

Jaboob bags gold in high jump, relay team claims bronze medal

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Fatek bin Abdul Ghafour Jaboob struck gold in high jump at the Islamic Solidarity Games underway in Konya, Turkiye, with a scintillating performance on Friday.

Additionally, the national relay team claimed the bronze medal in men's 4X100m relay clocking 39.21 seconds.

The medals raised Oman's tally at the games to three. Oman's top sprinter Barakat al Harthi won bronze in men's 100m on Tuesday.

Continuing till August 18, over 5,000 athletes representing 55 countries are participating in the games. Oman is taking part in five disciplines - athletics, cycling, swimming, shooting and weightlifting.



Fatek bin Abdul Jaboob clears the bar to claim high jump gold in Konya, Turkiye; and Oman's 4X100m relay team that won bronze. Barakat al Harthi (right) won bronze in men's 100m last week

Despite exiting in the qualifying round, Omani shooters gained valuable experience at the games by competing against experienced and top

ranking shooters.

"The event has helped them enhance abilities and self-confidence," an official of the Omani delegation at the games said.

Weightlifter Elias al Busaidi gained much experience from his participation in the 67kg category having competed against some of the top ranked athletes of the

world at the games.

Coached by Mohammed Moez bin Mustafa al Khiari, Oman's swimming team included Issa bin Samir al Adawi,

Nasser bin Saif al Kindi and Muhannad bin Younis Oulad Thani.

Oman concluded its participation in the games on Saturday.

Tropical depression to bring rains

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A deep tropical depression in the Arabian Sea resulted in scattered rains in parts of Al Wusta, South Sharqiyah and Dhofar on Saturday, with more expected in other governorates on Sunday.

The depression settled at a distance of 400km from Oman's coast in the Arabian Sea on Saturday, with the likelihood of it turning northwest towards the coast of Pakistan, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) stated in its special weather report for the depression.

Clouds will cover most of the sultanate on Sunday and rainfall of varying intensity - 15-60mm - will lash the governorates of Al Wusta, North Sharqiyah, South Sharqiyah, Muscat, Dakhliyah, South Batinah, Dhahirah and Dhofar. CAA forecast the same weather pattern for Monday.

'Seas will be rough along the Arabian Sea coasts with maximum wave height of 4m.'

'Oman's economic success is driven by accountability'

US think tank praises HM the Sultan's policies for economic turnaround

Our Correspondent
Muscat

By pushing the government to make more efficient use of higher hydrocarbon prices and a budget surplus of US\$2bn, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has "helped reduce anxiety about the stability of the strategically positioned Gulf state".

An American think tank based in Washington, DC, affirmed that the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan has succeeded in facing the twin economic challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and low crude oil prices.

A report by Jonathan Campbell-James of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy delves into the policies undertaken by the sultanate under His Majesty the Sultan's guidance to steer it



away from the economic crisis that the country faced as His Majesty the Sultan took the reins of the sultanate.

"When His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik came to power in January 2020, Oman's foremost problem was a looming fiscal crisis spurred by over-dependence on oil and natural gas revenues, compounded by the collapse in prices during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the period of mourning barely over, Omani crude futures plummeted to US\$30 per barrel four

months later - a price that threatened to halve the country's projected oil revenues for the entire year, widen its fiscal deficit, and double its national debt. Oman was already suffering from low credit ratings because of previous budget deficits, so financing this debt in the short term presented challenges," wrote Campbell-James.

He added that although many of these structural problems persist today, the tide appears to have turned. "In previous crises, the country had often been rescued from imminent financial disaster by a global price recovery and the extraordinary ability of Petroleum Development Oman to squeeze just a bit more oil from its complex geology. This time, however, the political leadership deserves credit as well."

Under His Majesty's watch, he wrote, long-stalled laws regarding foreign capital investment, bankruptcy, and public-private partnership have been introduced, along with changes to employment and visa regulations intended to attract foreign direct investment.

Continued on Page 03

Oman-India military exercise enhances inter-operability

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Army of Oman (RAO), represented by 60 personnel from the Sultan of Oman Parachute Regiment, and the Indian Army concluded a joint Oman-India military exercise - Al Najah IV - on Saturday in Bikaner, Rajasthan.

The exercise, which started on August 1, included professional interaction, mutual understanding of drills and procedures, establishment of joint command and control structures, and elimination of terrorist threats, focusing on counter terrorism operations, regional security operations and peace keeping operations under the UN Charter.

