



'EMPOWERING WOMEN CRITICAL FOR OMAN'S EQUITABLE FUTURE'

Majlis A'Shura elections

Our Correspondent
Muscat

While Omani women have made significant strides in administrative and diplomatic roles, their representation in Majlis A'Shura remains limited. As the shura elections approach - on October 29 - experts weigh in on the disproportionate presence of women in the body.

To address the disparity, Muscat Daily spoke with experts who believe Omani women have received unwavering support and attention from the highest echelons of the government. In the wake of the blessed Omani renaissance, women have been granted equal opportunities to pursue education and have actively contributed to diverse professional domains. So their lack of representation in the political sphere is concerning.

"Omani women's political participation isn't just an aspiration. It's vital for an inclusive and equitable nation," said Fatema Yousuf Hamdan al Balushi, head of the communications department at SQU.

According to Fatema, al-



At the family level, support often hinges on familial duty rather than belief in a woman's competence. At the tribal level, allegiance often takes precedence over gender

FATEMA YOUSUF
HAMDAN AL BALUSHI

though women have achieved notable social and economic milestones, their political involvement is insufficient. This, despite rights granted to them under the Basic Law since 1996.

"From 1994 to 2019, the shura has seen no more than two female members in any term. This is surprising, espe-



cially considering the female voter turnout reached 62.7% in the last elections," Fatema noted.

She believes the social structure has a big role in supporting Omani women's political representation. "At the family level, support often hinges on familial duty rather than belief in a

woman's competence. At the tribal level, allegiance often takes precedence over gender, favouring male candidates."

To bolster women's roles in politics, Fatema suggests enhancing women's presence in civil society institutions, offering financial assistance to female candidates and prioritising re-

search on women's participation. "A national fund, supported by the private sector and NGOs focused on women could be an effective strategy. Concurrently, local research can shape a more informed national vision," she added.

Voicing his perspective, Khamis al Abri, a lawyer, said,



The prevalent belief is that women aren't fit for the shura. What's essential is changing this mindset and championing women who've made remarkable contributions to society

DR SAMAH MAHMOUD
AL SHARIF

"Omani women have been integral to society's development. Their election campaigns, however, need stronger promotion to gain voters' trust."

Addressing a more basic issue, Dr Samah Mahmoud al Sharif, head of the Veterinary Quarantine Department at Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and

753,952 voters for Majlis A'Shura elections

Muscat - The Ministry of Interior has released the preliminary list of voters eligible for the Majlis A'Shura elections for its tenth term. A statement issued by the ministry said, "The number of voters for the elections is 753,952, including 362,924 female voters. The number of new registered voters is 139,963. North Batinah governorate registered the highest number of voters with a total of 153,809, followed by Muscat (97,928) and South Batinah (93,869).

According to the ministry, a total of 843 candidates - including 32 women - are contesting the elections.

Continued on Page 02

NEWS BRIEF

KARIKO, WEISSMAN WIN NOBEL FOR COVID-19 VACCINES

Stockholm, Sweden - Katalin Kariko of Hungary and Drew Weissman of the United States won the Nobel Medicine Prize on Monday for work on messenger RNA (mRNA) technology that paved the way for COVID-19 vaccines.

The pair, who had been tipped as favourites, were honoured "for their discoveries concerning nucleoside base modifications that enabled the development of effective mRNA vaccines against COVID-19", the jury said. "The laureates contributed to the unprecedented rate of vaccine development during one of the greatest threats to human health in modern times," it added. See also Page 09

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Huge fire rips through regional police HQ in Egypt

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'Every soul is in need of self respect'

SAI recovers RO97.8mn for Public Treasury

Our Correspondent
Muscat

State Audit Institution (SAI) presented notable insights from its 2022 Annual Report on Monday, offering a comprehensive look at the audit tasks conducted in various government units, authorities and companies in Oman.

This critical endeavour led to important observations, uncovering areas of improvement and showcasing results of SAI's unwavering commitment to transparency, accountability and integrity.

The report also outlined SAI's significant role in the recovery of funds for the state's public treasury and handling a multitude of public cases, reinforcing its pivotal contribution to upholding financial and legal standards in Oman.

In this context, Ahmed Salim al Rujaibi, Deputy Chairman of SAI, stated that the report mirrors the approach advocated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik emphasising transparency, integrity and accountability across all sectors, while engaging the community to fortify the regulatory system to realise national goals.



The report mirrors transparency, integrity and accountability across all sectors, while engaging the community to fortify the regulatory system to realise national goals

AHMED SALIM AL RUJAIBI



Key statistics and achievements

Audit tasks: SAI conducted 181 audit tasks as per its 2022 annual audit plan. Out of these, 147 reports were issued containing a total of 1,591 observations.

Government unit audits: The main audit areas for government units included tax assessment, collection of companies' income tax and indirect taxes, along with administrative audits of various sectors such as intellectual property, commercial establishments and food security systems.

Authorities, investments and

company audits: Significant audit areas included projects of design and construction of cargo and aircraft maintenance buildings at Muscat and Salalah airports and assessment of the ninth and tenth strategic plans of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates - Madayn. Further topics included the audit of ticket sales revenues of Oman Air and the assessment results of management and operations of gas plants and facilities.

Recovered funds: SAI's work in 2022 resulted in the recovery and collection of RO17.8mn for the state's public treasury from

various entities. A total of RO80mn was recovered in 2021, as reported in the 2022 Annual Report.

Public cases: SAI dealt with 113 public cases in 2022, some of which led to convictions. The cases involved instances of bribery, embezzlement, misuse of position and furnishing incorrect information. Punishments in such cases ranged from one month to ten years imprisonment and fines between RO100 and RO78,000.

Legislation reviews: SAI reviewed a total of 81 legislations related to financial and accounting affairs, taxes and charges in line with Article 5 of the State Audit Law issued by Royal Decree No111/2011.

Community reports: SAI received 587 complaints and reports from the community in 2022, achieving an 84% completion rate in dealing with these complaints and reports.

Promotion of integrity: The SAI community brief includes a statement highlighting the positive effects of the institution's work for the year 2022, focusing on community partnership, promoting values of integrity, protecting public funds and preserving state gains through various programmes and activities.



UK-GCC FTA likely by Q1 2024: MoCIIP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement could be negotiated by the first quarter of 2024 if the current pace continues, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) announced at the British Business Forum on Sunday.

Organised by the British Business Forum and the UK Embassy in Oman, the event focused on fostering a stronger business and trade relation between Oman and the UK.

The event saw the presence of over 60 leading UK companies. The guest of honour was Faisal al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Commerce between the UK and the GCC economies is likely to jump 16% with the signing of a free trade agreement, according to a statement by the Department for Business and Trade, UK.

H E Dr Liane Saunders OBE, the newly appointed Ambassador of the UK to Oman, emphasised the numerous advantages of this forthcoming trade agreement including its potential to strengthen economic ties between the UK, GCC and Oman.

Speaking during the event, H E Liane said, "The UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement represents a significant step forward in our bilateral relations. It will not only boost trade and investment opportunities but also promote job creation and economic growth. Oman, in particular, stands to benefit immensely from increased trade and licensing opportunities, further consolidating its position as a key player in the region. This FTA will facilitate smoother trade flows and reduce trade barriers, leading to lower costs for consumers and businesses alike. It's a win-win situation for both sides, fostering cooperation and strengthening the ties that bind our nations."

Iran welcomes Oman's initiative to revive nuclear deal through negotiations

Tehran, Iran - Iran has highlighted Oman's efforts in bringing the parties involved in the nuclear deal negotiations closer.

Speaking at a press conference in Tehran on Monday, Nasser Kanaani, Foreign Ministry spokesman, said that Iran has en-



Nasser Kanaani

gaged in indirect talks with Washington and that some friendly countries have initiated efforts for an agreement.

He also referred to Oman's initiative to bring the parties' views closer and return all parties to their commitments, saying Iran

welcomes the efforts of friendly countries in this regard, Iran's state news agency IRNA reported.

Iran has repeatedly stated that it adheres to the process of negotiations to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement, also called the Joint

Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Tehran regards the negotiation process as a suitable path to revive the deal, which was unilaterally ditched by the United States in 2018. We have stated many times that we adhere to the

process of negotiations for a responsible return of all parties to the JCPOA," he said.

He further added, "If the other side has the will to responsibly return to the JCPOA, Iran is also ready to help in this direction."

OCCI, Unicef sign pact for family-friendly workplaces

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) signed a memorandum of cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) on Monday to assist companies in establishing family-friendly policies, ensuring parents have the necessary time, resources and services for their young children's care.

The pact was signed by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI, and Sumaira Chowdhury, Unicef Representative to the sultanate.

Areej bint Mohsen Haider Darwish, board member of OCCI and head of its Businesswomen's Committee, asserted the positive impact of implementing family-friendly policies, which contribute to the evolution of sustainable and equal societies.

She emphasised the critical role such policies play in enhancing quality of life and



(Supplied photo)

achieving diverse economic and social goals, including better education, public health and gender equality.

Areej informed that the memorandum aligns with Unicef's global vision, citing its vital role in promoting children's rights, boosting maternal and child health, and supporting robust educational frameworks. "This initiative is a step towards

realisation of these significant goals."

Sumayra reiterated the memorandum's role in bolstering family-friendly policies and promoting children's rights in sync with Oman Vision 2040. She said she was hopeful of collaborative work with the chamber and its affiliates to ensure the objectives of the memorandum are achieved.

EA launches 'No to Plastic' drive

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) has launched a campaign called 'No to Plastic' in Al Wusta.

The campaign aims to educate society about the environmental impact of plastics, particularly single-use plastic bags, and promote eco-friendly alternatives.

An official from EA highlighted the authority's efforts to reduce plastic use. "EA has formed a specialised team, based on administrative decision No 61/2021, tasked with establishing a framework to stop the use of plastic shopping bags. This team is committed to addressing challenges stemming from the excessive use of plastic shopping bags under 50xcm."

The campaign is in line with



(Supplied photo)

EA's ban, which came into effect on January 1, 2021, on the use of single-use plastic shopping bags under 50xcm.

In a further step towards environmental conservation, H E

Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, enforced a ban on the import of plastic bags, effective from January 1, 2023, under Ministerial

Decision No 519/2022.

The concerted efforts of various authorities underscore a national commitment to reducing plastic consumption and its consequent environmental impact.

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The 'Top Three' most fascinating photographs will be published in Muscat Daily, on October 10, and will win a one-night stay for two persons each at Barceló Mussanah Resort

Municipality opens two lanes on Amerat-Bausher Road

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To ensure smooth flow of traffic, Muscat Municipality has announced the opening of two lanes on the Amerat-Bausher Road for peak-hour morning traffic. A statement issued by the civic body said, "Two lanes have been opened on Al Jebel Road by the municipality, in coordination with Royal Oman Police, for morning hour traffic from 5am to 9am for those commuting from Amerat to the wilayat of Bausher to enhance the flow of traffic."



Muscat Municipality urged road users to exercise caution

while driving, given the ongoing maintenance work on the road.



(Supplied photo)

Meeting on Arab Strategy for Intangible Cultural Heritage kicks off in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A ceremony was held on Monday to mark the opening of a meeting on the Arab Strategy for Intangible Cultural Heritage. The meeting was organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in cooperation with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi,

Minister of Heritage and Tourism. It included a visual presentation themed 'Shared Identity and Culture'.

The meeting discussed ways to upgrade current legislations on protecting intangible cultural heritage. It also looked into ways of drafting mechanisms and plans to register elements of intangible cultural heritage on lists of the Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

'Empowering women critical for equitable future'

Continued from Page 01

Khalid Said al Anqudi, also a government employee, believes raising grassroots-level awareness can boost female representation. "Omani women should understand their social role, and every family leader and social worker should foster women's empowerment," he stated, while highlighting the convenience of voting for women candidates through the Intakhib app this year.

The Ministry of Interior has released details of the upcoming Majlis A' Shura elections for its tenth term. Omani citizens based abroad can vote on October 22, while those in Oman can vote on October 29 from 8am to 7pm.

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عالي البروتين و قليل السكر

INTERNATIONAL COFFEE DAY

Coffee and Sweets Expo to promote SMEs begins today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

East Coast for Organising Exhibitions is set to host an event called Coffee and Sweets Expo at Mall of Muscat starting Tuesday. The four-day event aims to bolster Omani small and medium enterprises by promoting their products on the occasion of International Coffee Day, celebrated worldwide on October 1.

Areej bint Mohsen Haider Darwish, member of Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will inaugurate the exhibition. She is also the chairperson of the chamber's Businesswomen's Committee.

Khadijah Mubark al Batashi, Managing Director of East Coast for Organising Exhibitions, underscored the event's significance in enhancing visibility of SME products.

According to Khadijah, the expo will feature approximately



The expo at Mall of Muscat starting Tuesday will feature approximately 20 SMEs, providing a platform to sell a diverse range of items, including coffee products, dates, Omani sweets and gift items

KHADIJAH MUBARK AL BATASHI



(Supplied photos)

20 SMEs, providing a platform to sell a diverse range of items, including coffee products, dates,

Omani sweets and gift items. "This event is an opportunity to encourage entrepreneurship,

foster trade relations and exchange of experience and knowledge among the participants."

Khadijah informed about a gradual recovery of the exhibitions and conferences sector from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the crucial need for sustained support. "This event aims to rejuvenate the SME sector and help the national economy. East Coast for Organising Exhibitions reaffirms its commitment to consistently promote Omani products and invigorate the economy."

Khadijah committed her company's continued engagement in regional and international exhibitions to enhance the visibility of Omani products.

As a testament to the burgeoning coffee market in Oman, the National Centre for Statistics and Information reported a 3% increase in Oman's coffee imports this year till June. This increase signals a promising outlook for Oman's coffee industry, reinforcing the importance of events like the Coffee and Sweets Expo in nurturing and supporting local enterprises.



(Supplied photo)

Global Money Exchange opens 3 branches at Salalah airport

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global Money Exchange Company (GMEC), one of the largest exchange houses in Oman managed by State Bank of India, recently opened three new branches at Salalah International Airport.

