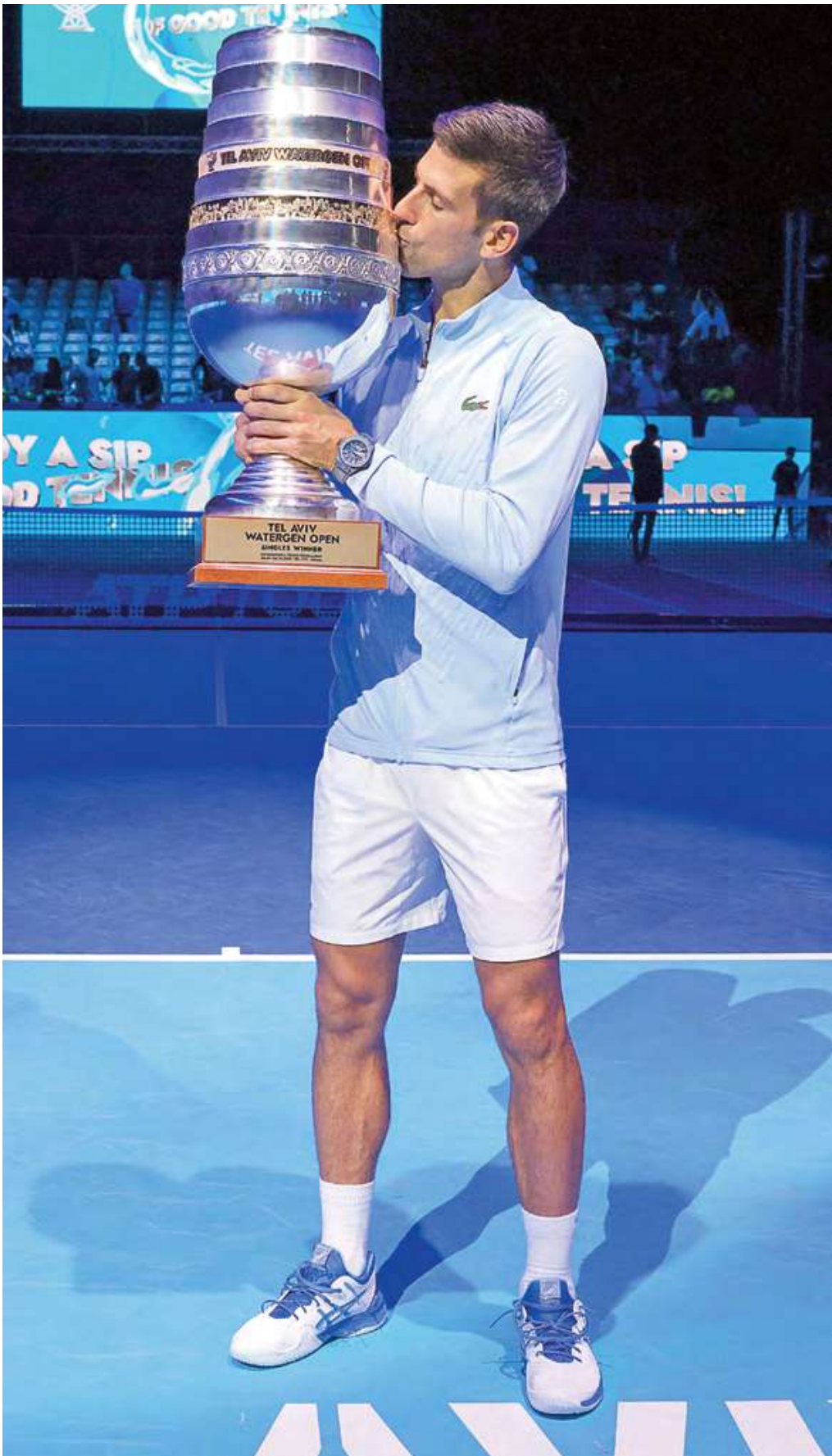
“Just everything really that we experienced this week was positive,” added Djokovic.

Djokovic now heads to the Astana ATP tournament where world number one and US Open champion Carlos Alcaraz takes the top seeding.

Ranked at seven in the world, Djokovic - having won a Grand Slam title this season - just needs to finish in the top 20 to book a place at the ATP Finals.

That would give him the opportunity to end 2022 with a flourish having started the year being deported from Australia over his controversial vaccination stance.

AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates with the trophy after winning the Tel Aviv Watergen Open on Sunday (AFP)



Carlos Alcaraz (L) with Rafael Nadal

Spain reign as Nadal second behind Alcaraz in ATP rankings

Paris, France - Spain reign at the summit of men's tennis with Carlos Alcaraz holding world number one spot in the ATP rankings released on Monday with compatriot Rafael Nadal moving back up to second.

Nadal, 36, benefited from Casper Ruud’s quarter-final exit in Seoul where he was top seed, to move ahead of the Norwegian.

Novak Djokovic, winner of his third tournament this season in Tel Aviv, stays seventh but scores 250 precious points in the race for the ATP Finals in Turin, his end-of-season goal.

The Serb was competing in his first singles tournament in Israel

since claiming a seventh Wimbledon crown in July, and can still earn points this week in the Astana ATP tournament.

Croat Marin Cilic gained two places moving from 16th to 14th, thanks to his reaching the final in Tel Aviv.

ATP RANKINGS

1. Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) **6740 pts**
2. Rafael Nadal (ESP) **5810 (+1)**
3. Casper Ruud (NOR) **5645 (-1)**
4. Daniil Medvedev **5065**
5. Alexander Zverev (GER) **5040**
6. Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) **4810**
7. Novak Djokovic (SRB) **3820**
8. Cameron Norrie (GBR) **3445**
9. Andrey Rublev **3345**
10. Hubert Hurkacz (POL) **3175 (+1)**



Iga Swiatek

Pole IgaSwiatek maintains healthy lead atop WTA rankings

Paris, France - Pole Iga Swiatek retained her comfortable advantage as world number one as Anett Kontaveit moved to third thanks to a runners-up finish last weekend, the WTA announced on Monday.

US Open champion Swiatek, 21, will feature for the first time since this month’s Grand Slam win at Flushing Meadows by

playing at Ostrava this week.

Swiatek has also clinched the French Open this year and still has almost double the points as Tunisian Ons Jabeur, who she beat in the final in New York, in second.

Estonian Kontaveit switches positions with Spaniard Paula Badosa despite losing Sunday’s Tallinn Open final.

Russian Veronika Kudermetova, who is banned from competing under the name and flag of her country after the Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine, climbs to a career-best 12th spot despite not playing since September 24.

Mayar Sherif jumps from 74th to 49th after becoming the first woman from Egypt to claim a WTA Tour title with victory in

Parma on Saturday. Sherif overcame Greek Maria Sakkari, who retains her sixth place.

The season-ending WTA Finals will be held between October 31-November 7 in Texas with the top eight players qualifying.

As well as the tournament in the Czech Republic there is an event in Monastir, Tunisia, this week.