The concluding activities were presided over by Brig Gen Jitesh



Ralli, Commander of 57th Brigade of the Indian Army, in the presence of Brig Gen Humaid bin Abdullah al Maamari, Commander of 23rd Infantry Brigade of RAO, Rear Admiral Khamis bin Saeed al Farsi, Military Attaché in India, and several senior officers of RAO and the Indian Army.

Brig Gen Maamari said, "The

Royal Army of Oman attaches great importance to joint exercises with the armies of brotherly and friendly countries, because of their importance in terms of exchanging experiences. This helps in learning from the armies of friendly countries. Al Najah IV is one of the successful models of joint exercises with brotherly countries."

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Call for caution as more drowning cases reported

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has urged people to be cautious, follow safety measures and avoid hazards while swimming following an increase in the number of cases of drowning. Experts say there is high likelihood of drowning among children if left unsupervised.

On Thursday, rescue teams of CDAA in South Batinah responded to a drowning report of a family of five people at Sawadi Beach in Barka; three of them lost their lives. 'The father and two children died in the accident, while the mother and one child were rescued,' CDAA stated.

In another incident on Thursday, rescue teams responded to a drowning incident of a child in Ain Sahalnot in Salalah. The teams managed to rescue the child who is now in good health.

Last week, a citizen drowned in Wadi Dabat and was de-



(Supplied photo)

clared dead on arrival at a hospital.

'People going out for adventure trips and swimming in wadis must follow guidelines, including wearing life jackets and going out only with well-known tourism companies who provide the necessary equipment. We urge parents to teach their children to swim,' a CDAA official said.

Last year in Oman, more than 500 drowning accidents were reported, recent statistics reveal.

A report by CDAA said that water rescue teams dealt with

521 calls of drowning accidents in 2021. 'Swimming requires caution and should not be carried out in undesignated sites,' it warned.

A swimming expert based in Muscat said that because of lack of parents' awareness, children are left unsupervised, which is one of the main factors that significantly increases the risk of drowning. 'As Oman is blessed with long coastline and a number of wadis, incidents of drowning in the country are quite common and such incidents occur mostly

in the summer months,' he said.

CDAA has issued guidelines to prevent drowning incidents. 'Keep an eye on children when they are swimming or getting close to water, swim in designated places, check the flow of water when crossing wadis, and make sure that one can swim before entering a body of water,' CDAA stated.

'Swimming pools should be equipped with fixed steps and metal handles and do not swim in places where water levels are constantly rising,' it added.

Abalone aquaculture project begins in Mirbat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A first-of-its-kind abalone fishery project in Oman, with production capacity of 600 tonnes per annum, was inaugurated by H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, on Thursday in Mirbat, Dhofar.

A joint venture of Muscat Overseas Group and Abagold, a leading South African abalone farming company, the project has been set up at a cost of RO10mn and is being run by Oman Aquaculture Company formed for the purpose.

The project is part of the plans of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources to encourage the private sector to diversify investment in the field of food security in general and fisheries projects in particular.

H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that the project is among ventures realising the ministry's vision for fish farming in Oman. 'It also serves the local community and provides jobs for Omani youth,' he added.



(Supplied photo)

The project covers an area of 37,240sqm, with construction spread over 8,900sqm comprising facilities and services that will contribute to the production of abalone at par with international standards.

An official of Abagold earlier told Muscat Daily that the project will help reseed and restock the ocean with abalone "in a well structured joint partnership with the ministry in Oman as well as local fishermen, whose livelihood has been destroyed by the reduction in natural abalone resource. We also hope to introduce abalone back into the region for local consumption and along with this we will be creating many jobs

in the Mirbat region".

The abalone stock has dwindled over the years in Omani waters, with yearly catch hovering around 50-55 tonnes. It went up to a high of 149 tonnes in 2011, when fishing of abalone reopened after a moratorium of three years on harvest, sale and export.

With dwindling catch, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources imposes bans on fishing abalone from time to time, the latest being imposed for two years - 2020 and 2021.

For the last few years, fishing season has varied from year to year, spanning from ten to 25 days in December.

ASEAN Committee in Muscat holds meet to promote association in Oman

Muscat - Representatives of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member countries residing in Oman, the ASEAN Committee in Muscat (ACM), held a meeting last week.

ACM currently consists of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore.