During a press conference held at Golden Tulip Hotel on Sunday, K S Subromoniyam, Managing Director of GMEC, reflected on the company's rapid growth in Oman from a single branch in 2002 to 63 branches currently. "GMEC is the only money exchange with its presence in all four airports of Oman - Muscat, Sohar, Salalah and Duqm - and also Port Sultan Qaboos in Muttrah."

Subromoniyam highlighted GMEC's exclusive role in offering the Kerala Welfare Pravasi Fund to South Indian expatriates in Oman. "Expats can register their names in any of the 63 GMEC branches in Oman, and can also pay their membership fees monthly or yearly, as prescribed by the Kerala state government."

Amit Talukder, General Manager at GMEC, emphasised the company's commitment to community service. GMEC ensures convenient access for its customers to send money to their loved ones without extensive travel by having branches even in remote locations with sparse expatriate populations.

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AMIT TALUKDER

R Madhoosudan, Advisor to the GMEC Board, informed about the company's assistance in renewing passports of Indian expatriates. "Since 2018, over 10,000 Indian expats have benefited from this service annually. Now, GMEC extends attestation services on behalf of Embassy of India in Oman at select branches."

Considering the expansion of GMEC's network, Madhoosudan said he anticipates the launch of an enhanced and integrated mobile application, further simplifying transactions for its diverse clientele.



(Supplied photo)

Drive to counter palm pest infestation in 100 villages concludes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has concluded a campaign to combat the alarming spread of the red palm weevil in 100 villages in Dhahirah.

According to Ahmed bin al Abri, Director of Agriculture Development Department in Dhahirah, 23,106 palm trees in the governorate were reported infected last year, marking substantial economic losses.

"The ministry concluded its third campaign - lasting two weeks - against the red palm weevil on September 28."

The campaign involved extensive community cooperation for timely reporting and addressing infestations. Insect control teams tirelessly worked across the 100 villages alongside local volunteers, which expedited the process considerably.

Highlighting the severity of

the problem, Abri underscored the classification of the wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank in Dhahirah as agricultural quarantine areas by the MAFWR due to widespread infestation. This status enforces strict prohibition on transferring date palm seedlings from these wilayats to other regions without permission. This measure remains in place for three years post the last recorded case of infection.

Offering further insight, Abri informed that the third campaign recorded 2,052 infestations, 1,539 palm trees treated and 513 infected trees removed in 100 villages, compared to the second campaign in March 2023, which recorded 4,372 infestations, 3,661 palm trees treated and 761 trees removed in 66 villages.

These numbers are significant in determining the current status of infestation in villages and planning control operations in the future.

Schools across sultanate mark Omani Day of Physical Activity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Schools all over the sultanate marked Omani Day of Physical Activity, an initiative of the Ministry of Education and Omani School Sports Association, on Monday.

The nationwide event witnessed active participation of students, as well as educational and administrative staff, emphasising the vital role of physical activity in enhancing health and well-being across various age groups.

The event was held in schools mostly during morning assembly, featuring a plethora of programmes, including radio broadcasts and theatrical events promoting sports activities. Each school had the autonomy to select and execute these programmes, ensuring safety and security throughout the activities.

Fahd bin Khalfan al Mashaikhi, Secretary-General of Omani School Sports Association, elaborated on the comprehensive nature of physical activities beyond just sports, encompassing daily tasks such as household chores and walking.

Approved in 2017 by the Council of Ministers, the Omani Day of Physical Activity is overseen by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and executed in collaboration with the ministries of Health and Education. The day aims to bolster the culture of consistent physical activity, promote overall health and combat chronic diseases, Mashaikhi said.

Several schools organised



(Supplied photos)

events, underscoring the importance of incorporating physical activity into daily life. Tabuk School in North Batinah held a walk within school premises, followed by awareness programmes and sports competitions, ensuring participation of all students, including those with special needs. Oman College of Health Sciences supported the event with a lecture, explaining the essential relationship between physical activity and community health.

In South Sharqiyah, Manbaa al Khair School hosted activities for all its students, including a walk, exercises and sports competitions. The school collaborated

with Al Wafi Health Centre for a lecture on the importance of physical activities.

At Masirah School, also in South Sharqiyah, the celebrations included a broadcast on the significance of physical activity, various competitive sports activities and an awareness lecture titled 'My Health in My Sports'.

Omani Day of Physical Activity is a crucial initiative in highlighting the indispensable role of physical activity in improving health, promoting citizenship values and social responsibility. It advocates seamless integration of physical activity in education and daily routine to foster a healthier, more active future for all.

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BRIEFS

Turkey says Iraq oil pipeline will resume 'this week'

Turkey said Monday that an Iraqi oil pipeline that ceased operations in March because of a complex payments dispute involving the Kurdish autonomous region will resume pumping crude this week.

Turkey closed the pipeline after an arbitration court ordered Ankara to pay about \$1.5bn in damages to Baghdad for transporting oil from the Kurdistan region without Iraq's approval.

Ankara contested the decision and sought damages of its own.

The autonomous Kurdish region was exporting roughly 450,000 barrels of crude per day prior to the pipeline's closure.

Turkish Energy Minister Alparslan Bayraktar told an energy forum in Abu Dhabi that the dispute has been settled and "we will start to operate (the pipeline) this week".

Fitch upgrades Omantel to 'BB+', keeps outlook stable

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings upgraded Oman Telecommunications Company's (Omantel) long-term issuer default rating (IDR) to 'BB+' from 'BB' on Monday. The rating agency maintains a stable outlook for Omantel's rating, as announced.

Fitch has also affirmed the 'BB+' senior unsecured ratings for Omantel's \$600mn and \$900mn notes maturing in 2023 and 2028, respectively.

The decision to upgrade Omantel's rating follows a similar action on the Omani sovereign on September 25, 2023, when Fitch raised Oman's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating to 'BB+' from 'BB,' with a stable outlook. Fitch attributed this upgrade to Oman's prudent use of high oil revenues to reduce debt, extend maturity, disciplined spending to mitigate external risks, and an optimistic outlook for oil prices.

Omantel's rating remains influenced by the Omani sovereign rating, given the Omani state's 51% ownership in the company. This assessment aligns with Fitch's government-related entities (GRE) criteria,' Fitch said.

Fitch's assessment of Omantel's Standalone Credit Profile (SCP) stands at 'bbb-.' The sov-



At the end of the first half of 2023, Omantel maintained its leading market share in fixed-line services, with 73% of subscribers in Oman

oreign rating's influence reflects the strong ties between the two entities.

Omantel holds a 'bbb-' SCP, driven by its dominant market share in the domestic market, low leverage, and increased competitive challenges following the entry of Oman Futures Telecommunications Company (Vodafone Oman) in 2022, according to Fitch.

Omantel is 51% state-owned, and our assessment of overall links under the GRE rating criteria shows a strong connection.

We consider the status, ownership, control factors, and financial implications of default as 'strong.' The state has a significant influence on the company's strategic direction, as evidenced by the majority of board directors being appointed by the state. The company's track record of support is also 'strong,' highlighted by Omantel's regional expansion,' Fitch explained.

At the end of the first half of 2023, Omantel maintained its leading market share in fixed-line

services, with 73% of subscribers in Oman. Fitch emphasised the unmatched scale of Omantel's fixed-line network in Oman.

According to the rating agency, Omantel boasts a national 5G network footprint with a leading 39% market share of subscribers by the end of the first half of 2023. This positions the company well to capitalise on the growth potential of gigabit speed-capable packages in 5G fixed wireless access and fiber to the home (FTTH).

Omantel is set to continue its FTTH rollout across Oman, where only approximately half of premises currently have access to this technology. FTTH typically generates higher revenue per customer compared to cop-

per fixed-line services, and the growing demand for data consumption and reduced latency will drive continued fiber demand,' Fitch noted.

Competition intensifies

Fitch highlighted that, like other GCC telecom operators, Omantel faces fierce competition from national incumbents but has fewer foreign-exchange risks than its peers.

Oman's market is predominantly prepaid, akin to other GCC markets, with 64% of Omantel's mobile subscriptions being prepaid at the close of the first half of 2023.

'The company's stable mobile subscriber market share in 2022 and 2023 within an increasingly competitive market underscores its market strength,' Fitch commented.

The rating agency also acknowledged Omantel's progress in transitioning prepaid customers to postpaid contracts in 2023, where average annual revenues are higher.

However, Vodafone Oman's entry into the postpaid market in 2023 may constrain Omantel's mobile revenue growth in the latter half of 2023 and in 2024, as average revenue per user and subscriber numbers face pressure, Fitch noted.



CBO issues RO27mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced on Monday the issuance of treasury bills worth RO27mn. The bills have been issued in two maturity periods of 28 days and 91 days.

The value of allotted treasury bills amounted to RO8mn for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached RO99.660 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.660. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.4321% and 4.4472%, respectively.

The value of allotted treasury bills amounted to RO19mn for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO98.684 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.680.

The interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 6.00%, while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with the central bank is 6.50%.



The president of the upcoming COP28 Sultan Ahmed al-Jaber speaks during the Abu Dhabi International Petroleum Exhibition on Monday (AFP)

Oil industry 'central' to climate solutions

Abu Dhabi, UAE – The president of the upcoming COP28 climate talks told an Abu Dhabi oil conference on Monday that the fossil fuel industry would play an essential role in addressing the climate crisis.

"For too long, this industry has been viewed as part of the problem, that it's not doing enough and in some cases even blocking progress," said Sultan al Jaber, the president-designate of the COP28 talks, who is also the head of UAE oil giant ADNOC.

"This is your opportunity to show the world that, in fact, you are central to the solution," he told the Abu Dhabi International Petroleum Exhibition Conference.

"This industry can change the global debate... It is time to silence the sceptics by applying scale, capital and technology to deliver outcomes."

Jaber urged industry leaders to curb emissions associated with energy production and expand use of renewable energy sources.

He also encouraged them to embrace "low carbon solutions" like carbon capture and storage, tools that climate experts say distract from the urgent goal of slashing fossil fuel pollution.

Climate activists have criticised the appointment of Jaber

to lead the COP28 talks which kick off next month in Dubai.

But Jaber has garnered the support of COP parties including US climate envoy John Kerry, partly by emphasising his belief that "the phase-down of fossil fuels is inevitable" – a message he repeated on Monday.

At the same time top oil executives and officials from major oil-producing countries have advocated for ramped-up investment to meet demand and stave off energy shortages.

Haitham al-Ghais, secretary general of the OPEC oil cartel, told the conference in Abu Dhabi on Monday that calls to cease fossil fuel investments were dangerous.

"We see calls to stop investing in oil. We believe this is counterproductive," he said.

"This puts countries... from Europe and many other parts of the world at risk, because the cornerstone of global economic prosperity today is energy security."

Instead he called for investments of \$600bn per year between now and 2045 "just for the oil industry".

He added: "This is what it requires to be able to achieve energy security for Europe, for the rest of the world."

AFP

OQGN organises final IPO roadshow at MSX

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) organised its final IPO roadshow on Monday to introduce investors, citizens, and residents to the process of subscribing to its shares and the targeted categories.

Organised at the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), the event was attended by a group of investors and businesspeople. The company floated up to 49% of its shares in an initial public offering (IPO), providing an opportunity for investors to participate in OQGN's growth.

With its final session held in Muscat, the company concluded its roadshows aimed at educating the public about its IPO, which will end on October 5th for Category 2 investors.

The roadshows, which began on September 20, were held in the governorates of North Batinah, Musandam, Dhahirah, Dakhiliyah, Buraimi, Dhofar, North Sharqiyah, and Muscat. The roadshows witnessed a significant turnout from citizens and investors who raised questions regarding the subscription to shares and their potential.

Mansoor Ali al Abdali, Managing Director of OQGN, said,



OQGN has floated up to 49% of its shares in the IPO (ONA)

The roadshows held in various Omani governorates witnessed good interaction from citizens and investors

"The roadshows held in various Omani governorates witnessed good interaction from citizens and investors. This reflects the public awareness of the importance of investing in OQGN's shares, which provides an oppor-

tunity for investors and citizens to participate in the company's growth. OQGN is the exclusive operator of the gas transportation infrastructure in Oman."

He added, "OQGN has attributes that qualify it to play a key role in the energy transition journey in the Sultanate of Oman. The company's growth strategy is based on maximising its strengths and market position to play a key role in Oman's energy transition by facilitating the transportation of hydrogen."

Regarding the details of the IPO, Abdali said that 70% of the total volume of the IPO was allo-

cated to Category 1, which includes legal entities and anchor investors. The first category was divided into 20% for local legal entities, 20% for foreign legal entities, and 30% for anchor investors. The remaining 30% of the IPO volume was allocated to Category 2, including individual investors.

He explained that the minimum subscription for the first category is up to 100,000 shares, with subsequent multiples of 100 shares, whereas the minimum subscription for the second category is up to 1,000 shares, with subsequent multi-

ples of 100 shares.

Abdali added that the company has strong growth opportunities as it has obtained regulatory approvals for its short-term network expansion initiatives and long-term transformational growth initiatives.

He pointed out that the company's strategy is based on three main pillars: continuing to invest in the growth of the natural gas transportation network, removing barriers, conducting updates, acquiring the assets of gas transportation, and expanding in the activity of transporting other sources of energy.

Saudi projects \$21bn deficit in revised budget

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Saudi Arabia has revised down its budget projections and now expects to record a deficit this year, the finance ministry said, reflecting rising expenditures and falling oil revenue.

The Gulf kingdom, the world's biggest crude exporter, had planned for a surplus of SAR16bn(\$4.27bn) in 2023 but now predicts a deficit of

SAR82bn (\$21.86bn), or two per cent of GDP, according to the ministry's pre-budget statement.

A deficit of SAR79bn, or 1.9% of GDP, is expected next year, the statement said.

Saudi Arabia in December announced it had recorded its first annual budget surplus in nearly a decade, benefiting from oil price hikes that re-

sulted from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Oil revenue this year has fallen by 17% as prices have dipped and Riyadh has cut production in a bid to boost them.

Daily output is currently nine million barrels per day, down two million barrels from this time last year.

Saudi Arabia is also pursuing an ambitious and expensive Vi-

sion 2030 reform programme spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that intends to shift the economy away from fossil fuels.