WTA RANKINGS

1. Iga Swiatek (POL) **10,180 pts**
2. Ons Jabeur (TUN) **4,885**
3. Anett Kontaveit (EST) **4,010**
4. Paula Badosa (ESP) **3,934**
5. Aryna Sabalenka (BLR) **3,470**
6. Jessica Pegula (USA) **3,447**
7. Maria Sakkari (GRE) **3,355**
8. Cori Gauff (USA) **3,047**
9. Simona Halep (ROM) **3,025**
10. Caroline Garcia (FRA) **2,930**

Confident Tiafoe ‘flying high’ after Tokyo opener

Tokyo, Japan - US Open semi-finalist Frances Tiafoe said he was “flying high on confidence” after beating Yasutaka Uchiyama 6-3, 6-4 in the first round of the Japan Open on Monday.

The American made a name for himself when he stunned Rafael Nadal on his way to a shock final-four appearance at Flushing Meadows last month before playing a starring role at the Laver Cup.

The world number 19 is playing his first singles tournament since the US Open this week in Tokyo and he dispatched Japanese wild card Uchiyama with little fuss.

Tiafoe said he was “not really feeling any pressure” despite his recent achievements putting him firmly in the spotlight. “Every day is different, guys may play well and they may beat you - you’ve got to live with it,” he said.

“I’m flying high on confidence and I’m just staying with my



Frances Tiafoe hits a return against Yasutaka Uchiyama during their first-round match at Japan Open on Monday

process.”

Tiafoe will play Bernabe Zapata Miralles in the second round after the Spaniard beat Japan’s Taro Daniel 7-5, 7-5.

Tiafoe did not lose a single service game against Uchiyama

and closed the match out in 1hr, 12min.

“I hit the ball well from the ground, I moved well, made first serves when I needed them,” he said.

Spain’s Pedro Martinez also

advanced to the second round with a 7-5, 6-4 win over Australia’s Alexei Popyrin, while American Brandon Nakashima beat Japan’s Shintaro Mochizuki 6-3, 6-2.

AFP

‘Excited’ Kyrgios focused on Japan Open on eve of court case

Tokyo, Japan - Nick Kyrgios said it was “not difficult at all” to focus on this week’s Japan Open, despite his court hearing on Tuesday at home in Australia for alleged common assault.

The 27-year-old Wimbledon finalist is due to have his case heard at a magistrates’ court in Canberra, on the same day he is scheduled to play in Tokyo.

It is common for defendants not to appear for largely administrative hearings where they have legal representation. Details of the allegation against Kyrgios have not been disclosed.

The maverick world number 20, at his first tournament since losing in the quarter-finals of the US Open last month, said that he had been dealing with the case “for months” and was taking it “day by day”.

“There’s only so much I can control and I’m taking all the



Nick Kyrgios

steps and dealing with that off the court,” Kyrgios, one of the most polarising figures in tennis, said on Monday in the Japanese capital.

“I can only do what I can and I’m here in Tokyo and just trying

to play some good tennis, continue that momentum and just try to do my job -- and that’s play tennis, play it well. That’s it.”

The temperamental Kyrgios, whose potential has often been betrayed by his on-court behaviour, said he was “super excited” to be back in action in Tokyo after his “heartbreaking” US Open defeat to Russia’s Karen Khachanov.

He said the loss had “added a bit of fuel” to his motivation and feels he is ready to win his first Grand Slam at next year’s Australian Open.

“I thought the US Open was a great chance - obviously that one really, really hurt because I definitely thought that I was the favourite after I beat (Daniil) Medvedev,” he said.

“I’m doing all the right things so I definitely think I can win a Grand Slam, for sure,” he added.

AFP

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Oman down Bahrain to top group at U19 World Cup Division -2 Asia Qualifier

Muscat - Hosts Oman defeated Bahrain by 86 runs to emerge as Group A topper in the ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup Division -2 Asia Qualifier at the Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) grounds on Monday.

Oman will take on Group B runners up on Thursday.

Group B winners, (who will be decided after the Singapore vs Hong Kong tie on Tuesday) will take on Bahrain in the other semi-final.

It was a fine performance on the field by hosts Oman on Monday, despite the team failing to capitalise on the strong start as they were bowled out for 178 in 48.5 overs.

Openers Lakshmi Satish and Devansh Loya gelled well for the first time in the tournament as they shared a 61-run stand after Oman skipper Arjun Dhiman won the toss and elected to bat first at OCA 2 ground. Loya was first to depart for 29 and Satish (31) was next as Oman reached 84/2 in 25.3 overs.

However, a double-strike by Bahrain's Nadith Tennakoon put the hosts on the back foot in the 26th over as he prized the wicket of in-form Dhiman off the last ball of the over.



Oman's Aryan Bisht in action

Aryan Bisht, who had made 60 in the opening group game against Bhutan, played another solid knock as he remained unbeaten on 48 off 55 balls. But

Bisht found little support at the other end as Oman was restricted to 178.

Tennakoon and Muhammad Adil Khan were the most suc-

cessful bowlers with four wickets each.

Bahrain had a disappointing start as medium pacer Mohammed Arafat Islam struck a

double blow, dismissing skipper Aryan Ashwin and Ananth Krishnan Natesan off successive deliveries.

Both the batters were snared behind by Rahil Habibulla, who had a good day behind as he later had one stumping to his name.

The early setback pushed Bahrain in a shell and the middle order caved in as they were left tottering at 28/5 in 15th over. They never really recovered from that and were bowled out for 92 in 34.3 overs.

Bisht followed his batting heroics with a tidy spell of 2/14 to be adjudged the man of the match.

"I think we were always in the game. We had a decent start although we lost wickets in the middle. We couldn't convert it to something big but I'm happy the way I contributed in terms of holding the ship and I am enjoying the role of batting under pressure," said Bisht.

In the other game of the day at the OCA 1 ground, Mohammed Ahmed Raza came up with a dream spell of 7/20 to lead Saudi Arabia to a five-wicket win over Bhutan for a consolation win.

It was Saudi Arabia's first win in the tournament.



England players pose with the trophy after winning the seven-match Twenty20 series against Pakistan on Sunday (AFP)

Malan, Woakes star in England's T20I series win over Pakistan

Lahore, Pakistan - Dawid Malan hit a brilliant half-century and pace bowler Chris Woakes took three wickets as England thrashed Pakistan by 67 runs in Lahore on Sunday to win the seven-match T20 international series 4-3.

Malan hit a 47-ball 78 not out and was ably supported by Harry Brook (46 not out) and Ben Duckett (30) to lift England to 209-3 in 20 overs.

The visitors then restricted the home team to 142-8 to end their first tour to Pakistan in 17 years with a series victory.

England won the first, third, sixth and seventh games while Pakistan won the second, fourth and fifth.

The result denied Pakistan their first T20I multi-game series win over England, who have won five while drawing the other two.

Pakistan never recovered from losing the in-form Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan, their top run-scorer in the series, in the opening two overs.

Woakes had Azam caught at short cover for four before Reece Topley bowled Rizwan for one with his second delivery.

Shan Masood's 43-ball 56 was in vain as Pakistan were never in the hunt for their highest successful chase.

Pakistan's best chase in a T20I was the 208 they achieved against the West Indies in Karachi last year.

Woakes, who took 3-26, dismissed Asif Ali (seven) and had Masood caught brilliantly by Adil Rashid in the 19th over to end Pakistan's hopes.

England skipper Moeen Ali, standing in for tour captain Jos Buttler who didn't play a single

We played really well from the start and the batters put up a very good score

MOEEN ALI

game due to a calf injury, said it was a "brilliant game".

"We played really well from the start and the batters put up a very good score while I thought our bowling was outstanding in wet conditions," he added.