The 35th ACM Meeting was hosted and chaired by the In-



(Supplied photo)

donesian Ambassador to Oman, H E Mohamad Irzan Djohan, and attended by Ambassador H E Shaiful Anuar of Malaysia, H E Imelda Panolong of the Philippines, H E Suwat Kaewsook of Thailand, Consul General Bernie Ho of Singapore, and Dzuldenny Dzulkifly, Charge d'affaires of Brunei Darussalam.

During the biannual meeting, discussions were held to in-

crease cooperation and promotion of ASEAN in Oman.

To advance ASEAN cooperation with the sultanate, ACM agreed to carry out various activities involving local stakeholders in aspects of economic, political and cultural cooperation. 'This will include the exchange of understanding of arts and culture between ASEAN countries and the sultanate,' a press release stated.

During the meeting, the AMC family cut a birthday cake and sang the ASEAN Hymn.

The ACM also welcomed the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) by Oman, which took place on the sidelines of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting earlier last week in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

TAC is a peace treaty signed in 1976 among ASEAN members

as a set of codes of conduct governing inter-state relations in the region and as a foundation for maintaining regional peace and stability.

The ACM meeting also coincided with the 55th anniversary of ASEAN Day. ASEAN, which is a political and economic union of ten countries in Southeast Asia, was established on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok, Thailand.

FORESIGHT



SYED ADIL ABBAS

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

The great crises are hitting a new information reality. The war in Ukraine is characterised partly by real-time horrific images and partly by a discussion about the accuracy of these images and information. In just a few weeks after the war started, the President of Ukraine had gathered more international followers on social media than Oman has inhabitants. The WHO has described the COVID-19 crisis as not only a pandemic but also an 'infodemic'. The climate crisis is constantly the subject of politicised discussions about facts and calculations of how bad the situation really is.

Behind these crises and debates is a fundamentally different media and information landscape than 20 years ago. Gone are the dominance of television monopolies and some newspapers. Instead, we've got new big tech monopolies, social media platforms, and unimaginable amounts of information. It is an information landscape that makes it possible to become both a couch expert and be online 24/7 without having to deal with crises, society or politics at all.

We have a common task in ensuring an information landscape that is characterised by diversity, trust and transparency but there are some challenges along this journey.

Today, access to information is a vital necessity. However, the rules of the game when it comes to the information society are, to say the least, soft. We have some rules for radio licenses, other rules for the print press, and still other rules when it comes to television, journalism or adver-

tising. On the other hand, we have very few rules when it comes to the Internet.

We have reached a point where we need to recognise the fact that access to information is a vital necessity and should be treated as a critical infrastructure. This means that common ground rules must be agreed, as is now the case under the auspices of the EU with the Digital Markets Act and the Digital Services Act. It also means that we in Oman should have a conversation about what role information, access to it and content, should play in our society. We need to approach that discussion as if we were talking about vital infrastructure.

In recent years, the big tech platforms have become some of the world's largest,

TOWARDS A BETTER INFO ECOSYSTEM

richest and most successful companies. They have occupied a central place in the society for which none of them were designed. This means that they have been given power that puts them in the spotlight in crucial moments such as the Brexit vote, the US presidential election, the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021 and most recently in connection with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Fortunately, we have not been exposed to a similar situation in Oman, but let us not be naive. It is in these moments that it becomes apparent that these platforms have become absolute central gatekeepers in our society.

At the same time, the importance of in-

formation and online platforms for governments has also become more visible. Russia has banned Facebook and other platforms as part of their war. The European Commission has suspended the broadcasting activities of Sputnik and Russia Today in the EU.

It is undesirable in this respect for the governments and the European Commission to take on this role, but in particular, it is problematic that the platforms are so central. Unfortunately, we do not really know enough about this central position, because our data access to research and understand social media is so limited. Nevertheless, let it be clear that it should not be the platforms that, with or without government intervention, should determine what information is available. It is too important to leave it to them.

We must expand our arsenal to combat misinformation. We now have some evidence of when 'pre-bunking' is effective - that is educating citizens to be critical media users. In addition, we also know when 'debunking' through fact checking can be effective.

Therefore, we should help not only by focusing on the problematic content, but also by marking and helping to 'flag' the content that has been worked through.

The information war has many facets. We need data and knowledge to create an ecosystem where information is seen as critical infrastructure, where platforms are given a place that is subject to market and agreed rules, and where we work towards combating misinformation. It is in the information reality that citizens, managers and businesses need to navigate.