Saturday's statement touted growth in non-oil sectors, whose revenue jumped by 11% in the first half of the year.

Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan said the government "will continue im-

plementing fiscal and economic structural reforms to help develop and diversify the Saudi economy, and to increase economic growth while maintaining fiscal sustainability".

The ministry currently expects budget deficits to last through 2026, the statement said.

AFP

UN says high interest rates sap innovation investment

Geneva, Switzerland – Funding of innovation is becoming increasingly uncertain, with high interest rates taking a toll on the amounts venture capitalists are willing and able to dish out, the United Nations said.

In a fresh report, the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) found that 2022 was marked by swelling government and company spending on research and development, especially in areas like artificial intelligence and biotech.

But at the same time, the global value of the venture capital (VC) funding that helps transform ideas and inspiration into products and services plunged 40%, and is continuing to fall.

"There has been a drop in the investment environment," WIPO chief Daren Tang told reporters in a virtual briefing.

"Venture capital funding is becoming more and more scarce."

The drop last year came after a dramatic surge in such funding in 2021, as the pandemic spurred spending in new areas and in regions that do not usually receive a large share of such investments.

But the funding levels have not just evened out. Sacha Wunsch-Vincent, co-author of the report, said the decline had continued, with a 47% drop seen in the first half of 2023 compared



to 2022.

"This is only the tip of the iceberg," he told reporters.

'End of cheap money'

Pointing to "a harsher investment conditions", including slow economic recoveries and geopolitical tensions, he warned the current high interest rates especially "endanger the future of innovation".

"Borrowing isn't free anymore. It's really the end of cheap money."

At the same time, WIPO stressed that the picture for innovation was mixed, with 2022 also marked by a significant rise in R&D spending by corpora-

tions, to a record high of \$1.1tn.

And preliminary data indicated that global government R&D budgets increased in real terms last year.

Patents also continued to rise, and while the value of VC funding dropped, the number of VC deals actually swelled, the report showed.

That boom was fuelled in part by activities in the field of artificial intelligence, Wunsch-Vincent said.

Information communication technology companies "were already spending a lot of money, ... but are now almost in an arms race for more spending on AI", he said, also highlighting spend-

ing in pharma, biotech and construction.

A number of sectors that cut spending during the pandemic had meanwhile seen spending bounce back, including automobiles.

'More diverse'

The report also comprised the UN agency's annual ranking of the world's most innovative countries, with Switzerland topping the list for the 13th year running.

But the Global Innovation Index 2023 showed that the innovation economy, long heavily concentrated in North America and Western Europe, is diversify-

ing.

"It is getting more diverse, there are more engines of innovation around the world," Tang said.

The top 10 list still includes mainly Western countries, with the exception of Singapore in fifth position, and South Korea in tenth.

The United States slipped to third position, with Sweden now in second, and Britain remaining in fourth.

China meanwhile dipped slightly from 11th to 12th place, but from 35th a decade ago.

China figures among the middle-income countries that have climbed the ranking the fastest in the past decade, alongside the likes of Turkey, India and Iran.

Since the pandemic started four years ago, Mauritius, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Pakistan have meanwhile risen most, WIPO said.

While the value of VC funding shrank last year, Wunsch-Vincent meanwhile said it was positive that the investments remained spread out geographically, and had not shrunk back to simply focus on the traditional centres of innovation.

Africa was the only region that did not see a decline in the value of VC funding last year, he said.

AFP



Eni announces large gas find in Indonesia

Rome, Italy – Italian energy group Eni said Monday that it had made a significant gas find in Indonesia, off the coast of East Kalimantan.

The company said preliminary studies had put the potential of the site at 140bn cubic metres of gas (5tn cubic feet).

The find came at the Geng North-1 exploration well drilled to a depth of 5,025 metres in 1,947 metres water depth in the North Ganai PSC, around 85km off the coast.

The company said it had found a gas column some 50 metres thick in a Miocene sandstone reservoir "with excellent petrophysical properties".

Eni added that "thanks to its location and significant size, the discovery has the potential to contribute substantially to the creation of a new production hub, in the northern part of the Kutei Basin, to be connected to the Bontang LNG facilities on the coast of East Kalimantan".

Daily future production is estimated at 2.2mn to 2.7mn cubic metres.

"The ongoing exploration campaign, along with the recent acquisitions, is in line with Eni's energy transition strategy to progressively shift its portfolio mix towards gas and LNG, targeting 60% in 2030" compared to 50% currently, Eni said.

"Indonesia, and South-East Asia in general, play a relevant role in this strategy," it added.

The news comes after Eni announced in July the acquisition of interests, including operatorship, in three blocks in the Kutei Basin, also offshore of East Kalimantan, from US rival Chevron.

Eni, operating in Indonesia since 2001, presides over a sizable portfolio of exploration, development and production assets for current production of around 80,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day from its Jangkrik and Merakes fields in East Kalimantan.

AFP

US Fed official says interest rates 'at, or near' peak level

Washington, US – US interest rates are rapidly approaching their highest level in the Federal Reserve's current battle against inflation, and may already be there, a senior Fed official said.

The US central bank has raised interest rates 11 times since March 2022 in a bid to tame inflation and bring it firmly down to its long-term target of two per cent.

Although inflation has come down sharply in the last 12 months, it remains stuck stubbornly above the Fed's target, even increasing slightly over the summer, which has kept up the pressure.

"My current assessment is that we are at, or near, the peak level of the target range for the federal funds rate," New York Fed President John Williams said in a statement.

"I expect we will need to maintain a restrictive stance of monetary policy for some time to fully restore balance to demand and supply and bring inflation back to our 2 percent longer-run



goal," he added.

Earlier Friday, the key US inflation measure used by the Fed to set interest rates ticked up again in August, fueled by rising energy prices. But aside from volatile food and energy costs, which are still paining Americans at grocery stores and gas pumps, inflation actually slowed last month to reach its lowest annual rate since 2021.

Futures traders currently assign a probability of more than 80% that the Fed will hold rates steady at that decision on November 1, according to data from CME Group.

The US Federal Reserve last month announced its interest rate decision after a two-day Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting and left the benchmark interest rates unchanged at 5.25%-5.50%.

Fed chairman Jerome Powell was widely expected to keep the interest rate unchanged after having raised its policy rate by 525 basis points since March 2022 to the current range, despite persistent US inflation rate levels exceeding the central bank's target range while the US economy remains resilient.

AFP

2050 climate goal depends on massive new private sector investment: IMF

Washington, US – The private sector must drastically increase its climate-related investments, most crucially in developing countries, for the world to reach net zero carbon by 2050, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a report published Monday.

To attain the 2050 goal, \$2tn would need to be invested annually by 2030, according to data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) cited in the report.

But this is far above the estimated \$400bn planned for the next seven years, the IMF said.

The report warns that countries, especially ones with emerging or developing economies, will not be able to increase their debt levels by an average of 45%-50%.

"We consider this as fiscally unsustainable," Ruud de Mooij, deputy director of the IMF's fiscal affairs department, said in an online press conference.

The good news, he said, is that 90% of the technologies needed to reduce emissions by 2030 already exist.



To attain the 2050 climate goal, \$2tn would need to be invested annually by 2030, according data from the International Energy Agency cited in the IMF report

But to reach sufficient deployment, according to the report, private sector must double its contribution from 40% to 80%.

The report is part of the fund's Global Financial Stability Report (GFSR), which will be released in full at the IMF and World Bank's annual meetings, beginning October 9 in Marrakesh.

While some emerging countries, such as China and India, have a well-resourced private sector, this is not the case elsewhere, which means creating the conditions to attract international investment will be necessary, according to the IMF.

Fabio Natalucci, deputy director of the IMF, said more work had to be done to improve developing nations' credit ratings.

AFP



Andrew Bosworth, Chief Technology Officer of Meta, speaks during Meta Connect event at Meta headquarters in Menlo Park, California (AFP)

Meta tech chief defends giant's AI strategy

Menlo Park, US – Meta's chief technology officer is quick to push back on assertions that the company has fallen behind rivals like ChatGPT in the explosive surge across the tech industry in generative AI.

"The majority of the world's population will have their first experience of generative artificial intelligence with us," Andrew "Boz" Bosworth told AFP at the company's recent Connect conference for developers.

Meta unveiled AI-infused chatbots with personalities at the gathering, along with tools

for creating images or written content using spoken prompts.

The company that owns Facebook and Instagram has been seen as lagging rivals like Microsoft and Google, which have pushed out generative AI products and invested heavily in the technology seen as a force poised to shape the future.

Bosworth was adamant that Meta is not behind, enhancing its global platforms with AI since before ChatGPT was launched to the public late last year.

"There are lots of cool tools,

like Stable Diffusion, for generating images," Bosworth said of the buzz around AI offerings from other companies.

But the executive was quick to point out that many of these new platforms take time and expert computer skills to master.

"We wanted the results to be great and fast, even on smartphones," Bosworth said, noting Meta's technology allows users to simply ask for an image of "hedgehog on a bike" or "happy birthday to a marathon runner," for example.

Meta for now has chosen the

more cautious approach when it comes to generative AI.

Two weeks before the debut of ChatGPT in November 2022, Meta released a generative AI chatbot called "Galactica" that specialized in scientific research.

Galactica could write articles and solve math problems, but at times fabricated answers. Meta quickly sidelined the tool, a move Bosworth told AFP he thought was a mistake.

"If it had been up to me, I would have left it," Bosworth said.

AFP

The partnership will see Bahwan Travel Agencies integrating

Key solutions Bahwan Travel Agencies will implement is Amadeus All Fares for shopping and Amadeus Robotics for fare

Biju Antony, general manager

Ernesto Sanchez Beaumont,

managing director of Amadeus Gulf, said, "As an industry, we only progress by working together. That's why we are thrilled to collaborate with Bahwan Travel Agencies in bringing latest Amadeus travel technology to take travel experience to next level. Our solutions are designed to drive efficiency and elevate customer service, and we are confident, Bahwan Travel Agencies will greatly benefit from implementing these tools.



"To all those who participated in the 'With You in Khareef' promotion, Al Maha extends its heartfelt appreciation. The company will reveal more plans for exhilarating promotions and updates in the near future."

On the sidelines of the 86th Conference of Ministers of Health Council of GCC countries and Yemen in its 48th session hosted by Oman, H E Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, met H E Dr Qasem Mohammed Buhaibeh, Yemen's Minister of Public Health and Population to address means of cooperation in health affairs between the two countries.

The state-of-the-art facility was inaugurated by Devendra Fadnavis, deputy chief minister of Maharashtra, in the presence of M P Ahammed, chairman, Malabar Group, Vijay Darda, former Member of Parliament and chairman, Lokmat Media Group, K P Abdul Salam, vice chairman, Malabar Group, Asher O. MD - India Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Shamlal Ahammed, MD - International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, and other official dignitaries, management team members of Malabar Group.



M-NH brings under one roof
Malabar Gold & Diamonds' mul-

tiple operations such as retail, procurement and supply chain, e-commerce, digital gold, digital marketing, CRM, omni-channel operations, merchandising and bullion, corporate gifting and B2B divisions, human resources and legal. M-NH will usher in a new era of growth and catapult the brand to new heights by paving

Mumbai being a major global jewellery and diamond trading hub, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has set up its base for its national operations in the city.



The aim is to advance the careers and prospects of Omani women by attracting them to the

STEM industries. This scheme aligns with Oman's Vision 2040 objectives and supports progress and inclusivity. The initiative had incredible success when it was first launched in 2022, the first graduates were inspired to gain employment in the industrial sectors and at the accomplishment of the training programme two students were offered full-time employment with OCI, while six others were offered to

The 2023 SHE STEM5 programme promises to exceed the achievements of the 2022 edition. OCI has enhanced the programme's structure to offer a new and improved learning experience to shape the leaders of tomorrow, with a curriculum that encourages innovation and excellence.

This innovative service operates 24x7, allowing users to instantly transfer funds, add



Tariq Atiq, general manager and chief Retail and Digital Banking officer, said, "With great enthusiasm, we announce our affiliation with Federal Bank, a respected institution celebrated for its remarkable legacy. This dynamic cooperation empowers us to initiate a new era of seamless digital solutions catering to individuals in Oman who seek to

Shalini Warriar, executive director of Federal Bank, added, "We are thrilled to announce our remittance tie-up with NBO. This pact empowers NRIs with best-in-class technology that assures fast and reliable remittances. At Federal Bank, we consistently embrace cutting-edge technology to enhance our customers' experience. As a key player in non-resident banking, we are confident that our partnership with NBO will significantly elevate customer satisfaction."

Kosovo PM accuses Serbia of planning to ‘annex’ country’s north

Pristina, Kosovo - Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti on Monday accused Serbia of trying to annex the country’s Serb-majority north and said that recent deadly clashes were part of the plan.

Around 30 gunmen were involved in a shootout with Kosovo police in a north Kosovo village in late September, killing one officer. It was one of the most serious escalations in years between police from Kosovo’s ethnic Albanian majority and members of the ethnic Serb minority.

Three Serb gunmen were also killed in the hours-long

shootout in the village of Banjska after they ambushed a patrol and latter barricaded themselves at an Orthodox monastery near the northern border with Serbia. Kurti said Kosovo police confiscated documents which showed the ‘terrorist’ attack against police in Banjska ‘was part of a larger plan to annex the north of Kosovo’ by a coordinated attack on tens of positions in the area.

“Establishing a corridor to Serbia would follow to enable supply of arms and troops,” he wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

In the wake of the clashes,



Kosovo’s PM Albin Kurti lights a candle in memory of the killed police officer, in Pristina on September 24 (AFP)

Kosovo authorities rounded up suspects, remanded three alleged gunmen in custody and seized an arsenal of weapons that, according to them, could arm hundreds of people.

The United States on Friday urged Serbia to withdraw what it said was a large military build-up on the border with Kosovo, following the attack in Banjska.

In response to the ‘current situation’, Britain said it was sending troops to join NATO-led peacekeepers there.

In the aftermath, Kosovo’s government displayed a large arsenal of weapons and equipment and accused the govern-

ment in Belgrade of backing the incident.

On Friday, Milan Radoicic, the vice president of Serb List, the Kosovo Serbs’ main political party, resigned after admitting to organising the armed group.