Azam deplored the loss of early wickets.

"We were chasing a 200-plus total and because we lost two important wickets early on that made our chase tough and credit to England for playing better," said the Pakistan skipper.

AFP

Indian speedster Jasprit Bumrah ruled out of Twenty20 World Cup

New Delhi, India - India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was on Monday ruled out of the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia starting later this month with a back injury, the country's cricket board said.

"The BCCI Medical team has ruled out Team India fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah from the ICC Men's T20 World Cup squad. The decision was taken following a detailed assessment and in consultation with the specialists," the Board of Control for Cricket in

India said. "The BCCI will be naming a replacement for Jasprit Bumrah in the squad for the marquee tournament soon," the BCCI statement said.

Bumrah, 28, had already been forced out of the ongoing T20 series against South Africa after he complained of back pain ahead of the opening match.

It is a second injury blow for heavyweights India, who begin their World Cup campaign against arch-rivals Pakistan on October 23 in Melbourne.



Jasprit Bumrah

Ravindra Jadeja failed to make the squad due to a knee injury that made him pull out of the Asia Cup midway through the tournament. They missed making the semi-finals of last year's T20 World Cup in the UAE in a lacklustre campaign that included a 10-wicket thrashing by Pakistan.

Last month they were again beaten by Pakistan as well as by eventual championship winners Sri Lanka in the Super 4 stage of the Asia Cup.

AFP

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MANAGEMENT OF BENIGN PROSTATIC ENLARGEMENT

What is benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)?

BPH is when the prostate and the surrounding tissue expands. The prostate goes through 2 main growth periods as a man ages. The first is early in the puberty when the prostate doubles the size. The second begins around the age 25 and continues during most of a man's life. As you age, your prostate may get larger. BPH is when it gets large enough to cause problems.

How BPH causes problems?

As the prostate enlarges, it presses against the urthrae. The bladder wall becomes thicker. Overtime the bladder may weaken and lose the ability to empty fully. Urine then remains in the bladder. These problems cause many of the lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) of BPH.

Who is at risk of BPH?

- Men over the age of 50 - the risk of BPH raises with age.
- Men whose fathers had BPH
- Men who are overweight/obese.
- Men who don't stay active.
- Some men with erectile dysfunction

What are the symptoms of BPH?

Enlarged prostate can cause:

- Incomplete emptying/weak urine flow
- Increased frequency of urination
- Intermittency (need to stop and restart several times - during urination)
- Straining to pass urine
- Nocturia (need to wake up frequently from sleep to pass urine)

What are the causes of BPH?

Hormonal changes play a major role. As a man ages, the testosterone level in the blood decreases, dihydrotestosterone level increases, and estrogen level stays the same. These hormonal changes trigger BPH. Also, too much body fat increases hormone levels and other factors causing BPH. Smoking is also a causative factor.

How does one get diagnosed?

The following tests are used to diagnose and track BPH:

Digital rectal examination - The doctor inserts a gloved, lubricated finger into the rectum to feel the back wall of the prostate gland. He looks for enlargement, tenderness, hard spots. This 10 -

15 seconds exam is an important way to find problems.

Other tests include urinalysis test, uroflowmetry and post-void residual volume, ultrasound scan, cystoscopy, and prostate specific antigen.

What is TRUS (Transrectal ultrasound guided) prostate biopsy?

In patients with persistent raised PSA, MRI prostate is done to map areas/lesions of prostate which are suspicious of malignancy. In these patients prostate tissue sampling is done through TRUS biopsy. This the definite procedure to confirm malignancy in prostate.

How is BPH treated?

The main treatments for BPH are:

- Low fat and low purine diet (with adequate water intake and stopping smoking).
- Prescription drugs
- Surgery is done in patients with failed medical management and complications of BPH. These include bipolar transurethral incision of prostate, bipolar transurethral resection of prostate, and Holmium laser enucleation of prostate.



Services Available at **MUNH**

Muscat Urology and Nephrology Healthcare Centre (MUNH), under Modern Healthcare company, is Oman's ambulatory daycare Centre, a super specialty medical centre offering comprehensive and efficient services in urology, nephrology and renal dialysis, and offers treatment for ailments like kidney stone, bladder stones, kidney failure and more. The Centre is a state-of-the-art daycare surgery for diagnostic and therapeutic services, fully equipped with all modern equipment. Designed as a daycare Centre to keep the Hospital Acquired Infection(HAI) at minimum and expense low while providing affordable and effective services with patient needs are always placed first here.

MOH 439/2022

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SLEEPING DUTY

7 ways to improve sleep quality

Going for long periods of time with poor sleep quality can disrupt metabolism, hormone regulation and growth and repair. This can lead to serious health conditions, from obesity and diabetes to increased stress and poor performance at work, according to a recent article in Nuffield Health. Here are seven effective ways to improve your sleep quality:

1. STICK TO A ROUTINE

Aim to go to sleep and wake up at the same time, even at the week-ends. The more consistent you are, the more consistent your sleep will be. In fact, naturally waking up at the same time each day is a sign of good sleep health.

2. HAVE A WARM BATH

Soaking in the tub before bed increases your body temperature, but the subsequent cooling down afterwards is a strong signal to the body that it's night time and that you should get ready to sleep.

3. CONTROL THE ROOM TEMPERATURE

16 to 18°C is considered an ideal bedroom temperature, so try to control this as best you can. With the summer months approaching, consider a fan if your bedroom gets too hot. Plus, the noise it produces can help light sleepers.

4. AVOID ALCOHOL AND CAFFEINE

Most of us know that a cup of coffee might not be great for sleep health, but some turn to alcohol because they think a nightcap will help them to nod off. In fact, alcohol actually impairs our ability to cycle efficiently through the stages of sleep where we have the greatest physical and mental restoration

5. IMPROVE YOUR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Try to keep the bedroom a space for sleeping. Aim to disconnect from work emails, calls and texts between certain hours and/or at week-

ends. With more and more people working from home, research suggests that those who work from their bedroom are more likely to have disturbed sleep than those working from a dedicated office space

6. REDUCE LIGHTING

For an hour or so before bed, avoid bright lights, turn down the brightness and use night mode on your phone, and restrict other light-emitting devices such as TVs and computers. Light tells the body that it's daytime, so if you're getting too much before you sleep, you'll reduce your production of melatonin - the hormone that makes you sleepy.

7. EXERCISE REGULARLY

Moderate-intensity exercise, which finishes at least 90 minutes before bed, can improve sleep health while resetting the body's sleep-wake cycle. Try to avoid HIIT-based exercise prior to sleep as this increases heart rate and adrenaline, affecting your ability to fall asleep.

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TAIWAN

MASK MANDATE

Wearing of face masks is part of the all-year-round culture of hygiene and safety in Taiwan



Shaddad al Musalmay

Face masks are considered by many a useful way to stop the contraction and spread of COVID-19 over the past two years. Before the pandemic, these surgical aids were rarely seen in use in the Middle East, including Oman. But its use has sort of exploded in Taiwan.

On a recent visit to Taiwan, Muscat Daily learned that Taiwanese have worn masks for a host of cultural and environmental reasons, including non-medical, since 1950s, and it has become part of their culture.

"People know that when outbreaks like COVID-19 come to hound us, they have to cooperate together and trust the government," said Yi-Chun Lo, deputy director general of Taiwan Centers for Disease Control.