Bidding

University of Technology and Applied Sciences Bidding Announcement

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

M	practice number	Bidding name	Document's Price	Last date bid submission
1	02/2022	Renting corners for selling of ready-made food and drinks in the college buildings	(25) Twenty five Riyal Omani	30/08/2022
2	03/2022	Providing smart printing machines for students in the college buildings	(25) Twenty five Riyal Omani	30/08/2022

- Specialized companies and institutions registered with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and wishing to obtain the documents of any of the bids mentioned above, may refer to the Administrative Affairs Department in the main building, the ground floor of the Ibri Technical College, as of the date of publishing this announcement and during official working hours.
- The bid that meets the conditions and technical specifications shall be submitted, accompanied by a bank guarantee from a local bank of (1%) of the bid value, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of its submission.
- The bid shall be submitted in closed envelopes addressed to the name of the head of Tenders Committee, and written on it the number and name of the bid, provided that the name of the company or any reference to it is not written. The bid envelopes shall be placed in the bid box in the main building on the ground floor before 10am in the morning from the date indicated in the table is above, and no bid submitted after this time will be considered, for whatever reasons.
- The university shall not be bound to accept the highest or any other bid.



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Hip hoppers take Oman to international championship in US

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A dance team calling itself Royal Beasts represented the sultanate at the recently concluded World Hip Hop Dance Championship held in Phoenix in the American state of Arizona.

Royal Beasts competed in the Varsity Division of the championship.

Although it did not qualify for the finals, team members described representing Oman on the world stage as an 'award'.

Speaking from the US, Nadeem al Balushi, one of the directors of the group, said, "This is the first time ever that Oman was represented at this world famous competition. We gave a tough fight and our moves were appreciated by judges as well as peers. We have won hearts and that is a great achievement and an award in itself in our first outing on such a big international stage. However, we need to work more."

According to Balushi, the championship offered the team an opportunity to learn new techniques.

Royal Beasts was ranked 32 among 46 teams from around the world. The team of 15, including managers, coaches and dress designers, left for the US on August 1. The performers include



(Supplied photo)

We gave a tough fight and our moves were appreciated by judges as well as peers. We have won hearts and that is a great achievement and an award in itself

NADEEM AL BALUSHI

five girls and four boys.

Team leader Tejas Udani Gupta informed that Royal Beasts was the only team from the Gulf. "We put up a fairly tough fight. The other teams were better than us and they deserve to win. This competition

has pushed us to work better. With more practice and determination, we will surely rock the next time."

Royal Beasts' performance was choreographed by Prasanth Shinde, and directed by Shiv Gupta and Nadeem.

BLOOD DONATION FOR INDIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY



H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, inaugurated a blood donation camp organised by the Sanskrit Wing of Indian Social Club on the occasion of 'Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' - India's Independence Day celebrations - on Saturday. He lauded all members of the community who came forward to donate blood (Supplied photo)

Awareness drive on tax in Muscat and Dhofar

Muscat - Inspectors of Tax Authority conducted several awareness visits in the governorates of Muscat and Dhofar in the past week.

Specialists from the agency presented publications and tax law booklets on corporate income tax and value added tax (VAT) in order to educate taxpayers about the importance of tax compliance, following up on their registration with Tax Authority, updating their data, and submitting tax returns in a timely manner.

Also, during the awareness campaign, taxpayers were urged to use the electronic services provided through the authority's e-services portal to facilitate easy clearance of their tax transactions.

They also urged taxpayers to monitor the awareness bulletins issued through the authority's social media platforms and the media to know the latest developments in the tax laws and regulations.

'Oman's economic success is driven by accountability'

Continued from Page 01

"Besides His Majesty the Sultan's personal example of frugality during the fiscal crisis, the key difference today is that officials are being held more accountable for the effort and results they show when implementing these initiatives. The Sultan's business style, coupled with the additional constitutional tools he has given himself to strengthen managerial oversight, suggests that he is intent on making sure executives stick to the plan and meet targets."

Given this sharpened focus, Campbell-James said, "Oman is able to meet targets it all too often missed in the past. For example, the government introduced a value-added tax in April

2021 after years of prevarication. Despite being set at a low rate of five per cent, the VAT raised a modest US\$780mn in 2021 and is projected to generate US\$1.3bn in 2022."

He wrote His Majesty the Sultan's foreign policy appears to have enhanced relations across the board, particularly with Britain and Saudi Arabia. "Elsewhere, Oman has continued its prominent facilitating role in renegotiating the Iran nuclear deal and securing the ceasefire in Yemen. Warm relations with partners - based on trust and history rather than just transactional value - are paying dividends across the portfolio of government business."