However, he denied receiving any help from Belgrade.

The clash on September 24 was just the latest in a long list of incidents in Kosovo’s troubled north since Pristina declared independence from Belgrade in 2008.

Serbia - and key allies China and Russia - have refused to recognise the move.

AFP

Turkish jets strike PKK bases in Iraq

The air strikes were launched after a blast injured two police officers near the parliament building in Ankara

Ankara, Turkey - Turkish jets launched air strikes inside Iraqi Kurdistan late on Sunday, after a blast earlier the same day injured two police officers near the parliament building in Ankara.

In the hours following the bombing, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had already vowed that ‘terrorists’ would never achieve their aims.

The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), listed as a terror group by Turkey and its Western allies, claimed responsibility for the blast. It has waged a deadly insurgency against Ankara for four decades.

The district targeted in the bombing is home to several other ministries and the Turkish parliament, which reopened as planned in the afternoon with an address from Erdogan.

“The villains who threaten the peace and security of citizens have not achieved their objectives and will never achieve them,” Erdogan said.



Members of Turkish Police Special Forces secure the area near the Interior Ministry following a bomb attack in Ankara, on Sunday, leaving two police officers injured (AFP)

An official in Iraqi Kurdistan reported Turkish army planes bombing parts of the Bradost region and the village of Badran. Turkey’s defence ministry acknowledged an ‘air operation’ in northern Iraq

The interior ministry said two attackers had arrived in a commercial vehicle around 9:30 am (0630 GMT) in front of ‘the entrance gate of the General Directorate of Security of our Ministry of the Interior, and carried out a bomb attack’.

“One of the terrorists blew himself up,” Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya told journalists outside the ministry. “The other was killed by a bullet to the head before he had a chance to blow himself up.”

Two police officers were

lightly injured in the exchange of fire, but their lives were not in danger, he added.

The Ankara prosecutor’s office said it had opened an investigation and banned access to the area. Local media were asked to stop broadcasting images

from the scene of the attack.

North Iraq strikes

In a statement to the ANF news agency, which is close to the Kurdish movement, the PKK said that ‘a sacrificial action was carried out against the Turkish Interior Ministry’.

On Sunday evening, an official in Iraqi Kurdistan reported Turkish army planes bombing parts of the Bradost region and the village of Badran. Turkey’s defence ministry acknowledged an ‘air operation’ in northern Iraq to ‘neutralise the PKK’.

The ministry said that ‘20 targets used by terrorists’ had been destroyed.

In his opening remarks, Erdogan also slammed the European Union for stalling his country’s membership bid, stating that Turkey ‘no longer expects anything from the European Union, which has kept us waiting at its door for 40 years’.

“We have kept all the promises we have made to the EU but they have kept almost none of theirs,” he said, adding that he would not ‘tolerate any new demands or conditions’ for his country to join the bloc.

This session of Turkey’s parliament must also validate Sweden’s entry into the NATO alliance.

Hungary and Turkey in July lifted their vetoes against Sweden’s entry into the Atlantic alliance, but have been slow to ratify its membership.

AFP

Huge fire rips through regional police HQ in Egypt, 45 injured

Ismailia, Egypt - A huge fire ripped through a regional police headquarters in the Egyptian city of Ismailia before dawn on Monday, gutting the building and leaving at least 45 people injured.

Authorities said they had launched a probe into the cause of the blaze that destroyed the Security Directorate building in the city 110km (70 miles) north-east of Cairo.

Several people could be seen trapped inside the burning building, screaming for help from the windows, in video footage shared on social media, and emergency crews were later seen deploying a crane to rescue them.

No fatalities have been reported from the at least eight-storey tall building that was fully staffed with police when it was engulfed by flames overnight.

Fifty ambulances rushed to the scene, joined by two army planes and military emergency services, according to the health ministry and local media.

Crowds of onlookers flocked to the base of the building as the



Firefighters try to extinguish a fire at the police headquarters in Ismailia on Monday (AFP)

flames raged through it, sending black smoke billowing into the night sky. Twelve people were treated at the scene, the health ministry said, and 33 more were taken to hospitals in Ismailia and nearby Suez, according to the public prosecutor’s office.

Most suffered burns or smoke

inhalation in the fire, first reports of which were received at 4:30am (0130 GMT). By dawn, the building had been reduced to a blackened concrete shell as emergency services hosed it with water to prevent the blaze for flaring up again.

Authorities have not said how

many police or detainees were inside the building, and security forces later sealed off the area.

Interior Minister Mahmoud Tawfik ordered an investigation into the cause of the fire and a ‘structural safety review’ for the building, his ministry said.

AFP

Canada left battered by ‘never before seen’ wildfire season

Normétal, Canada - When scientists started pouring over data to assess Canada’s fire season this year, they struggled to find the right superlatives.

‘Never before seen’, was thrown around, as was ‘exceptional in scale, duration’ and ‘huge long-term consequences’.

“We have shattered all the records on a Canadian scale,” says a shaken Yan Boulanger, a researcher for the country’s natural resources ministry.

There had never been so many areas burned - 18mn hectares (70,000 square miles), via 6,400 fires - or so many people evacuated, at more than 200,000.

“It’s an impressive wake-up call because we didn’t necessarily expect it so quickly, even if the potential was there,” Boulanger, a forest fire specialist at Natural Resources Canada, told AFP.

In Quebec, hard hit and less accustomed than the west to very large fires, the shock is immense. No more leaves on the branches, trunks blackened and roots charred: in the spruce forest of Abitibi-Temiscamingue, only a



Burnt forest around Lebel-sur-Quevillon, a town that was evacuated twice during the month of June due to forest fires (AFP)

few tufts of moss managed to resist the onslaught of blazes that started in June. As far as the eye can see, there is the same desolate landscape. “There is little chance that this forest will be able to regenerate. The trees are too young to have had time to form cones which ensure the next generation,” says Maxence Martin, a professor of forest ecology at the University of Quebec in Abitibi-Temiscamingue.

In this remote region, forestry is the main industry, supporting entire towns with the 60,000 di-

rect and indirect jobs linked to it. But both the industry and the wildfires have significantly reshaped the landscape.

“If we continue on the current trend (of fires), by 2100 as much as one third of the boreal forest in Quebec will have been lost,” says Martin. This area is part of a vast ring of greenery which encircles the Arctic, stretching from Canada through Alaska, Siberia and northern Europe to form the largest expanse of wilderness in the world.

AFP

Catholic Church to reflect on challenges

Synod of Bishops, for the first time, will include women and laypeople to help chart future of the Church

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis will on Wednesday open the Synod of Bishops, a key congress that will for the first time include women and laypeople to help chart the future of the Catholic Church.

The 16th Ordinary General Assembly will take place over four weeks in Rome, bringing together bishops and other participants to collaborate on ideas and solutions to some of the most contentious issues affecting the 21st century Church.

Underscoring Francis's priority of bringing the Church closer to the faithful, the Synod two years ago invited the world's 1.3bn Catholics to share views on topics as diverse as divorcees and LGBTQ church members, women deacons and priestly celibacy.

The multi-stage process, with a second session of the assembly scheduled for October 2024, sought input from local dioceses around the globe, with their insights and those from episcopal conferences contributing to a 50-page working document that will be used during this month's discussions.

"It's an important forum for reflection for the Church, on its way of being, of moving for-



Pope Francis waves to the pilgrims flanked by children from the five continents during the Sunday Angelus prayer in St Peter's Square at the Vatican (AFP)

ward," Italian priest Giacomo Costa, special secretary of this assembly, told AFP.

During the assembly, 464

participants, including 365 members with voting rights, will meet every day, divided into plenary sessions in five different lan-

guages. The group is mostly made up of bishops, but also includes other clergy.

But for the first time in the his-

tory of the Church, 54 of the participants will be women - nuns and laywomen who will take part in the consultations and be able

to vote.

Following the October 2024 assembly, a final document will be submitted to the pope, who can decide whether or not to incorporate its findings into a papal document.

During an ecumenical prayer vigil on Saturday, Francis expressed hope that the Synod

of laypeople and women will make the synodal process more effective. "Within the bishops, there is an ecclesiastical culture. With the laity, that won't work anymore, they won't be satisfied with nice words, there will be a demand for procedure, the will to change, efficiency," the source told AFP.

Synod will be a place where the Holy Spirit will purify the Church from gossip, ideologies and polarisation

POPE FRANCIS

would be 'a place where the Holy Spirit will purify the Church from gossip, ideologies and polarisation.'

'Pushing boundaries'

This Synod, with its reflections on sensitive topics and more inclusive process, has ruffled some feathers at the Vatican, especially among conservatives like Germany's Cardinal Gerhard Mueller or the American cardinal Raymond Burke, who say the process will create confusion and division.

But one informed observer of the Holy See, who asked not to be named, said the participation

"In this sense, Francis is pushing the boundaries, which is why many are afraid."

A source within the Vatican told AFP that even if important questions are still unresolved after the Synod, major advances will have been made.

"Questions once considered off-limits are now being brought to the attention of the Church. This is already a huge step on delicate issues," the source said.

Particular attention will be paid to the possibility of allowing women to serve as deacons, or allowing married men as priests in remote areas lacking clergy.

AFP

Mexico: Church roof caves in, 10 dead

Mexico City, Mexico - At least ten people, including three children, were killed and 60 more injured when the roof of a church came crashing down on a baptism in northeastern Mexico on Sunday, authorities said.

The disaster struck the coastal town of Ciudad Madero, in Tamaulipas state, with a Red Cross rescuer telling local media that 80 people had been in attendance at the Santa Cruz parish when the roof caved in.

"Unfortunately, ten people are confirmed dead. Of these, five are women, two men and three children," Americo Villarreal, governor of Tamaulipas, told reporters at the scene of the disaster.

Rescue workers were attempting to recover the body of a woman from the rubble, but the death toll was not expected to rise as all of the missing had been accounted for, he added.

At least 60 people were treated for injuries, the governor said, with 23 still hospitalised.

"Two have serious injuries, their lives may be in danger," he said.

Church officials said a bap-



Rescuers working after a church roof collapsed in Ciudad Madero, Tamaulipas State, Mexico, on Sunday (AFP)

The disaster struck the coastal town of Ciudad Madero, in Tamaulipas state, when 80 people had been in attendance at the Santa Cruz parish

tism was being celebrated when the ceiling collapsed.

"We are experiencing a very difficult moment... the roof of a church has collapsed during the celebration of the Eucharist," the bishop of the local diocese Jose Armando Alvarez said in a video posted to social media.

Rescue effort

Earlier, ambulances, patrol cars

and police and military personnel had rushed to the site, in addition to numerous people in search of family members who were in the church.

Local media showed footage of dozens of people trying to hold up part of the collapsed structure with poles while others made their way through the wreckage in search of survivors.

AFP

Indonesia launches Southeast Asia's first high-speed railway

Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia launched Southeast Asia's first high-speed railway on Monday, a delayed, multibillion-dollar project backed by China that President Joko Widodo hailed as 'a symbol of our modernisation'.

With a top speed of 350km (220 miles) per hour, the bullet train 'Whoosh' can get between the capital Jakarta and Bandung in 45 minutes.

The 140km journey would previously have taken about three hours by train.

"The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed train marks our efficient, friendly, and integrated mass transportation system," Widodo said during a ceremony at the capital's central station.

"It is a symbol of our modernisation in the public transport, seamlessly connecting with other modes of transportation."

Widodo said the 600-capacity train was the first high-speed rail transportation in Southeast Asia. It is part of Beijing's Belt and Road initiative - a decade-old programme of China-backed in-



Staff stand next to the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed train named 'Whoosh' after the inauguration at Halim station in Jakarta on Monday (AFP)

frastructure projects.

The president said the name was actually an acronym, standing for a tagline of 'Waktu Hemat, Operasi Optimal, Sistem Handal' - which in Bahasa Indonesia means 'Saving time, optimal operation, reliable system'.

It was built by PT KCIC, which is made up of four Indonesian state companies and Beijing's China Railway International Co.

The project was initially set to cost less than US\$5bn and be completed by 2019.

However, delays caused by construction challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic led to a surge in costs.

In preparation for its opening, officials have conducted public trials for the new high-speed route. Last week, Transportation Minister Budi Karya Sumadi confirmed that the government would extend the high-speed train route from Bandung to the country's second-biggest city Surabaya.

AFP

PINK OCTOBER



People take photos on Trocadero square near the Eiffel Tower illuminated in pink in Paris on Sunday, to mark the launch of Pink October, or Breast Cancer Awareness Month (AFP)

Parade of pets blessed at New York cathedral

New York, US - New York worshippers celebrated mass at St John the Divine Cathedral on Sunday alongside hundreds of animals - including a camel, a pony, snakes, ostriches, geese, cats and dogs - which all queued up for blessings of their own.

The Manhattan Episcopal church invited its four-legged guests - or no-legged, in the case of the snakes - to mark the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, known as the patron saint of pets and animals.

Sunday's ceremony was a special milestone for the parish, which has not held a traditional first-weekend-of-October animal blessing since 2018, due to a fire and then the COVID-19 pandemic.

Animal-lovers of many faiths brought their furry friends to receive a little extra grace, including Jon Shweky, who is Jewish,



People take part in procession of animals at the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York City on Sunday (AFP)

and Christine Cookman, who is Catholic. They brought their black labrador, who is training to become a guide for the blind starting in November.

"We wanted to bring him for a blessing before he went in (to become a guide dog), for a good health and good luck," Cookman told AFP.

"It's such a spiritual (and) amazing thing to be involved with a church that recognises the soul of animals," she added.

AFP

COVID vaccine researchers win Nobel prize

Katalin Kariko and Drew Weissman won the Nobel Medicine Prize for work on mRNA technology

Stockholm, Sweden - Researchers Katalin Kariko and Drew Weissman won the Nobel Medicine Prize on Monday for work on messenger RNA (mRNA) technology that paved the way for groundbreaking COVID-19 vaccines.

The pair, who had been tipped as favourites, 'contributed to the unprecedented rate of vaccine development during one of the greatest threats to human health in modern times', the jury said.