"It's important that the government still has a lot of public trust that is built up through past years. The public here trusts

medical doctors, they trust experts, and that is why they follow their initiatives to wear masks," he added.

In Taiwan, citizens say masks keep their faces warm in the winter and offer a sense of protection from air pollution, including any airborne germs. They also wear masks when feeling sick, as a courtesy, to stop any sneezes from landing on other people. Also, masks have become so popular that some manufacturers make them for fashionable use, too.

Pedestrians, motorists, cyclists and everyone else continue to wear face masks even though the government has not laid down any specific guidelines regarding the need to cover faces outdoors. Since July, many in Oman have abandoned wearing masks as soon as it was legally allowed.

According to public-health leaders, precautionary measures have been embraced by the public - a collective commitment which, the officials argue, has helped give the island one of the best COVID-19 control records in the world.

All employees at different facilities were mandated to wear a mask outside home, with exemptions announced in July for moped users, cyclists and others. However, everyone continued wearing them. "Wearing masks has become part of the good culture of Taiwanese. They want to overdo what the government says," Lo quipped.

The co-operative attitude stems from the trauma of Taipei's SARS outbreak in 2003, transparency by authorities imposing the restrictions, and a high level of trust for health leaders. Lo said less than five per cent of Taiwanese objected to being vaccinated. "Part of the motivation comes from memories of SARS 19 years ago," he said.

The country has for the last two and a half years closed its borders to non-citizens, and required anyone entering the island to quarantine for two weeks at a time. Dozens of hotels are still designated as quarantine accommodation, though the isolation requirement is due to be lifted completely for international travellers on October 13.

Authorities have tried to be as transpar-



ent as possible. "Daily press briefings on COVID issues still occur and don't end all questions are answered," Lo said.

In Taiwan, older people add sunglasses and sun hats to masks to obscure their en-

tire faces. The full blockade wards off sunburns and, some users say, stops common air pollution. The common use of masks now goes beyond official health guidance and has become part of the culture.

ESWL – The less invasive treatment option for kidney stones



DR SRINIVASAN THIMMARAJU
Urologist & Andrologist
Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Salalah

Stones in the urinary tract need to be treated. Often people are uncomfortable with the invasive means of management available. Is there any way other than invasive devices or surgical procedure? Yes. ESWL is an option to consider.

What is ESWL
ESWL (Extracorporeal Shock Wave Lithotripsy) is the procedure in which a series of shock waves are targeted to kidney stone resulting in its fragmentation. The shock waves are generated by a machine called a lithotripter. These waves are guided using an x-ray or ultrasonic device onto the kidney stone. The waves travel through skin and body tissue, reaching the stone where they break it into small fragments. Fragmented stone pieces then pass out along with urine.

Who should undergo this treatment?
ESWL is well suited to small kidney stones which can be easily seen by X-ray. Preliminary tests and imaging will help in making the decision at the time of consultation. Ultimately the treating urologist will decide whether the procedure is appropri-

ate for the given situation.

For whom is it not suitable?

Though non-invasive, this procedure is not suitable for all patients and all stones. It is not suitable for those with pacemakers for heart, patients who are on blood thinners, pregnant women, those with certain stone types and in certain locations, patients with severe pain, and those with active infection.

How it is done?

Some patients need preliminary JJ stenting before ESWL. Patient should lie on a table in a specialised treatment room that has the shock wave machine and imaging equipment. The stone location is made out using an attached computerised X-ray machine or an ultrasound. The waves are then focused on to the stone. A series of shock waves (from hundreds to thousands) is directed at the stone. Intensity and focus of the waves are so adjusted to optimise fragmentation of the stone.

Are there any concerns?

Some patients may have a small amount of blood in urine after this treatment. The urine may be slightly

pink or reddish. The blood in the urine often goes away in 2-3 days. Very rarely, will the patient require hospitalisation for complications after this procedure.

In Situ ESWL at Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Salalah

This method is considered to be totally non-invasive, as it does not involve prior placement of any tubes inside the patient's body like JJ stents.

At Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Salalah, we perform In situ ESWL. With our technical expertise, the entire procedure is done as day care (not requiring admission). The procedure is well tolerated by patients and hence the requirement for anaesthesia is rare, if at all, it will be minimal.

Take care of your kidneys

Proper and timely care of urinary stones save the kidneys from impending trouble. Kidneys are valuable organs and their safety must always be ascertained. Some procedures are old but are never obsolete. ESWL holds its promise as a safe and non-invasive treatment option for kidney stones at an affordable cost.

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TUESDAY, 04 OCTOBER, 2022

MUSCAT DAILY

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT



FINANCE IN FOCUS

Robust economic recovery has boosted the confidence in Oman's financial sector this year. Buoyed by promising business outlook, financial sector entities are expanding their offerings and focusing more on customer experience

Dhofar Insurance

Focusing on accessible customer service, faster turnaround time

Dhofar Insurance is the leading provider of general insurance in Oman. Can you tell about company's network, branches and reach to customers in different parts of the sultanate?

Dhofar Insurance has the largest branch network and we are present in every governorate across the sultanate. We have dedicated claims team in select branches for faster processing of claims. Our focus is to provide services to our customers with easy accessibility and faster turnaround time.

What is the company's current market position in motor and other major segments? How has been the growth in premiums in 2021 and what do you expect for this year?

Dhofar Insurance is a leader in motor and property insurance and has a significant market share in marine insurance. We have recorded significant growth in our gross premiums and aim to continue this growth in the foreseeable future.

Going forward, what will be your focus areas? Any plan to further diversify product portfolio and expand branch network?

Our focus is to launch innovative insurance products, keeping the customer requirements in mind. We are the first insurance company to launch Oman's first drive through insurance facility at our branch in Al Khuwair. In addition, we have been the first insurance company in Oman to launch 'pay-as-you-use' motor insurance for high-end cars and a mobile accidental damage gadget protection cover. We are continuously reviewing our branch network to ensure that its aligned with population density.

Can you briefly tell about Dhofar Insurance's digital transformation efforts. What major advancements has the company made in



SUNIL KOHLI, Chief Executive Officer

digitalisation in past few years, particularly after the start of COVID-19 pandemic?

Dhofar Insurance had put in place a business continuity plan that ensured that business was unhindered during the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. We had teams in place to ensure claims were processed online seamlessly. In addition, we had teams present 24x7 during the lockdown period

to ensure that policies are issued. Our call centre team was also available to help customers for any requirements.

On the digital transformation front, we have worked on many projects and many innovations are in the pipeline. We have launched online sales option on our website where customers can buy retail products like motor, individual health, individual life,

travel insurance, domestic worker insurance and home insurance covers. We are working on building a responsive mobile app as well.

The Capital Market Authority is implementing mandatory health insurance under the Dhamani scheme in a phased manner. What is your growth outlook for Dhofar Insurance's medical line

of business going forward?

We are looking forward to the launch of the mandatory health insurance by the Capital Market Authority. We have been working on having our systems in place to ensure that we are fully operational when the same is launched by the Authority. We aspire to be a major player in the health insurance space over the next couple of years and have been investing resources in training our staff to gear up for the same.

What is the company's position in life insurance business in Oman market. How do you see life insurance penetration and its current trends in the sultanate?