WEATHER WATCH			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min		
Muscat	35	29	Fajr	4.22am
Abu Dhabi	43	31	Sunrise	5.42am
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Kuwait City	43	32	Asr	3.43pm
Manama	39	30	Maghrib	6.46pm
Riyadh	43	27	Isha	8.01pm

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إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology invites for the Following Tender:

TENDER NO	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MTCIT/ HQ-19/101/2022	QUALIFICATION AND TRAINING OF OMANI CADRES IN MARITIME CAREERS	14/8/2022	23/8/2022	13/09/2022	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (All Classes)	(38,500) THIRTY EIGHT OMANI RIAL AND FIVE HUNDRED BAISA NON-REFUNDABLE

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Al Ghaith to set up \$40mn chemical plant in Sur

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sur Industrial City, which is affiliated to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estate (Madayn), has signed an investment agreement with Al Ghaith for Chemical Industries to establish a chemical plant.

Al Ghaith for Chemical Industries will set up the chemical plant on a 60,000 sqm area in the Sur Industrial City with an investment exceeding US\$40mn, Madayn said in a press statement on Saturday.

This value-adding project, Madayn said, aims at promoting the growth of chemical industries in Oman and supplying the oil and gas, petrochemical and water treatment industries with basic chemicals and raw materials.

Eng Abdulqadir al Balushi, director general of Sur Industrial City, said that this new project will adopt advanced chlor-alkali technologies for the production of chemicals.

"The production lines will be operated with cutting-edge and environmentally friendly technologies, which shall enhance the quality of the plant's output. It is hoped that the project will provide a range of job opportunities for Omanis," he said.

The construction for Al Ghaith's chemicals plant is expected to start in the fourth quarter of 2022 and commercial production is expected to



Eng Abdulqadir al Balushi (left) and Almamoon al Baadani sign the agreement (Supplied Photo)

Construction for Al Ghaith's chemical plant is expected to start in the fourth quarter of 2022 and commercial production is expected to begin during the first half of 2024

begin during the first half of 2024.

Almamoon al Baadani, CEO of Al Ghaith for Chemical Industries, said, "We look forward to starting construction works during the last quarter of this year to expand production operations for caustic soda, hy-

drochloric acid, calcium chloride and sodium hypochlorite. The plant will meet the needs of customers in the oil and gas and chemical industries, and water treatment sectors. The plant is expected to commence commercial production during the first half of 2024, thanks to the

efforts made by Sur Industrial City management to facilitate the investment process."

Sur Industrial City has witnessed increased interest from investors in recent years. The city recently signed an investment contract with Al Fairuz Projects and Investments to establish rubber powder production plant with an investment of RO83mn for phase one of the project.

The total volume of investments in Sur Industrial City had touched RO1.5bn by the end of 2020.



MSX to organise investor conference

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) will organise a promotional conference for investors and listed companies during September 5-6 in Muscat.

The conference will focus on the investment environment of the securities sector in Oman.

The event will provide a platform for the listed companies to introduce their financial performance, prominent projects and future plans in front of local, regional and international investors.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange, said that the investor conference is a promotional platform for public shareholding companies listed on Oman's stock exchange.

"The conference will bring together the CEOs of largest public shareholding companies and will include several working papers on Oman's economic achievements and projects which enhance the country's position in meeting investors' aspirations," he said.

Salmi said that the confer-

ence will enhance effective communication between investors and public shareholding companies. "This may help in developing the performance of these companies and identifying available investment opportunities."

"This is an opportunity for companies to expand and diversify their investors base."

He further stressed that the MSX seeks to continue holding such promotional conferences and meetings that would enhance the stock exchange's position on the global investment map and introduce investment opportunities in the sultanate.



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Duqm Port's container crane project 86% complete

Duqm - The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced the completion of 86 per cent of a project to supply and install cranes and gantry cranes as part of the second phase of Duqm Port's commercial jetty.

In August 2021, OPAZ had awarded the contract for design, manufacturing, supply, installation, testing and operation of cranes and gantry cranes to the German company Liebherr. The project includes the installation of four modern automated cranes for the transfer of containers from vessels to the com-



mercial jetty at a capacity of 65 tonnes, as well as the installation of 12 rubber tyre gantry cranes with a capacity of 41 tonnes. The smart cranes have been

chosen due to their high performance and speed in container handling. They are provided with 5G technologies and fibre optic systems for data transmission

and remote control.