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020 and the first mRNA vaccines were approved for use against the illness in December that year. Billions of Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna doses have been injected around the world since then. Together with other COVID vaccines, they 'have saved millions of lives and prevented severe disease in many more', the jury said.

Kariko, 68, and Weissman, 64, longstanding colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States, have already won a slew of awards for their research. In recognising the duo this year, the Nobel committee broke with its usual practice of honouring decades-old research, aimed at ensuring it has stood the test of time. While the prizewin-



Member of Nobel Assembly Rickard Sandberg announces the winners of Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in Stockholm on Monday (AFP)

ning research dates back to 2005, the first vaccines to use the mRNA technology came out just three years ago.

Unlike traditional vaccines which use weakened virus or a key piece of the virus' protein, mRNA vaccines provide the ge-

netic molecules that tell cells what proteins to make, which simulates an infection and trains the immune system for when it encounters the real virus.

Sweet comeback
The idea was first demonstrated

in 1990 but it wasn't until the mid-2000s that Weissman, of the US, and Hungarian-born Kariko developed a technique to control a dangerous inflammatory response seen in animals exposed to these molecules, opening the way to develop safe

human vaccines. The honour is particularly sweet for Kariko, the 13th woman to win the Medicine Prize, who toiled in obscurity for years and struggled to convince her superiors of the need for research on messenger ribonucleic acid.

Speaking to Swedish Radio (SR), she said her late mother always had faith in her, listening to the Nobel prize announcements 'year after year' hoping to hear her daughter's name called out.

"Unfortunately, five years ago she passed at the age of 89. She might be listening from above," Kariko said.

Thomas Perlmann, the secretary general of the Nobel Assembly, called Kariko 'an extraordinary and unusual scientist' who 'resisted any temptation' to do 'something easier'.

Weissman told AFP he heard the news from Kariko, who received the call from the jury first.

"We were wondering if somebody was pulling a prank on us."

"This is the ultimate - this is the prize I thought of when I was five years old when I started to get interested in how things worked," he said.

Breakthrough

In the 1990s, Kariko believed mRNA held the key to treating diseases where having more of the right kind of protein can help. But the University of Pennsylvania, where Kariko was on track for a professorship, decided to demote her after grant rejections piled up. She carried on as a lower-rung researcher.

Much of the scientific community was at the time focused on using DNA to deliver gene therapy but Kariko believed that mRNA was also promising since most diseases are not hereditary and don't need solutions that permanently alter our genetics.

First though, she had to overcome the problem of the massive inflammatory response in animal experiments, as the immune system sensed an invader and rushed to fight it.

Kariko and Weissman discovered that one of the four building blocks of the synthetic mRNA was at fault - and they could overcome the problem by swapping it for a modified version.

They published a paper on the breakthrough in 2005.

In 2015, they found a new way to deliver mRNA into mice, using a fatty coating called 'lipid nanoparticles' that prevent the mRNA from degrading and help place it inside the right part of cells. Both these innovations were key to the COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna.

Their mRNA technology is now being used to develop other treatments for diseases and illnesses such as cancer, influenza and heart failure.

AFP

REMEMBERING MAHATMA



India's President Droupadi Murmu pays respect on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary at his memorial in Rajghat, in New Delhi on Monday (AFP)

EU pledges lasting support at 'historic' Kyiv meeting of FM's

Kyiv, Ukraine - The European Union signalled its long-term support for Ukraine on Monday as its foreign ministers convened in Kyiv for a historic first gathering beyond the bloc's borders.

The meeting came as disagreements grow among EU members over support for Ukraine and as Kyiv's forces make limited gains in a high-stakes counteroffensive against Russian troops in the south and east of the country.

"We are convening in a historic meeting of the EU foreign ministers here in Ukraine, candidate country and future member of the EU," the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement.

The purpose of the meeting was to 'express our solidarity and support to the Ukrainian people', he said, acknowledging that the gathering 'does not have the aim of reaching concrete conclusions and decisions'.

President Volodymyr Zelensky told the ministers that the length of the war, now in its twentieth month, will depend entirely on support Ukraine receives from its allies.

"Our victory directly depends on our cooperation: the more



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky attending the EU-Ukraine foreign ministers' meeting in Kyiv, on Monday (AFP)

strong and principled steps we take together, the sooner this war will end," Zelensky said in a statement.

To bring about a speedy end to fighting, he urged the EU to expand its sanctions regime on Russia and Iran, which has supplied attack drones for Russian forces.

And he also called for the 'acceleration' of work by the bloc to direct 'frozen Russian assets to finance the restoration of war-torn Ukraine'.

The EU's 27 nations have remained broadly united through the war on their support for Ukraine, hitting Russia with 11

rounds of sanctions and spending billions of euros on arms for Kyiv.

But there are growing fears of cracks appearing within the bloc as concern also rises over the support of key backer the United States, where a deal this weekend left out fresh funding for Ukraine due to opposition from hardline Republicans.

Hungary, Russia's closest ally in the EU, could now be joined by Slovakia as a potential block to more backing as populist Robert Fico pushes for power in Bratislava after winning elections this weekend.

AFP

India: Bihar government releases caste survey data

Patna, India - The Bihar government on Monday released caste survey data, with the figures that have ramifications for the Lok Sabha polls next year, showing that Other Backward Caste (OBC) and Extremely Backward Class (EBC) together account for 63 per cent of the state's population.

The report of the caste-based survey conducted in Bihar was released at a press conference in the state capital.

"The extremely backward class is 36.01 per cent, the general category is 15.52 per cent and the other backward caste is 27 per cent," Vivek Kumar Singh, Additional Chief Secretary said.

According to the data, Scheduled Castes (SC) make up 19.65 per cent and the Scheduled Tribes (ST) 1.68 per cent of the population of the state.

The data also said that the Hindus comprise 81.99 per cent of the population, Muslims 17.7 per cent, Christians 0.05 per cent, Sikhs 0.01 per cent, Buddhists 0.08 per cent and other



This file photo shows Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar during the 2nd phase of the caste based census at Bakhtiyarpur in Patna on April 15 this year (ANI)

The extremely backward class is 36.01%, the general category is 15.52%, other backward caste is 27%

VIVEK KUMAR SINGH

religions 0.12 per cent.

The data said that Yadavs, the OBC group to which Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav belongs, is the largest and accounts for 14.27 per cent of the state's population.

Kushwaha and Kurmi communities form 4.27 per cent and 2.87 per cent of the population, the caste survey said. Chief Min-

ister Nitish Kumar belongs to the Kurmi community in the state.

The total population of Bihar is more than 13 crore.

The chief minister congratulated the caste-based enumeration team and said the survey 'not only revealed the castes but also gave information about the economic condition of everyone'.

ANI

You're wrong about my ear: AI Van Gogh

Paris, France - AI Vincent Van Gogh is patient but unimpressed by yet another question about his chopped-off ear.

"I apologise for any confusion but it seems you are mistaken," says the great painter's avatar, in the sort of testy tone familiar to anyone who has toyed with AI language models.

"I only cut off a small part of my ear lobe," he insists (in fact, there are multiple accounts of how the artist mutilated his ear).

The artificial intelligence Van Gogh appears on a video screen at the end of a blockbuster exhibition at the Musee d'Orsay in Paris. The exhibition, running until February, is dedicated to the final weeks of his life in the village of Auvers-sur-Oise, just north of the French capital.



Visitors look at an autoportrait of Van Gogh during the press preview of the exhibition at Orsay Museum in Paris on September 29 (AFP)

Van Gogh shot himself with a rusty pistol in 1890 aged 37. It took him two days to die.

But the AI Vincent is surprisingly well-versed in 21st century therapy-speak.

"While I did face mental health struggles, my move to Auvers-sur-Oise was not motivated by a desire to end my

life," he says.

As the 40 or so paintings at the Orsay exhibition make clear, his final weeks were extraordinarily prolific, full of masterpieces including 'The Church at Auvers', 'Wheatfield with Crows' and his very last, 'Tree Roots'.

All the more surprising is

that this period has never been given a dedicated showcase, said Christophe Leribault, Musee d'Orsay president.

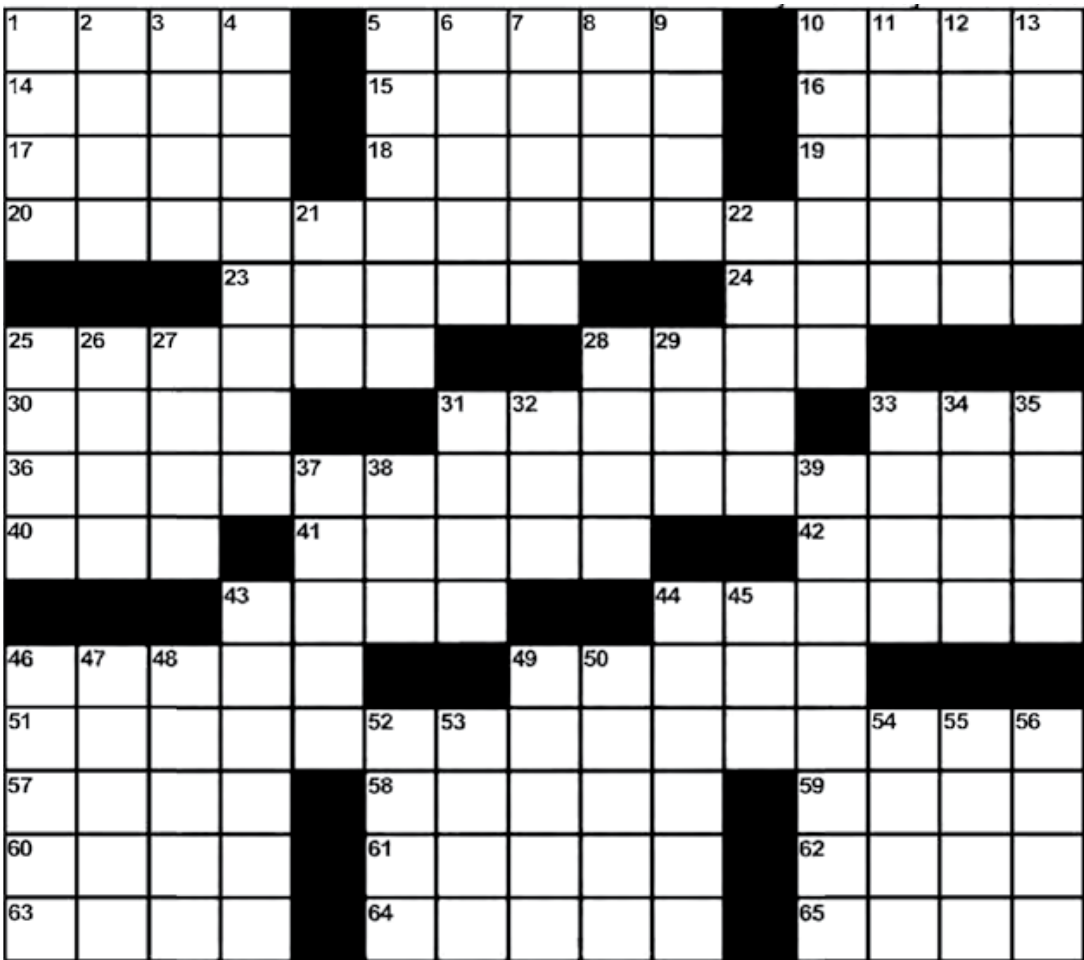
Among the highlights is a room dedicated to his 'double-square' panoramas, a technical revolution in which he used very long and thin canvases, prefiguring the wide-screen landscapes of cinema.

It is perhaps fitting, then, that the show ends with modern technologies, which have become increasingly common as exhibitions try to pull in young audiences.

As well as the Van Gogh chatbot, visitors can also don a virtual reality headset to enter the kitchen of Dr Gachet, where Van Gogh spent time in his final weeks.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) It's drawn with a rifle?
5) "Snow White" fruit
10) Batman has one
14) "To Sir With Love" singer
15) Like a crossword
16) Brainy product
17) Eye part or flower
18) Give birth to a cow
19) Sardine cans
20) Three types of wheels
23) Damsons and green-gages
24) Misplaces
25) Engulfed in fire
28) Part of the leg
30) Extended family
31) Printer's purchase
33) Type of high school rally
36) Three types of wheels
40) _ out a living (scrape by)
41) Mine exits
42) "Not to mention ..."
43) Full of anticipation
44) Type of gun
46) Dictation taker, briefly

49) It's down in the mouth
51) Three types of wheels
57) Under the covers
58) Guy in the family
59) Gin flavor
60) America's national flower
61) Drawn-out fight
62) Duke's counterpart
63) Braille markings
64) Expensive violin, for short
65) Goblet part

DOWN

1) Radar screen image
2) It replaced the lira
3) Finished hang-gliding
4) Sweepers' utensils
5) Pile up, as interest
6) Liquid part of blood (var.)
7) Fleshy fruit parts
8) Jeans purveyor Strauss
9) Adam's address
10) Large, lemonlike fruit
11) "See ya!"
12) Pasta choice
13) Some bridge seats
21) "A Nightmare on_ Street"

22) Make playful romantic overtures
25) Persistent pain
26) Verbal abuse
27) Unsatisfactory, as excuses
28) Hydrotherapeutic hangouts
29) "... and sat down be-side..."
31) Goody-two-shoes
32) Make a move
33) Alternative to a caplet
34) "What _ could go wrong?"
35) A good one will thicken
37) Append
38) Shogun's capital
39) Ill feelings?
43) Battery terminals
44) Put through a blender
45) North Pole peon
46) Grassy area
47) Strictly verboten
48) Give off, as perspiration
49) Worrier's malady
50) Europe's longest river
52) Proclaim profanely
53) "Get_!" (boss's order)