We are a major player in the life segment in Oman and have significant market presence. We aspire to grow this line of business over the next few years. Life insurance penetration is low in Oman market and people are buying life insurance mainly to secure their loans hence credit life is main product being preferred. However, after COVID-19, people are becoming more aware of the benefits of life insurance as a risk mitigation as well as savings instrument.

Can you tell about Dhofar Insurance's CSR initiatives and community activities?

Dhofar Insurance has been very active in supporting the community over the last few years. We had contributed towards the rehabilitation efforts undertaken by the authorities after Cyclone Shaheen. In addition, we have provided relief to families affected by the heavy rains in Sur.

The company has also recognised the services of Omani sportsmen for their achievements. We focus on sustainable development through three principal aspects, namely (i) healthcare, (ii) community driven development and (iii) education.



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Confidence in Oman's financial system significantly rises in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The removal of COVID-19 restrictions and higher oil prices have boosted Oman's economic recovery and significantly raised the confidence in the stability of macro-financial system in 2022, according to the results of a survey conducted by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The CBO's Systemic Risk Survey (SRS) is an annual survey that asks market participants and other stakeholders about perceived risks to, and their confidence in, the stability of Oman's macro-financial system.

Results of the survey were published in the CBO's Financial Stability Report 2022 released recently.

'As revealed by responses to SRS 2022, the relative improvement in the overall economic dynamics due to the ease of COVID-19 restrictions and rising oil prices significantly raised the degree of confidence in the stability of Oman's macro-financial system in 2022,' CBO said in the report.

The percentage of respondents who described themselves as 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' in Oman's macro-financial system jumped from 54 per cent in 2021 to 86 per cent in 2022.

Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents to SRS 2022 who were 'just confident' declined to 13 per cent from 42 per cent in 2021, and the responses in favour of 'not at all confident' dropped to only one per cent in 2022 from four per cent in the previous year.

The survey is generally completed by officials from banks, non-banking financial establishments, financial sector regulators, other governmental institutions, professionals from public and private business sectors, and academics in the fields of economics and finance. The results are based on responses to the SRS 2022, conducted in March 2022, and do



In CBO's Systemic Risk Survey, the percentage of respondents who described themselves as 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' in Oman's macro-financial system jumped from 54 per cent in 2021 to 86 per cent in 2022

not reflect the views of CBO.

The survey found that the level of respondents' confidence in the Omani macro-financial system remarkably increased as the pandemic started fading away. In SRS 2022, more than half (51 per cent) of the respondents reported an increase in their confidence over the last six months preceding taking the survey compared to only 15 per cent in 2021, while 41 per cent declared 'unchanged' confidence compared to only eight per cent a year ago.

Remarkably, only eight per cent of participants to SRS 2022 responded that their confidence 'decreased' this year as compared to 77 per cent in 2021.

According to responses to SRS 2022, the perceived probability of an event with a high negative impact occurring in Oman's financial system over the short term (up to one year ahead) dropped considerably in line with recovering demand as the pandemic lockdown measures eased globally as well as the recent surge in oil prices.

Only eight per cent of the respondents judged this probability to be 'high' or 'very high' in 2022, compared to 27 per cent in SRS 2021. Moreover, the percentage of respondents who viewed this probability as 'low' or 'very low' increased from 37 per cent in 2021 to 55 per cent in 2022.

Interestingly, the participants' expectations of such a negative event occurring over the medium term (1-3 years ahead) witnessed a smaller change between 2021 and 2022. The percentage of re-

spondents who viewed this probability as 'high or very high' slightly declined to 20 per cent in 2022 from 24 per cent in 2021. However, the percentage of those who judged this probability as 'low or very low' jumped to 39 per cent in 2022 from 25 per cent a year ago.

Within Oman's financial system, conventional banks, Islamic banks, and currency exchange companies are viewed as the most solid financial intermediaries in 2022, while finance and leasing companies, mutual funds, and capital market institutions are perceived as the most vulnerable to adverse shocks, as per the survey.

CBO's Financial Stability Report 2022 noted that the policy actions taken during the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery so far have diminished the short-term risks to financial stability.



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Providing wide range of financial services under one roof

Modern Exchange has been in the remittance and money exchange business since 1993. Tell us about the company's branch network and services in Oman?

Modern Exchange Co LLC-Oman, was established in the year 1993. The company with more than 29 years of trusted service has gone through a major transition in 2011, it was acquired by one of the conglomerate Al Mulla Group, a leading diversified privately held business group headquartered in Kuwait, driven by over 15,000 people from more than 35 countries, having affiliations with over 40 companies and subsidiaries, and exclusively representing over 200 renowned world-class brands.

Modern Exchange have been growing at a fast pace and have built a strong network of Thirty-Seven branches across the Sultanate of Oman. Modern Exchange offers a wide range of financial services under one roof, every product, service or process is engineered to enhance customer experience. So, no matter which branch the customers walk in to, they will get the same attention and quality of service. This pro-active thinking has enabled us to offer a wide range of financial services under a single roof. Customers can avail Money transfer, Foreign currency exchange and Payment solutions at the same branch, making Modern Exchange a true financial supermarket.

"Our Motto is to beat customer expectations, not just to meet them. We believe in creating customer delight and positive experiences for our customers towards our brand through our service levels. We care about surpassing customers' expectations and focus on building a long-term and engaging relationship with them.

What is the most significant way in which Modern Exchange stands above its peers within the local remittance and money exchange market?

Technology is the backbone and major contributor in our success. We are the first among exchange houses launched online/mobile app, through which one can send money to any corner of the



We care about surpassing customers' expectations and focus on building a long-term and engaging relationship with them

LIJO JOHN, General Manager, Modern Exchange Company

world. Apart from that, now customers need not carry hard cash to the branch, instead they can use their any Oman issued debit cards for transactions.

We treat strategic partnership as an opportunity to win specific business objectives and it is often considered as a long term, win-win commitment between specifically identified potential partners. Modern Exchange has entered into strategic partnerships with leading banks/MTO's across the world to offer unparalleled service to our customers and in turn enabling us for winning a new set of customers (acquisition), retention and reactivation of inactive customers etc. Some of our recent strategic partnerships made us to enable faster account credit service to the corridors such as Europe, UK, USA, Canada, Australia and the UAE for Corporate as well as individual customers with very competitive charges and exchange rates.

Do you see consumer preferences have changed in your industry as a result of the pandemic? If so, how are you and team dealing with renewed customer expectations?

We have been advocating for moving remittance business on to digital platform, which could help us to move the exchange companies to cashless

transaction. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, changes in consumer preferences were more visible in the digital world as more consumers turned to Internet banking, mobile banking, and mobile payments, which changed the way they interact with their banks and financial institutions (BFIs). We have introduced our mobile app/online remittance in 2018, however the emergence of COVID-19 has severely disrupted the methods of money transfer and payments. After the COVID-19 outbreak, the use of digital payments and remittances has suddenly increased globally and in different contexts. Even in countries where the usage of digital financial services was relatively high before the pandemic.

We have successfully introduced Payment Link transactions during the COVID time and the number of online/mobile App customer registrations have increased manifold and still the trend is continuing. Hence, our registered customers would now be able to make real-time transactions without visiting branches.

Oman's economy is seeing a robust recovery this year amid higher oil prices. What is your outlook for remittances in 2022 and the coming years?