54) Like useless tires
55) Ripped
56) Ship's steering mechanism

NOTE PAD

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Strange but interesting ideas will be bursting from your brain today, but good luck turning any of them into reality right now. You're likely to deal with some unexpected eruptions from other people, which will definitely distract you. Don't set your expectations too high today. You need to slow down anyway. You've been going too fast for too long and it's time to let other people take the lead. You might have the idea, but they have the necessary energy and resources.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your routine might be tossed on its ear by a new person. You either desperately want to impress the heck out of them or shadow them everywhere they go to find out their secret. They're so different from you that you find them more fascinating than celebrities or anyone else. Finding out what makes them tick will be one of those challenges that inspires you to get creative and clever. This person is good for you in some way.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Just about anything you suggest, no matter how outlandish or odd it might seem, will be heartily received today. You have an original mind, and people are loving what it comes up with. This puts you in an ideal position to lead your coworkers or friends today, whether that's into an intimidating meeting or on a shopping spree. Just don't put too much pressure on yourself to come up with every single idea or option. It will intimidate people a bit too much.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Today is a good day for you to look at your future and try to identify possible pitfalls in your latest endeavor. Troubleshooting before there is trouble is a smart habit to cultivate. It isn't that you're thinking negatively about your project; it's just that you like to be prepared. Having an alternate plan or two ready to go will not only put your mind at ease, but it will also keep you at the head of the pack. Use your imagination to figure out what might go wrong.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Share some of that good energy you've got coursing through your veins right now. Crack a joke, flirt a little, and toss out a few compliments. Doing so will not only help you get favorable attention from some powerful people, but it will also help you turn a potentially ho-hum day into one that's full of adventure and excitement. Unleash all your charm and you can get promising results, especially if you're in a fairly new relationship.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're ready to make a big impact on someone's life today. All you need to do is open your heart and be there for that person when they need you. It won't take much. A sweet smile, a sympathetic shoulder to cry on. But the littlest gestures you make will create a positive outcome in the life of someone who could use a friend. And you don't have to come up with words of encouragement either. Listening is all you need to do.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

One of your newer friendships will hit a snag today when a misunderstanding causes a confused conversation that could result in hurt feelings. But have no fear -- it's hiccups like this that tend to strengthen a relationship, not break it apart. So take things as they come, and if you or the other person gets ticked off, talk about it! Not only will you get resolution quickly, but you might actually be laughing about it by the end of the day. You can't fear conflict right now.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You could be immensely entertained today when a voice of authority reveals that they don't know everything after all. In fact, in one particular area, you're the expert while they're the novice. Try not to lord this over them or make them feel silly. After all, you want them on your side. Show them how knowledgeable you are and thus how valuable you are to them. This is your chance to prove your worth in a big way. Things could start changing soon.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Today, it's time for you to take a larger view of your life and how your recent actions have affected your path. If you took a turn down a new road, was it the right decision? Think about it and figure it out before you continue going any further. You need to be more reflective about your actions and add some more discipline into your life. Hold back from falling into temptation. Doing so will prepare you for something big that's coming soon.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you're looking to expand a personal relationship or business partnership, today might not be the best day for it. Instead, focus on creating a balance between your personal life and professional life. One of them has been taking over the other, and things will start to fall apart soon unless you adjust your priorities. If you've been calling in sick when you're not really sick, stop doing that. And if you've forgotten your best friend's name, call them immediately and make some plans.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

It's perfectly acceptable to rely on your network of friends and associates to connect you with the career opportunities you seek. But they'll only send you down the same paths you've already been on. Isn't it time to try something new? Don't hesitate to go down a road that's unknown to you. If you want a change, make it a big change. If you have the urge, that means you're ready for a major transition. Go explore something that excites you.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Whether you want to expand your social circle or career network, you have friends in high places who can help make the connections you need. They won't think you're using them if you call them up and ask them to make an introduction or two for you. In fact, they'll welcome the opportunity to help you meet your goals. Just put yourself in their shoes. Wouldn't it give you a thrill if you knew you had the power to make someone you care about happy?



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The exterior of which real Boston pub was used in the TV programme "Cheers" in the 1980s?

A. Welcome Stranger
B. Cheers
C. Bull & Finch
D. Sam Malone's

02. Which song-writing duo wrote hit songs under the pseudonyms Ann Orson and Carte Blanche?

A. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein
B. Elton John and Bernie Taupin
C. George and Ira Gershwin
D. W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan

03. In the phrase which might be represented by the abbreviation "a w f a g's b", what does the "b" stand for?

A. Breakfast
B. Bridle
C. Buccaneer
D. Behind

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. B

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

S	R	U	S
E	R	E	B
N	O	V	I
R	E	I	Y

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

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

WORD BUILDER

E U
S C F
O N

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

India gun for kabaddi revenge against Iran at Asian Games

Hangzhou, China - India had been the only country ever to win kabaddi gold at the Asian Games until Iran shocked them five years ago.

Now India are gunning for revenge in Hangzhou but Iranian athletes and officials warned Monday they will face a "tough" battle to wrest back the gold.

Kabaddi, rooted in Indian mythology, requires two seven-player teams to send raiders into enemy territory to tag an opponent before returning to safety -- all on one breath and taking no more than 30 seconds.

Iran won both the men's and women's golds at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta to stun India, where millions of television viewers watch glitzy and money-spinning professional kabaddi leagues modelled on cricket's IPL.

But Iran are confident they will retain supremacy if the countries meet again in a medal showdown in Hangzhou this week.

"We come for gold," Iranian player Mohammadreza Shadlouichiyaneh told AFP after beating Pakistan 43-16 in their opening group match on Monday on the courts at Xiaoshan Guali Sports Centre.

"Our team's defence have a good performance, but their raiders are also very good. I think we can control them," he said.

"If we play in the final (against India), this is very hard and tough match, because both teams are strong," said Iranian coach Ghilamreza Mazandarani.

India are determined to grab back their traditional status as number one in a sport that is revered back home.

"Our team will fight and our team will win," India women's coach V. Tejaswini Bai said after a surprise 34-34 draw against Taiwan in their first group match on Monday.

AFP

Yavi in a league of her own

Bahraini star reigns in 3,000m steeplechase as India's Chaudhary wins silver and Priti bags bronze

Hangzhou, China - Bahrain's untouchable world title holder Winfred Yavi surged to the Asian Games 3,000m steeplechase gold medal on Monday, as Iranian veteran Ehsan Hadadi's 17-year reign as discus champion came to an end.

Yavi was in a league of her own at the Hangzhou Olympic Stadium, defending her title in a new Games record 9min 18.28sec to back up the 1,500m gold she won on Sunday.

India's Parul Chaudhary won silver medal with a timing of 9:27.63s while compatriot Priti, with a new personal best of 9:43.32s, took bronze.

It was the highlight of a night where the titles were split between six nations, including China's Li Ling claiming a third straight women's pole vault gold, clearing a new Games record 4.63m.

Yavi stormed to victory ahead of Kenya's Beatrice Chepkoech at the worlds at Budapest in August, then ran the second fastest time in history, 8:50.66, at the Eugene Diamond League last month.

But she had no one to push her faster in Hangzhou as she cruised home ahead of Chaudhary and Priti.

"Anything can happen, so today I planned to play the game safe. I had a lot of pressure (with people) saying 'you're going to win'," the 23-year-old said.

"So I was careful, and just tried to break the Asian Games record."

With the 1,500m in the bag



Bahrain's Winfred Yavi is flanked by India's silver medallist Parul Chaudhary (L) and bronze medallist Priti as they celebrate after the women's 3,000m steeplechase

Today I planned to play the game safe. I had a lot of pressure (with people) saying 'you're going to win'. So I was careful, and just tried to break the Asian Games record

WINFRED YAVI

along with the steeplechase, Yavi said it had given her confidence

to branch out further. Few athletes have been as

dominant as Hadadi in the discus, with the 38-year-old unbeaten at the Asian Games since winning his first gold at Doha in 2006.

But his reign is over, with fellow Iranian Hossein Rasouli heaving 62.04m to his teammate's 61.82.

In other action, Singapore's Shanti Pereira powered to the

women's 200m title in 23.03 with China's Li Yuting second and Bahrain's 2018 champion Edidiong Odiong third.

It helped justify Pereira's decision to quit her job as a copywriter this year and become a full-time athlete.

"I knew I crossed the line first, and I was like 'Oh my God'," said Pereira.

"What a season. It's been so crazy, it means a lot to me. I can't really describe this."

But there was heartache for Bahrain's former 400m world champion Salwa Eid Naser, who was disqualified from the 200m final to scupper her bid for a first major title since returning from a drugs ban.

AFP



Mutaz Essa Barshim

Olympic 'vibes' for high-jump great Barshim

Hangzhou, China - Three-time high-jump world champion Mutaz Essa Barshim compared the Asian Games to the Olympics Monday after skipping the season-ending Diamond League event at Eugene to be in Hangzhou.

The reigning Olympic gold medallist won Asiad titles in 2010 and 2014 and is determined to cap his 2023 season with another.

"For me, the Asian Games are important. You see these vibes, it's like our Olympics before the

Olympics," he said after needing only a single jump of 2.19m to lead the field into Wednesday's gold-medal showdown.

"Eugene? I am not saying it's not important, it's about having different priorities now.

"For me, it was too much travel and I am a different high jumper now. I have three Diamond (League) trophies. Adding a fourth would have been great, but it's not my top priority at the moment so I decided to skip that."

Barshim shares top billing as

Qatar's most famous sportsman with five-time Dakar Rally champion Nasser Al-Attiyah, who also took time out from his hectic schedule to be in China.

Along with rallying, Al-Attiyah is an accomplished skeet shooter and won men's team silver and individual bronze in Hangzhou.

Barshim has extra motivation to get back on top of the Asian Games podium after being shocked at the Budapest world championships by Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi, who denied him a fourth consecutive title.

"The stadium is amazing, the crowd is amazing. This is the last competition of the season, hopefully finishing at the top," he said.

"Then I need a good break, a good vacation to recharge before the Olympic season starts."

His chief rival is South Korea's Woo Sang-hyeok, the 2022 world silver medallist who won the Diamond League trophy in Eugene that Barshim skipped, with a personal best 2.35m.

He also qualified comfortably on Monday.

AFP

Panghal seeks new start for scandal-hit Indian wrestling at the Asian Games

New Delhi, India - Indian wrestler Antim Panghal begins her campaign for a medal at the Asian Games in Hangzhou this week hoping it will mark a fresh start for a sport mired in a sexual harassment scandal back home.

Three top wrestlers accused Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of sexual misconduct in January and launched protests demanding his resignation.

Images of star athletes being detained as they tried to march to parliament in May went viral on social media. The wrestling begins in Hangzhou on Wednesday with two-time under-20 world champion Panghal among the favourites.

"I hope to put the controversies behind me and win a gold for my country," the 19-year-old told AFP before leaving for Hangzhou.

Two weeks ago she beat the world champion and a two-time European champion on her way to bronze at the World Wrestling Championships in Belgrade.

"I am filled with new energy," said Panghal, who competes in



Antim Panghal

the 53kg freestyle category on Thursday at the Lin'an Sports Culture and Exhibition Centre.

Wrestling is hugely popular in rural northern India and the country has historically performed well in the sport at the Asian Games, bagging 59 medals, 11 of

them gold.

The 66-year-old Singh, who is also a lawmaker from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling right-wing party, has been charged with sexual harassment and stalking. Singh, who denies all charges and has been released on

bail, claims he is a victim of a conspiracy to force him out of parliament. He faces up to five years in jail if found guilty. Panghal, the two-time Under-20 world champion, did not take part in the protests but said the demonstrations had affected the "morale of all up and coming athletes".

Among the three prominent wrestlers who led the protest against Singh, only Olympic bronze medallist Bajrang Punia will be in Hangzhou.

Sakshi Malik, also an Olympic medallist, skipped the trials for the Games, while Vinesh Phogat opted out due to a knee injury.

Phogat won gold in the women's 50kg freestyle at the Jakarta Asian Games in 2018.

In a separate scandal, the WFI was suspended in August by United World Wrestling, the global governing body, for not holding its elections in time.

The suspension means Indian wrestlers have to compete as neutral athletes in events organised by the UWW and not under the Indian flag.

AFP

South Korean skater 'very sorry' after early celebration costs gold

Hangzhou, China - South Korean rollerskater Jung Cheolwon committed a cardinal sin of sport Monday by celebrating too early, with his "big mistake" costing his country an Asian Games gold medal.

Jung was left red-faced after being the anchor for his three-man team in the men's 3,000m relay final at Qintang Roller Sports Centre.

Thinking he had easily beaten Huang Yu-lin, he eased up and raised his arms in celebration, only for the Taiwanese skater to lunge with his leg across the line first in 4min 05.692sec to win by one hundredth of a second.

"I made a rather big mistake. I didn't come at full speed to the finish line. I let my guard down too early," said Jung.

"I am very sorry. I apologise to my teammates and to our fans who supported us. We all worked very hard together for this, and it's all my fault."

Taiwan's Huang said it was



We all worked very hard together for this, and it's all my fault.

JUNG CHEOLWON

a "miracle" that he won, with his coach drumming it into him that you never give up.

"I realised they were celebrating, but I wanted to tell them, while you were celebrating, I was still fighting," he said.

"I wasn't sure whether I had reached the finish line in time.

"I thought it was such a shame that I was just a little bit short, and then the results came up on the screen showing that I had won by one hundredth of a second, and it was just a miracle."

SCORES TO SETTLE

Madrid coach Ancelotti returns to Napoli with a point to prove

Barcelona, Spain - Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti is not a man to hold a grudge, as reflected by his return to the Spanish capital despite being harshly sacked by Los Blancos chief Florentino Perez in 2015.

However, the 64-year-old veteran would doubtless enjoy proving a point when his Madrid side visit Napoli in the Champions League on Tuesday at the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium.

Ancelotti was axed by president Aurelio De Laurentiis in December 2019, less than an hour after helping Napoli reach the Champions League knock-out stages with a 4-0 thrashing of Genk.

The Italian side were struggling in seventh in Serie A at the time and won their first Scudetto for 33 years in 2023, so De Laurentiis will consider his decisions more than justified.

Ancelotti spent a year and a half in charge of Napoli, guiding them to a second place finish in the 2018-19 campaign, but his tenure was abruptly cut short in its sophomore year.

At the time it seemed Ancelotti had reached the game's summit years earlier and was on the way down football's food chain, with his next appointment at Everton appearing to confirm



Carlo Ancelotti

Ancelotti was axed by president Aurelio De Laurentiis in December 2019, less than an hour after helping Napoli reach the Champions League knock-out stages with a 4-0 thrashing of Genk

that. Dressing room tensions and a dispute with De Laurentiis over a training camp led to his downfall in Campania. The president appeared to think Ancelotti did not have it in him to manage the squad. However Ancelotti's surprise return to the helm of Madrid in 2021 put him back

among the elite, and in 2022 he won his fourth Champions League title as a coach, more than anyone else, as well as La Liga to complete a superb double. Madrid's 3-0 win at Girona on Sunday ensures they also arrive in Italy as leaders in La Liga, after a wobble in the derby against ri-

vals Atletico Madrid.

Recovery

A painful 3-1 loss at the Metropolitan on September 24 saw Ancelotti come in for criticism for his tactics and diamond midfield system. However the Italian made some minor changes and it

proved sufficient to earn a comfortable victory over the high-flying Catalans, who had hoped to score a second consecutive home win over Madrid at Montilivi.

"Winning here means that we did well and I'd like to highlight our defensive work, which was very good," Ancelotti told reporters.

The coach deployed Eduardo Camavinga at left-back instead of the more attacking Fran Garcia, and also asked Jude Bellingham to help with covering Girona to ease the burden on Vinicius Junior. "We put Bellingham on the outside to avoid Vini having too many defensive duties, bearing in mind that (Aurelien) Tchouameni was in the centre to provide cover," added Ancelotti.

Bellingham has seven goals and two assists this season across all competitions, largely playing in the number 10 role, despite his capacity to operate in deeper areas. It was an "invention" by Ancelotti to help cover for the departed Karim Benzema and so far it has paid dividends for the England international, top scorer in Spain.

The coach's tactical shift and subsequent tweaks dispel any doubts over his dedication at Madrid, showing he is not just on cruise control and heading towards the Brazil national team job he is set to take next summer.

Part of the reason behind the new set-up is to add muscle to the team and bolster the midfield, after Manchester City demolished the record 14-time European champions in last season's semi-final.



Romelu Lukaku

Lukaku lifts AS Roma as Juventus held by Atalanta

Milan, Italy - Romelu Lukaku helped Roma to only their second win of the Serie A season as the Belgian striker scored in a 2-0 victory over Frosinone on Sunday, while Juventus laboured to a goalless draw at Atalanta.

Lukaku grabbed his third goal in five league games for Roma after latching onto a clever pass from Paulo Dybala midway through the first half.

"It's an important win with lots of hard work and efficiency in front of goal," said Lukaku, who returned for another spell in Italy on loan from Chelsea.

"We're in a difficult situation, but the season is still long. We need to keep playing like that."

Bayern Munich's 'thin' squad faces Champions League test as injuries bite

Berlin, Germany - Injury-hit Bayern Munich travel to Copenhagen on Tuesday in the Champions League, facing a depth problem which is effectively of their own making.

Injuries kept first-teamers Serge Gnabry and Matthijs de Ligt out of Bayern's 2-2 draw at RB Leipzig. Gnabry will miss weeks with a broken arm while De Ligt also looks set to miss Tuesday's match.

Combine the duo's absence with injury clouds hovering above remaining centre-backs Dayot Upamecano and Kim Min-jae and the Bayern hierarchy may begin to understand manager Thomas Tuchel's persistent complaints about a lack of depth in his squad.

Bayern remain undefeated in the league, German Cup and Champions League this season, but have made a habit of conceding goals against better sides.

The German champions have conceded three in meetings with RB Leipzig and Manchester United so far this season, along with two against league leaders Bayer Leverkusen and again



Bayern Munich's Serge Gnabry will be out for three weeks after suffering an arm injury (AFP)

against Leipzig.

While Bayern make Tuesday's trip to Copenhagen as strong favourites, it is the kind of mid-week fixture that will test their depth as they hope to fight for all trophies on offer this season.

Despite a transfer window which brought England captain Harry Kane, Serie A defender of

the year Kim and Konrad Laimer to Munich, Bayern allowed several players to leave in the summer.

The list of departures included France defenders Benjamin Pavard and Lucas Hernandez, midfielders Ryan Gravenberch and Marcel Sabitzer and right-back Josip Stanisic.

After the window shut in early September, Tuchel described his squad as "a bit thin, a bit small" saying it was "thinner than before (the window closed)".

A frustrated Tuchel told Germany's Sky network "it's a courageous squad composition. We'll see if it's enough for the club's goals this season."



Lens players celebrate a goal in Ligue 1 (AFP)

Champions League clash with Arsenal recalls glory days for resurgent Lens

Lens, France - Lens' Champions League clash with Arsenal on Tuesday will see the French side come full circle in the season that marks their return to Europe's elite club competition after two decades away.

The golden era for the Blood and Gold ("Les Sang et Or") came in the late 1990s and early 2000s, before a long stint in the doldrums and then a remarkable recent revival.

Lens were crowned French champions in 1998 for the only time in their history, an achievement which earned them a first crack at the Champions League.

In November that year, having already held the Arsenal of Patrick Vieira, Dennis Bergkamp, Nicolas Anelka and Marc Overmars at home, they travelled to London to play Arsene Wenger's side at Wembley. A Mickael Debeve goal gave them a shock 1-0 win as 8,000 travelling fans celebrated one of the finest results in the club's history.

"It was the high point of my career," recalled Debeve, hardly a superstar, in an interview last

year with lensois.com.

"They were one of the best two or three teams in Europe at the time. It was like playing against Real Madrid or Barcelona, a team full of internationals.

"It was unexpected for us to be playing in such a competition against a team like that."

Spell in the doldrums

Lens were nevertheless denied a place in the knockout rounds by Andriy Shevchenko's Dynamo Kyiv, and two years later Arsenal gained revenge by beating the French club in the UEFA Cup semi-finals.

Now, a quarter of a century on from that night at Wembley, Lens will host Arsenal at a packed Stade Bollaert-Delelis, whose 38,000 capacity is famously larger than the entire population of the northern French town.

Lens did have one other crack at the Champions League in 2002/03, beating AC Milan and drawing with Bayern Munich.

AFP

Correa brace helps Atletico beat Cadiz with strong comeback

Barcelona, Spain - Atletico Madrid produced a fine comeback from two goals down to beat Cadiz 3-2 and climb to fourth in La Liga on Sunday.

Diego Simeone's side were hit twice early on by the Andalusian minnows but dominated the game and triumphed thanks to an Angel Correa brace and Nahuel Molina's strike.

"The comeback today makes me very happy because it was not easy after the two goals," Simeone told DAZN. "The team calmly found the path to victory."



Atletico Madrid's Angel Correa celebrates after scoring against Cadiz on Sunday (AFP)

Correa missed Thursday's win over Osasuna with a knee sprain he sustained in the Madrid derby triumph last weekend but said he came back as soon as possible to help Atletico.

"I wanted to force it, with a bit of pain, to help the team and it turned out well," said Correa, who started in attack in place of the suspended Alvaro Morata.

"Today the coach told me that I should play as the number nine to give more freedom to (Antoine) Griezmann."

Atletico were on top from the

start, with Griezmann striking the post before Lucas Pires sent the visitors ahead at the Metropolitan.

The Brazilian winger finished off Chris Ramos's excellent low cross to the far post, although Atletico were angry a foul was not given in the build-up.

Cadiz defender Fali came close to doubling his side's lead with a cheeky lob from inside his own half, which flew over Jan Oblak but also narrowly wide, to the goalkeeper's immense relief.

AFP



CRICKET EXTRAVAGANZA

India set sights on cricket World Cup glory and Olympic recognition

New Delhi, India - India target a third World Cup when cricket's global showpiece gets underway on Thursday with the country buoyed by a growing, international self-confidence and with a sport which unites and divides the sub-continent like no other on the verge of joining the Olympic elite.

The epic tournament features 10 nations playing 48 matches over 46 days at 10 different venues. However, the build-up has been far from smooth after arch-rivals Pakistan considered a boycott when India refused to travel across the border for the Asia Cup.

As a result, the announcement of the schedule for the World Cup was delayed until just three months before the first ball was to be bowled.

Fears over security for the India-Pakistan World Cup blockbuster in Ahmedabad then saw the match moved back a day, sparking a domino effect of nine rescheduled fixtures.

Pakistan's visit to India is their first since the 2016 Twenty20 World Cup but they were welcomed warmly when they arrived in Hyderabad last week despite only receiving visas just 48 hours before their departure.

"It's been a superb welcome. People coming to the hotel and their hospitality has been fantastic," said leg-spinner Shadab Khan.

In an indication of the security tensions, Pakistan's opening warm-up match with New Zealand on Friday was played behind closed doors at an eerily silent 55,000-capacity Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium.

The opening match on Thursday



The World Cup trophy is displayed at the Taj Mahal in Agra in August. India host the tournament from Thursday (AFP)

between champions England and New Zealand as well as the final on November 19 are being staged at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium, named after the prime minister, the world's biggest cricket arena boasting a capacity of over 130,000.

India will face Pakistan at the mega-venue on October 14.

The city which independence hero Mahatma Gandhi called home for 15 years is tipped as a potential host city should India bid for the 2036 Olympics. Cricket itself - albeit in its

short-format T20 -- is expected to be named an Olympic sport for the 2028 Games in Los Angeles when the International Olympic Committee meets in Mumbai later this month.

The gathering of the best players of India's favourite game will be the

sporting culmination of a year that saw India overtake China as the world's most populous country, after displacing former coloniser Britain as its fifth-biggest economy in 2021.

India are two-time champions having added the 2011 title on home soil to

their 1983 triumph. They boast superstar Virat Kohli who has made more than 13,000 runs in the ODI format.

Pakistan, the 1992 champions, have lost seven times out of seven to India at past World Cups.

However, skipper Babar Azam will be key to turning around that run as he leads the way in the batting rankings. His average of over 58 betters even that of Kohli.

Defending champions England, who triumphed in a nail-biting 2019 final against New Zealand at Lord's, can harness the destructive firepower of Ben Stokes who smashed 84 in that game which went to a Super Over conclusion.

The tournament will likely see the farewell ODI performance of Bangladesh skipper Shakib al Hasan, the top-ranked all-rounder in ODI cricket.

Australia are five-time champions and boast veteran David Warner who has amassed over 6,300 ODI runs.

South Africa, who have endured a roller-coaster relationship with the World Cup, undone by rain rules in 1992 and 2003, have also been hit by injuries, losing key pacers Anrich Nortje and Sisanda Magala.

For Afghanistan, slow bowlers Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, who made his international debut at 16, and Noor Ahmad will be key on welcoming Indian pitches.

Sri Lanka, the 1996 winners, will be fired up by the indignity of being bowled out for just 50 and losing the Asia Cup final to India by 10 wickets.

AFP

KNOW THE TEAMS



INDIA WORLD RANKING:1 SQUAD

Rohit Sharma (captain), Hardik Pandya, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ishan Kishan, Suryakumar Yadav

PREVIOUS BEST
CHAMPIONS
1983, 2011



SRI LANKA WORLD RANKING:7 SQUAD

Dasun Shanaka (captain), Kusal Mendis, Kusal Perera, Pathum Nissanka, Dimuth Karunaratne, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Charith Asalanka, Dhananjaya de Silva, Dushan Hemantha, Maheesh Theekshana, Dunieth Wellalage, Kasun Rajitha, Matheesha Pathirana, Lahiru Kumara, Dilshan Madushanka

PREVIOUS BEST
CHAMPIONS
1996



SOUTH AFRICA WORLD RANKING:4 SQUAD

Temba Bavuma (captain), Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Andile Phehlukwayo, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen, Lizaad Williams.

PREVIOUS BEST
SEMI-FINALS
1992, 1999, 2007, 2015



PAKISTAN WORLD RANKING:2 SQUAD

Babar Azam (captain), Shadab Khan, Fakhar Zaman, Imam-ul-Haq, Abdullah Shafique, Mohammad Rizwan, Saud Shakeel, Iftikhar Ahmed, Salman Ali Agha, Mohammad Nawaz, Usama Mir, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Shaheen Afridi, Mohammad Wasim.

PREVIOUS BEST
CHAMPIONS
1992



NEW ZEALAND WORLD RANKING:6 SQUAD

Kane Williamson (captain), Trent Boult, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitch Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Will Young.

PREVIOUS BEST
RUNNERS-UP
2015, 2019



NETHERLANDS WORLD RANKING:14 SQUAD

Scott Edwards (captain), Max O'Dowd, Bas de Leede, Vikramjit Singh, Teja Nidamanuru, Paul van Meekeren, Colin Ackermann, Roelof van der Merwe, Logan van Beek, Aryan Dutt, Ryan Klein, Wesley Barresi, Saqib Zulfiqar, Shariz Ahmad, Sybrand Engelbrecht.

PREVIOUS BEST
GROUP STAGE
1996, 2003, 2007, 2011



ENGLAND WORLD RANKING:5 SQUAD

Jos Buttler (captain), Moeen Ali, Gus Atkinson, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Liam Livingstone, Dawid Malan, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, David Willey, Mark Wood, Chris Woakes.

PREVIOUS BEST
CHAMPIONS
2019



BANGLADESH WORLD RANKING:8 SQUAD

Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Liton Das, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Towhid Hridoy, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Nasum Ahmed, Mahedi Hasan, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Hasan Mahmud, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib.

PREVIOUS BEST
QUARTER-FINALS
2015



AUSTRALIA WORLD RANKING:3 SQUAD

Pat Cummins (captain), Steve Smith, Alex Carey, Josh Inglis, Sean Abbott, Marnus Labuschagne, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Mitch Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Marcus Stoinis, David Warner, Adam Zampa, Mitchell Starc.

PREVIOUS BEST
CHAMPIONS
1987, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2015



AFGHANISTAN WORLD RANKING:2 SQUAD

Hashmatullah Shahidi (captain), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran, Riaz Hassan, Rahmat Shah, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Ikram Alikhil, Azmatullah Omarzai, Rashid Khan, Mujeeb ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Abdul Rahman, Naveen-ul-Haq.

PREVIOUS BEST
GROUP STAGE
2015, 2019

Australia beat Portugal to keep progress hopes alive

Saint-Étienne, France - Australia kept their faint hopes of reaching the Rugby World Cup knockout stages alive with an unconvincing 34-14 victory over minnows Portugal on Sunday.