Oman's economy has enjoyed a strong first half to 2022 and the outlook for the rest of this year and 2023 is positive. We believe this positive outlook would also help the remittance industry to grow in the coming year. Country's commitment to fiscal performance control procedures, initiatives in line with the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan and higher oil prices improved the economic and financial indicators.

How do you ensure meeting customer expectations and building long-term and engaging relationship with them?

Customers have always been the nucleus of every activity in Modern Exchange. Delivering customer service par excellence has been the single most goal of Modern Exchange since inception. And this reverence has been well received and reciprocated which attributes to the strong customer base. We have introduced 'Zero Minute remittance' for customers, Mobile/online and Payment Link transactions for their convenience, shortly we will be introducing offsite Kiosk in remote locations. Apart from that, more outlets will be opened to serve our customers.

As an organisation, we have been inculcating this culture of excellence, imbining its values in our work life. When we experience an enhanced degree of quality in the output every time, we celebrate it as success. This constant striving gets fuelled by encouragement in the form of awards and recognition from various authorities. The most recent example is the 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand' award, conferred under the Money Exchange category, highlights brand's success in catalysing steady improvements towards customer service and business excellence.

What are the recent developments in the remittances industry related to digitalisation and innovation? What innovations Modern Exchange has made in remittance space in recent years?

Central Bank of Oman has recently issued circular on the Merchant Service Fee to be charged on Off-Us transactions, by the licensed banks. This is in line with CBO's vision to promote e-

payments in the country and to achieve the goal of less-cash society. CBO's initiative has helped us in augmenting our digitalisation process and in turn reaching to all segments of the population especially Omani customers who have been using our online/mobile app service majorly for transferring funds to European countries. Payment link transaction is a boon to our registered customers who can remit money by receiving the remittance link through their registered mobile number with us even without visiting our branches.

In 2018, Modern Exchange became one of the first exchange companies in Oman to launch a mobile remittance app. How has been the response from customers for this app?

Post COVID-19, we see a surge in online/mobile app remittance transactions and with the timely interference of Central Bank of Oman, now can accept payments from all the debit cards issued in Oman. Sending remittance using mobile app is simple and easy. The app is designed to be user friendly, so even if you aren't tech-savvy, you should be able to navigate them. They are also secure as you complete all your transactions within the app without having to visit an external website.

In what kind of CSR activity is Modern Exchange involved?

Every act of kindness creates an endless ripple and we, at Modern Exchange believe in the same. As part of Corporate Social Responsibility, Modern Exchange started offering free life insurance worth RO1,250 for 30 days from the date of remittance, the insurance has got worldwide coverage for accidental death, normal death and permanent total disability. It is a free insurance for our customers, however premium of each transaction is being paid by the company, and no policy documents are to be filled, customers may enjoy hassle-free insurance cover for 30 days which gets auto-renewed at their successive transactions. This was started in 2013 and continued to be a helping hand for many of our customer's families.

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QNB unveils exciting preparations for the long-awaited FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022

As a part of its role as the Official Middle East and Africa Supporter of the FIFA World Cup 2022, QNB group unveiled its preparations for the upcoming FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and highlighted its main exciting events, initiatives, products, and services planned to take place as the country approaches the long-awaited event hosted for the first time in the Middle East.

Abdulla Mubarak al Khalifa, Group Chief Executive Officer emphasised on the importance of the group's role as the official Middle East and Africa supporter of the FIFA World Cup 2022.

"The Bank was an official supporter of the 2010 Qatari Bid Committee. Since then, QNB Group has been actively working on instilling sports as a culture locally, by highlighting its brand as a leading financial Qatari institution by supporting many local and international sports events. Today, we witness the outcome of our efforts over the years and consolidate our social responsibilities towards this distinguished football event."

In this context, Abdulla Mubarak al Khalifa affirmed the efforts made by the group during this period to provide a new and unique experience that will enthral visitors coming from all over the world. He emphasised on the strength and ability of our globally recognised national institutions to create change and development in the largest sporting event on a local and international level. This highlights such experience in a manner that benefits our institution and our beloved country Qatar, especially as this tournament will be a milestone for Qatar and the region.

FIFA Operations Committee

The group has formed a special committee designated to organise all FIFA operations during the tournament period, to deliver an exceptional experience.

The group's preparations for the



tournament were tested during the FIFA Arab Cup 2021, and the committee is currently working on several campaigns to further emphasise the tournament's uniqueness through its local and international branches.

International branches activities

"We launched several initiatives and activities in many of our branches and subsidiaries like Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Indonesia, where each of them will have a unique FIFA designed interior and exterior," Abdulla al Khalifa said.

Along its brand exposure within the region, QNB Group has also shared details of its international brand exposure, which included its screens and welcome banners in locations like Geneva International Airport and Heathrow International Airport.

The group's CEO emphasised

that it will have a unique imprint this year and a strong presence through collaborating with various institutions and organisations to carry out intensive promotional campaigns across the country, as it is expected to witness an unprecedented large number of visitors during the tournament.

Areas such as Lusail City, which will host the final match, is likely to attract a significant number of spectators around fan zones. This has pushed us to intensify our efforts to highlight our brand in some of the liveliest locations such as QNB Lusail Metro Station, and Place Vendôme Mall, the latest luxury shopping mall in Qatar that is expected to attract a large number of football fans."

He also revealed that a unique partnership with social media and international celebrities will be announced soon, which highlights a new approach for the Group with a

different content direction focused on promoting the tournament and its events.

Supporting Qatar's efforts for a successful tournament

The CEO also emphasised that the group has focused on supporting the country's efforts dedicated towards hosting the tournament saying, "We have taken upon ourselves the responsibility of supporting the continuous efforts taken by the country and ensuring that its success in hosting this event is reached by all measures. We will dedicate all our efforts towards the success and legacy of this prestigious event, and ensure that history will remember it in a way that reflects the Qatari culture, institutions, and identity, all of which will be prominent to everyone."

The group has also collaborated with the Supreme Committee for

Delivery and Legacy to incorporate the Fan Card App 'Hayya' within QNB ATMs to provide an easier and more convenient experience for the users.

Abdulla al Khalifa has also unveiled several details of the group's preparations and its participation and presence in the big event. He stated that as part of the group's activities, QNB will participate in the FIFA fan zones, where large numbers of spectators will be gathering during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, where the Group will participate in several activities, services, and live match broadcasts for fans to watch in an atmosphere full of excitement.

FIFA fan festival

He stated that the group has started its preparations for the FIFA Fan Festival, which will host several special and unique activities, and is anticipated to become a major attraction for all visitors and spectators. Activities will include, side events, live match screenings, and other preparations designed to suit customers and non-customers.

"The FIFA fan festivals will be designed in a very futuristic and unique way, making it exceptionally memorable for all. We will put all our efforts into making this version remarkable for everyone."

Abdulla al Khalifa also highlighted the recent initiatives aimed at including everyone within the experience as a part of its Corporate Social Responsibility. This included its recent partnership with Al Shafallah Center for Persons with Disability, which aims at providing them with the chance to attend the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 matches along with all the fans in an effort to promote inclusivity during the tournament.

He added that this comes as part of the group's efforts towards social and humanitarian initiatives, where individuals with special needs will be offered the chance to attend some of the most remarkable matches all while ensuring their safety and comfort.

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National Finance: a step ahead in finance solutions

Being recognised for its innovative financing and leasing solutions, and notable achievements in digitalisation, the sultanate's largest finance company, National Finance strives to achieve excellence in customer experience and in uplifting the finance sector. Over the last three decades, the company has built a reputation as the market leader, trusted by thousands of customers. It offers a wide range of products targeting both, individual customers and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and corporates through its 21 branches across the country.

Fast. Easy. Flexible.

Financial institutions have been competing in providing the best services and innovative financial solutions to its clients to meet their expectations. Amidst this scenario, providing ease of documentation, quick approvals, and most importantly, advancing loans and financial support to individuals and SMEs, National Finance is a step-ahead in its customer-centric approach. With its well-entrenched branch network across major cities and governorates, and with its digital platforms, the company provides customers with an experience that is Fast, Easy and Flexible. Aspiring to enhance customer engagement, National Finance has been ahead of the curve in adopting digital solutions that focus on ease and convenience. It invested into several technologically advanced solutions to enhance its e-channels such as the mobile App and website.

Applying for a loan

National Finance is well-advanced when it comes to E-channels. Individuals can apply for their financing through different channels such as website, mobile app, call centre, WhatsApp and social media. Using any of these multiple channels, customers at National Finance go through one seamless experience.

The National Finance mobile app provides 24x7 access to the customer's finance information, pay monthly installments, view transaction details, request for balance confirmation letter and other services.

Most Innovative Retail Finance – Automobile – Oman

The company's offering in automobile finance is known for its easy approvals, seamless procedures, easy documentation, and flexible terms. With an increasing number of Omani nationals joining the country's workforce, there is an inherent need for fulfilling basic requirements such as purchase of 4-wheelers, and heavy goods vehicles. This is where National Finance empowers individuals, small businesses, and large corporate to meet their needs without any stress and hassles.

Awards & Accolades

Over the last few years, National Finance has been honoured with coveted titles by reputed entities including the 'Best Non-banking Financial Corporation', 'Excellence in Customer Experience in Finance & Leasing', 'Excellence in Mobile App based Finance & Leasing Services' and 'Excellence in Fintech'. In 2021, it also won the 'Best SME Finance Solution 2021' award by Capital Finance International (CFI.co) and the 'Most Innovative Retail Finance – Automobile – Oman 2021' Award by International Finance Awards.

These achievements have cemented the company's leadership position in the market and strongly aligns with its robust growth strategy that focuses on the clients as a priority. The company will continue marching toward market excellence and innovation to deliver high end services and add value to its clients.



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Insurance premiums rise 3% to RO480mn in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Aggregate gross written premiums of insurance companies operating in Oman increased by 3 per cent to RO479.85mn for the year 2021 compared with RO465.89mn recorded in the previous year, data released by Capital Market Authority (CMA) showed.

The data indicated that the rise in total premiums was mainly contributed by growth in life insurance, family takaful and health insurance segments during last year, while the general insurance segment showed a mild increase in premiums.

Gross direct premiums of general insurance inched up 0.7 per cent to RO258.67mn in 2021 compared to RO256.95mn in the previous year.

On the other hand, life insurance and family takaful premiums grew by 6.6 per cent to RO57.321mn in 2021, from RO53.752mn recorded in 2020. Gross direct premiums for health insurance segment rose 5.6 per cent to RO163.866mn compared with RO155.193mn in the previous year.

Insurance compensations paid by insurers marginally increased by 0.1 per cent in 2021 compared to the 2020 figures. Total compensa-



tions paid by insurers stood at RO289.83mn for 2021 as compared to RO289.6mn in 2020.

Total compensations paid for general insurance policies dropped 8.4 per cent to RO125.52mn in 2021, compared with RO136.97mn in 2020. Compensations paid for life insurance/family takaful increased 38.6 per cent in 2021, while compensations paid for health insurance decreased 0.5 per cent.

Takaful premiums up 9.1%

Gross direct premiums of takaful (Islamic insurance) companies op-

The rise in total premiums was contributed by growth in life insurance, family takaful and health insurance in 2021, while general insurance showed a mild increase in premiums

erating in the sultanate increased by 9.1 per cent to RO70.78mn in 2021 from RO64.85mn in 2020. Takaful premiums currently represent

approximately 15 per cent of total premiums of the insurance sector in Oman, the CMA data showed.

Gross direct premiums for gen-

eral takaful increased to RO44.16mn in 2021 from RO41.42mn in the previous year, while premiums for family takaful increased 10.8 per cent to RO13.47mn. Gross premiums for health takaful rose 16.7 per cent to RO13.15mn in 2021 compared to RO11.27mn a year ago.

Total takaful compensations paid by takaful insurers increased 13.7 per cent to RO38.392mn in 2021 compared to RO33.777mn in the previous year, which constitutes 13 per cent of the total compensations paid by insurance companies in Oman.

Insurers' assets reach RO1.2bn

Total assets of insurance companies in Oman increased by 7.5 per cent year-on-year to RO1.197bn at the end of 2021. Of the total assets, RO767.64mn were related to general insurance, RO219.97mn were related to life insurance, and RO209.95mn assets were related to health insurance.

The assets of national insurance companies accounted for RO872.48mn or 72.8 per cent of the total, while foreign insurance companies accounted for RO325mn worth of assets or 27.2 per cent of the total assets.

Oman's financial wealth may reach \$89bn by 2026: Report

Oman's financial wealth will experience a sturdy compound annual growth rate of 5.2 per cent over the next five years, according to a new report released by Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

As per BCG's Global Wealth 2022 report, Oman's financial wealth is expected to rise from US\$69.3bn in 2021 to a high of US\$89.3bn in 2026.

"We see the Middle East and Africa, including Oman's, financial wealth growing year after year,

despite a tremulous global market," Mustafa Bosca, managing director and partner at BCG, said in a press statement.

He said Oman's financial wealth shows positive prospects having grown 4 per cent every year since 2016 to US\$69.3bn in 2021 and is expected to continuously grow to 2026.

Additionally, approximately 12 per cent of Oman's wealth is derived from ultra high net-worth (HNW) segment in 2021, which are

individuals who are worth more than US\$100mn, Bosca added.

Elsewhere in GCC, BCG expects UAE's financial wealth to grow by 6.7 per cent annually over next five years, rising from US\$0.7tn in 2021 to a high of US\$1tn in 2026. It predicts Saudi Arabia's financial wealth to grow by 4.8 per cent annually, rising from US\$1.3tn in 2021 to US\$1.6tn by 2026. "The wealth management agenda is getting more crowded - and the items on it more urgent. Net-zero, crypto, per-

sonalisation, and digitisation are not merely arenas that leaders can simply consider. They are imperatives whose outcomes will determine which (wealth management) institutions grow client share over the next five years. The most important question facing wealth managers right now is not which initiatives to prioritise - but how best to execute on all of them," Bosca concluded in his statement.

As per the BCG report, global financial wealth grew by a stagger-

ing 10.6 per cent from 2020 to 2021 - the fastest rate in over a decade. The double-digit growth created US\$26tn in new wealth and took total global financial wealth and the real asset pool close to US\$530tn.

Strong global equity markets helped propel the gains last year. Driven by healthy corporate profits, the S&P 500 index soared by 26.9 per cent in 2021, a remarkable rise given the record-setting levels of 2020. Real assets were another source of growth.