Tries from forwards Richie Arnold, David Porecki, Angus Bell and Fraser McReight, and winger Marika Koroibete secured Australia a bonus point and a Pool C lifeline, while Portugal hit back through Pedro Bettencourt and Rafael Simoes. The Wallabies can still reach the quarter-finals if Fiji lose to Portugal next week without a bonus point.

"It was good, the boys dug deep knowing it could be our last game and credit to Portugal, they are a very solid team," Australia's No.8 Rob Valetini said.

"We pride ourselves on the forwards trying to get over their forwards. A lot of things we did at training transferred over to the field, we knew the game was going to be won by the forwards."

It was a poignant night for Wallaby prop James Slipper, who



Portugal's Nicolas Martins (L) and Australia's Rob Leota jump for the ball in a line out during their Rugby World Cup Pool C match on Sunday (AFP)

broke his country's record for the most caps at a World Cup.

"I think we are really proud for what we gave, but it is a loss. I am proud, but not happy to be honest," said Portugal captain Tomas Appleton. "We still have one more shot to show what we can do next week, but we are a bit disappointed."

Portugal showed a fearlessness to run the ball from the get-go, even from deep inside their own half.

Despite an early penalty from Australia's Ben Donaldson, Portugal deservedly took the lead when, playing with a penalty advantage. A slick backs move set centre Bettencourt free on the overlap to dive over in the corner.

Samuel Marques converted but moments later Bettencourt hit his opposite number Izaia Perese with a high tackle and was sent to the sin-bin.

Donaldson missed the resulting penalty but Australia soon made the extra man count with Valetini offloading to lock Arnold

to score next to the posts.

Portugal became ragged, giving away possession cheaply and Wallaby captain Porecki punished them again, touching down from the back of a short-range driving maul. And before Portugal were back up 15 men again, prop Bell launched himself at the line from close in to score Australia's third try. Once they had their full contingent back, the Portuguese were again the better side.

Portugal thought they had scored a richly deserved second try but Wallaby full-back Andrew Kellaway's last-ditched tackle forced flanker Nicolas Martins into touch before he dotted down, leaving Australia 24-7 up at the break.

Australia secured the attacking bonus point seven minutes into the second period after another Portugal penalty allowed them to kick deep into their opponents' 22, before Mark Nawaqanitawase was able to pop the ball off for flanker McReight to score.



Europe's Jon Rahm (C) and teammates celebrate with the trophy after winning the Ryder Cup in Rome on Sunday (AFP)

Rahm inspired by Spanish legacy in Ryder Cup triumph

Rome, Italy - Jon Rahm was inspired by the legacy of Spanish Ryder Cup heroes as he played a crucial role in Europe triumphing over the United States in Rome on Sunday.

Rahm earned three points in the 16.5-11.5 victory to remind fans of his fellow countrymen Seve Ballesteros, Jose Maria Olazabal and Sergio Garcia who have made history in the tournament.

Garcia is the Ryder Cup's all-time points scorer with 28.5 collected over 10 editions, while the late icon Ballesteros and Europe vice-captain Olazabal picked up 22.5 and 20.5 respectively.

"Obviously the Spaniards have a legacy to live up to. It's certainly not easy," Rahm said.

"It's a lot to live up to and it's something that really inspires me, especially when Jose is around, right. He always tells me little things to inspire me.

"Following in their footsteps and how they try to make the team better is the way I've approached it. I try to do my part."

The Basque, nicknamed 'Rahmbo' by fans and teammates alike, won two matches over the weekend but it was his two halves which had the bigger impact. Rahm rolled a superb

90-foot putt to within inches of the 18th to snatch a half-point from his singles contest with world number one Scottie Scheffler, stemming an early wave of American pressure and taking Europe to 12 points.

He also rolled in a magical putt on the same hole in the Friday foursomes to ensure that the US didn't win a match in a day for the first time in the Ryder Cup.

Rahm hailed the "culture" which binds the European team together and makes them a tight unit, something that captain Luke Donald also spoke about after Sunday's triumph.

"It's the ability to walk through those gates and those doors and forget about who you are outside of this week, what you have done or what you may do afterwards, really truly doesn't matter," said Rahm.

Brooks Koepka denied that the US were lacking that sort of team spirit, amid reports of a rift in Zach Johnson's camp which hampered their tournament.

The Americans have perennially been accused of being a collection of great individuals rather than a great team with that being pinpointed as a reason why they haven't won in Europe since 1993.

TECS thump SARCO, OCT Al Hail A beat OCT Muscat

Muscat - TECS (Technical Services) beat SARCO by 31 runs in a low-scoring match of the A Division League 2023-24.

TECS were 107 all out with Nazish Mohd claiming three wickets while James M and Rakesh Patel took two each. Ravindu PW was the top-scorer for TECS with 26 runs. In response, Shanidh KT's fiery spell of five for 27 along with Jaleel K's 3 for 22 helped TECS bundle down SARCO for a mere 76.

In C Division League OCT Al Hail A beat OCT Muscat by 55 runs.

OCT Al Hail A posted 150/5 with Waleed al Balushi's hitting a half century. Arif al Balushi picked three for 25 to help OCT Muscat restrict the opposition. In reply, OCT Muscat were bundled for 95 as Suhaib Al Balushi claimed four wickets for just eight runs. Nadhir Ghulam and Waleed al Balushi picked two wickets each. Rashad al Balushi was the top-scorer for OCT Muscat scoring 21.

In E Division Peace Players - FOS Energy defeated Team Coorg by 10 wickets.

Brief Scores : TECS 107/10 in 40.1



(L-R) Shanidh, Ali and Jaleel of TECS

overs (Ravindu PW 26(80); Nazish Mohd 27(73) beat SARCO 76/10 in 20.1 overs (Rakesh Patel 17(24); Shanidh KT 27(5) by 31 runs.

OCT Al Hail A 150/5 in 20 overs (Waleed al Balushi 63(53) 7x4,1x6 ; Arif al Balushi 3(25) beat OCT Muscat 95/10 in 20 overs (Rashad al Balushi 21(25); Suhaib al Balushi 4(8) by 55 runs. Team Coorg Muscat 90/10 in 13.4 overs (Bronal Barboj 27(16) 5x4; Mohd Abrar 3(8) lost to Peace Players - FOS Energy 92/0 in 10.5 overs (Muhd Rashid 60(36) 9x4, 2x6) by 10 wickets.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY
OF NON-VIOLENCE

Streamline the self

SISTER MAUREEN GOODMAN, PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, BRAHMAKUMARIS UK, WAS IN MUSCAT TO DELIVER AN INSPIRING TALK ON THE OCCASION OF UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NON-VIOLENCE (OCTOBER 2). ‘MEDITATION HELPS US TO BE IN TOUCH WITH OUR INNER THOUGHTS,’ SHE TELLS **ANIRBAN RAY** ON THE EVE OF HER TALK

In a world often divided by differences and conflicts, it is the transformative power of love and meditation that stands as a beacon of hope. Renowned motivational speaker Sister Maureen Goodman, programme director of Brahmakumaris UK, visited Oman to deliver an inspiring lecture on the occasion of the UN International Day of Non-violence wherein she identified meditation as the key to self-refinement.

Maureen’s message resonates with the belief that love has the potential to change the world, transcending boundaries and fostering unity among humanity. As she shared her wisdom and insights on various aspects of life including family and work, Oman relished her enlightening discourse in shaping a more peaceful and harmonious world. Excerpts from an interview with Muscat Daily:

Tell us about the 'Light for Human Goodness for Global Peace' on the occasion of Non-violence Day?

With my experience and travelling around the world, I have seen that it is wars that leads to absence of peace. It has a much in-depth significance, as well as psychological impact. We have dealt with prisoners and juvenile criminals and have found that the basic thing that is being lacking among them is just one thing - self respect. Every soul is in need of self respect and when they are deprived of this, they grow resentful and eventually become violent.

Everyone seeks appreciation/acknowledgement of their efforts but often it doesn't come by, causing disappointment and disillusionment - comment?

It is true that for our internal happiness we need external validation, but at the same time, we should not be totally dependent on it. There are times when we base our identity with only external validation which can become dangerous. And here comes the important part, which is meditation. Meditation helps us to be in touch with our inner thoughts and streamline our self to a

more calmer self. That is the stage when we do not need any external validation.

People have to be competitive and earn money to fend for their families. Do young people need to meditate?

Chasing ambitions is not bad but it is not good to be greedy as it causes trouble and pain to others. Meditation helps us to direct our scattered mind more productively to work, business, and ambition, and take better decisions with clarity, not anger. It helps to look inside the various events and incidents and our thoughts more critically. It can be the foundation for better work and a career.

Oman is full of single professionals who have to compromise on family life to earn a living. What is your advice to them?

It depends on the choice that one makes, but without fear. One needs to decide the important thing that is of value to the present time. The decisions need to be taken consciously;

often there are multiple decisions that are taken hastily and randomly. And these are taken out of fear. This is where meditation is helpful - to take decisions wisely. Hence, I advice everyone to turn to meditation for a good balance in life.

With the fast pace of work life and domestic obligations, how does one find time for self-reflection?

Make the most use of every circumstance, even in traffic jams. Somethings are not in our hands and we have to let go. But we must attempt to take advantage of the situation. The world has to be more reflective rather than reactive. Every situation needs to be analysed with calmness. It is not what happens outside that matters, what matters is how to control the internal mechanism through the external circumstances.

Self reflection involves taking an opportunity in every adverse situation to convert it into something positive. And it is equally important to stay calm in every situation because there are many things that are beyond our control.



Every soul is in need of self respect and when they are deprived of this, they grow resentful and eventually become violent

ONE MINUTE REMINDER

There was a research sometime back wherein people avoided angry colleagues for at least six months, and it positively impacted their output. Also, one can control anger with meditation. We had a programme in Brazil called 'One minute reminder' wherein people meditated for one minute every one hour during work hours. In whatever work they were doing, they set aside 1 minute every hour for meditation, and the results were phenomenal. There was clarity, focus, and more productivity on the work-floor.





he 12-3-30 workout is basically 'Zone 2 training' which allows the body to work at a rate which it can recover from easily, doesn't require high energy levels, and will eventually build a lot of endurance.

This workout involves a person setting a treadmill to an incline of 12, with a speed of 3mph, and walking for 30 minutes. It might sound easy, but one minute in and you'll be sweating profusely.

How to get started

First things first - fuel up. According to the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), exercising on an empty stomach may cause nausea, so having something to eat one to three hours prior to your workout can help prevent that queasy feeling and give you the fuel and energy you need to get through your workout.

What to eat? Some of this is trial and error since everyone's body is different, but generally, opting for a meal or snack that yields a combo of carbohydrates and a small amount of protein is best. If you need something last-minute prior to your activity, a piece of fruit with a few nuts or

a little nut
butter can do the trick.

As with any other workout, resist the urge to jump in too quickly, and take time to warm up and ease into the workout. Begin with pre-workout stretches to activate your glutes, calves, hamstrings, and hips. Once on the treadmill, take it easy - first get acclimatised with the treadmill as you warm up. Then, slowly start to adjust the incline, and potentially the speed.

And remember, You're not off the hook once the 30 minutes are up. Allotting time

to recover after a good sweat optimises benefits and lowers risk of potential injuries. Whenever you're going up an incline for that prolonged period of time, as in a hike or a trek, you need to take time to undo your effort. On an inclined track, muscles are working, tightening, and strengthening, so you need to go back and let them ease out slowly.

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In an era where youth is often synonymous with vitality and health, a disturbing trend is silently gripping the younger generation - heart diseases.

Traditionally associated with the aging population, heart diseases have found an alarming niche among those who should be enjoying the prime of their lives. This shift in demographics raises critical questions about lifestyle choices, societal stressors, and the need for proactive health measures.

Gone are the days when heart diseases were considered the affliction of the elderly. Recent studies indicate a concerning surge in cardiovascular issues among individuals in their 30s and above. While the reasons behind this trend are multifaceted, a sedentary lifestyle, poor dietary habits, and heightened stress levels appear to be key contributors.

The advent of technology has undoubtedly brought about unprecedented convenience, but it has also ushered in an era of physical inactivity. Younger generations are increasingly tethered to screens, whether for work or leisure, leading to a decline in physical activity. The human body, designed for movement, rebels against the constraints of a sedentary existence. Lack of exercise contributes not only to obesity but also to an increased risk of heart diseases.

Nutrition, or the lack thereof, plays a pivotal role in the rising incidence of heart diseases among the youth. Fast food culture, characterised by high-calorie, low-nutrient meals, has become a staple for many young adults. Excessive consumption of processed foods laden with trans fats and sodium not only contributes to weight gain but also wreaks havoc on cardiovascular health. The consequences of poor dietary choices are not just visible on the waistline; they manifest as a ticking time bomb within the arteries.

Stress, often dismissed as an inevitable byproduct of modern life, is emerging as a silent killer among the younger population. The pressure to excel in academics, secure a stable job, and navigate the complexities of personal relationships can take a toll on mental and physical well-being. Chronic stress has been linked to hypertension, a major risk factor for heart diseases. The relentless pace of contemporary life, exacerbated by the ever-present digital connection, leaves little room for relaxation and recovery.

Beyond individual lifestyle factors, societal changes contribute significantly to the rising tide of heart diseases among the young. Economic uncertainties, intense competition, and the constant quest for success

create an environment where health often takes a backseat. Long working hours, irregular sleep patterns, and limited access to healthcare further compound the challenges faced by the younger generation in maintaining heart health.

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering individuals to make informed choices about their health. Promoting physical activity, advocating for balanced diets, and fostering stress-management strategies should be integral components of educational curricula.

There is a pressing need for initiatives that promote preventive health-care and make it accessible to all. Public health campaigns focusing on the importance of regular check-ups, screenings, and early intervention can go a long way in curbing the rising tide of heart diseases.

The rise of heart diseases among the younger generation is a wake-up call that demands immediate attention. As a society, we cannot afford to ignore the health of our youth, for they are the architects of our future. By reevaluating our priorities, embracing healthier lifestyles, and advocating for systemic changes, we can reverse the ominous trend and pave the way for a heart-healthy future. The clock is ticking, and it's time to prioritize the heartbeat of our nation - our youth.

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