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Omani banks have strong capital buffers to withstand shocks: CBO

Correspondent
Muscat

Omani banks have maintained sound assets quality and strong capital buffers which are sufficient to withstand any potential shocks, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

In its recently released Financial Stability Report 2022, CBO said the Omani banking sector continues to be on the growth trajectory, supporting the real economy.

'Banks maintained sound asset quality illustrated by the low non-performing loans and remained resilient with strong capital buffers that are well above the Basel III requirements. The capital of the banks is assessed to be sufficient to withstand plausible shocks,' the central bank said in the report.

The prudential liquidity indicators showed that Oman's banking system continued to maintain stable short-term and longer-term liquidity requirements and can withstand any potential liquidity shocks, CBO added.

As the sultanate's economy recovers from the pandemic along with the resumption of economic activities in a favourable oil price environment, banks have posted improved profits that allowed them to strengthen their capital.

Oman's banking sector demonstrated its resilience during the past two years. Banks were instrumental



Omani banks' maintained sound asset quality illustrated by low non-performing loans and remained resilient with strong capital buffers that are well above the Basel III requirements, according to CBO

in providing financial relief to the borrowers by suspending loan

repayment from borrowers affected by the pandemic. The moratorium

on loan repayments, allowed by CBO since March 2020, ended in

December 2021.

'As the exit from regulatory forbearance was timed to coincide with a robust recovery, the asset quality indicators are expected to stay strong. The profitability and liquidity of the banks improved during 2021 and they continue to hold adequate capital buffers,' the sultanate's central bank said in the report.

'Our stress tests show that the banking system remains resilient and retains the capacity to absorb a variety of shocks without adverse spillover effects on credit supply and the real economy,' the report added.

Omani banks' profitability indicators significantly improved in 2021 as the sultanate's economy embarked on a growth trajectory.

Banks posted pre-tax profits of RO382mn in 2021 as compared to RO303mn in 2020, the CBO data showed. The rise in profits was largely due to an increase in net interest income by RO25mn and a drop in provision and write-offs by around RO50mn.

'With a strong economic recovery, banks were set to further improve profitability during 2022, which would also help them accumulate more capital. Nevertheless, the heightened political and economic uncertainties and monetary policy tightening are bound to counterweigh on potential gains,' CBO noted.

Oman's Islamic banking assets jump 9.6% to RO6.2bn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With continuing robust growth of Oman's Islamic banking sector, total assets of Islamic banks and windows operating in the sultanate jumped by 9.6 per cent year-on-year to reach at RO6.2bn in June 2022.

Oman's Islamic banking assets

now account for 15.9 per cent of the country's total banking system assets, according to latest data released by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The sultanate's Islamic banking entities provided total financing of RO5.1bn till end-June 2022, recording a robust growth of 11.2 per cent over that a year ago.

Total deposits held with Islamic

banks and windows also increased by 12.8 per cent to RO4.7bn in June this year compared to the same period a year ago.

The Islamic banking sector in the sultanate - which comprises of two fully-fledged Islamic banks and five Islamic banking windows - has continued its double-digit growth despite the adverse economic impact of the

COVID-19 pandemic.

Oman's Islamic banking entities recorded about three-times higher profitability in 2021 from the plunge observed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to CBO's latest Financial Stability Report.

During 2021, the Islamic banking sector exhibited pre-tax profit of

RO82mn against RO27.4mn a year ago, which improved return-on-assets and return-on-equity of the sector. The asset quality of the Islamic banking financing portfolio also remained strong with a non-performance financing ratio of 1.9 per cent at the end of December 2021, which is among the lowest in the region, the CBO noted.

Bank Muscat facilitates digital transformation of its Government and Corporate customers

Holds customer events in business hubs to stress on the importance of digitalisation



MUSCAT – In line with its role in strengthening national development and digitalisation of the economy as part of the ambitious Oman Vision 2040, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, continues to launch innovative digital banking solutions and services that are transforming banking for its Institutional and Corporate Banking clients. Its Corporate Internet Banking, Business to Business (B2B) Connect solution, Direct Debit solution, Virtual Accounts, Sweeps solution, Remote Deposit Capture (RDC), Point of Sales and Payment Gateway are being increasingly leveraged by customers to rapidly transform businesses and enhance efficiencies. These digital solutions optimise cash flow, provides complete control and visibility of funds thus making working capital management more predictable.

To further spread awareness of the importance of digital transformation for the country, the bank is continuously organising customer events in business hubs like Salalah and Sohar so as to enhance partnership with government institutions and corporates. These events offer a platform to discuss new developments in corporate banking and focus on the importance of digital transformation.

Speaking on the occasion, Ilham



Ilham al Hamaid

Murtadha al Hamaid, general manager - Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "As a pioneer of Corporate Banking in the country, Bank Muscat has always been a pillar that supports the country's needs across both the government and private sectors. Over the last few years, the bank has been working hard to promote digital banking by constantly adding new features and services to strengthen the customer experience as much as possible. Over the last 40 years, we are delighted to have played a key role in facilitating the growth and development of our Government and Corporate partners across different sectors."

She added, "Going ahead, the current shift to digital will only gather more pace and play a key



Wafa al Ajmi

role in enabling our customers to transact securely and conveniently from anywhere and at any time. We are delighted to note that our Government, Institutional and Corporate customers have been wholeheartedly shifting over to highly-efficient digital banking over the past two years. Bank Muscat is glad to further popularise the importance of the ongoing digital transformation by holding more customer events so that we can reach out to the maximum number of our Government and Corporate partners as possible."

Wafa Ibrahim al Ajmi, assistant general manager - Transactions & Government Banking, Bank Muscat, thanked customers for their strong confidence in the bank's services and facilities. She pointed out how

Bank Muscat has been spearheading a massive digital transformation in the banking and financial services sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The bank provides a complete range of technology-driven digital offerings, which cater to government entities, corporates and SMEs, and enables institutions to become future ready, agile and digitally-mature organisations. She added that Bank Muscat would continue to support corporates and government entities to make the best use of digitalisation to transform and supercharge their business environment."

Bank Muscat's digital solutions and services are boosted by its new Corporate Banking website (<https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Business/Pages/Business-Home-page.aspx>). The website provides direct links to services and solutions, including Corporate Online Banking, business loans and solutions, trade finance, agency and custody services, sectoral insights and eApplications for various trade solutions and other banking services. Recently, the bank also launched the Bank Muscat Trade Portal for online initiation of trade transactions such as issuance/amendment of Letters of Credit, Guarantees, and Trade Financing. Accessible through the online banking platform, the portal is an e-chan-

nel that also helps customers access required information/reports online. Instead of customers visiting branches and submitting their requests in person, the same can now be sent to the bank online, thereby enhancing customer convenience and accessibility.

The bank's ongoing digitalisation drive is in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and will further enhance financial inclusion in Oman. The bank's customers are at present benefiting immensely from the latest devices, solutions and technological advances made available to them through the implementation of cutting-edge technology. Bank Muscat has announced plans to keep introducing new digital services and features that further enhance banking convenience and security in the future, and its efforts in customer centricity and digitalisation have been well recognised by local and international media with the bank winning multiple awards across its different lines of business regularly. In recognition of the bank's commitment to provide innovative digital solutions to its customers, Bank Muscat has won a number of prestigious awards including the Best Corporate/Institutional Digital Bank (Oman) and the Best Consumer Digital Bank (Oman) awards from Global Finance.



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