The cranes are also supplied with smart driving, smart yard survey and automatic landing. They operate within a diameter of 71 metres forward and 18 metres backward, enabling them to deal with the largest container carriers in the world.

The project dedicates 10 per cent of the value of its business to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) during the preparation and installation period. This is in addition to a training programme for Omani youth in different fields, including engineering. ONA

Global oil demand set to rise this year as gas prices surge: IEA

Paris, France - Global oil demand will rise more than previously forecast this year as heatwaves and soaring gas prices are prompting countries to switch fuels for power generation, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

Oil prices have dropped by US\$30 per barrel from a peak in June due to growing supplies and "escalating concerns over the deteriorating economic outlook", the Paris-based agency said in a monthly report.

Meanwhile, prices of natural gas and electricity have jumped to new records, prompting some countries to switch to oil use, the IEA said.

"With several regions experiencing blazing heatwaves, the latest data confirm increased oil burn in power generation, especially in Europe and the Middle East but also across Asia," the agency said.

"Fuel switching is also taking place in European industry, including refining," said the IEA,



which advises developed countries on energy policy.

Consequently, the IEA raised its demand growth forecast by 380,000 barrels per day (bpd).

Demand is now seen rising by 2.1mn bpd to a total of 99.7mn bpd in 2022. It will reach 101.8mn bpd in 2023, exceeding pre-Covid levels.

The IEA said European oil deliveries are being boosted by "exceptional demand" for heat and power generation and in industry.

The report comes as a European Union plan to cut gas consumption across the 27-nation bloc by 15 per cent came into effect on Tuesday.

The effort is aimed at coping with the energy price crisis spurred by Russia's war in Ukraine.

EU countries also fear Russia may cut gas supplies during winter in retaliation to Western sanctions over the war.

The IEA said the heatwaves and "the beginning of what may be a major rise in gas-to-oil switching under new EU guidelines in response to uncertainty surrounding gas supply from Russia are augmenting fuel oil and gasoil use."

In its own monthly market report on Thursday, the Saudi-led OPEC oil cartel lowered its demand forecast by 300,000 bpd.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) now foresees demand growing by 3.1mn bpd to a total of 100.02mn bpd this year.

But it also noted "the recently observed trend of burning more crude in power generation".

OPEC and 10 allies led by Russia, a group known as OPEC+, agreed last month to raise production by 100,000 bpd in September following Western calls for more output to combat soaring crude prices.

They had agreed to increases of almost 650,000 bpd in July and August, but the cartel has struggled to meet its quotas.

OPEC, which has 13 members, raised production by 162,000 barrels in July to a total of 28.8mn bpd, with most of the output coming from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, according to its monthly report.

Production in Venezuela and Angola declined. AFP

UK economy closes in on recession as GDP shrinks

London, UK – Britain's economy shrank in the second quarter, official data showed, as the country heads towards recession under a new prime minister.

UK gross domestic product dropped 0.1 per cent in the April-June period after a rise of 0.8 per cent in the first quarter, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

The Bank of England (BoE) expects the economy to enter a year-long recession by the end 2022 as Britons endure a cost-of-living crisis with inflation at its highest level in decades.

"With May's growth revised down a little and June showing a notable fall, overall the economy shrank slightly in the second



quarter," said ONS director of economic statistics Darren Morgan.

"Health was the biggest reason the economy contracted as both the (Covid) test and trace and vaccine programmes were wound down, while many retail-

ers also had a tough quarter." Morgan said this was "partially offset by growth in hotels, bars, hairdressers and outdoor events across the quarter, partly as a result of people celebrating the Platinum Jubilee" that marked Queen Elizabeth II's 70

years on the throne.

The ONS added that the UK economy slumped 0.6 per cent in June.

Following Friday's data, finance minister Nadhim Zahawi said he was "determined to work with the Bank of England to get inflation under control and grow the economy".

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson will not make "major fiscal interventions" before leaving office next month, his spokesman said on Monday amid calls for immediate government action to tackle Britain's cost-of-living crisis.

Johnson, back at his desk after a five-day belated honeymoon with wife Carrie in Slovenia last week, has been criticised

for being absent as the BoE last week warned of recession.

His trip coincided with Zahawi also being away on holiday, as the central bank hiked interest rates by the biggest margin in nearly three decades in a bid to stem surging inflation.

Johnson, who last month announced he would step down on September 6 following a slew of scandals, is set to hand power to either Liz Truss or Rishi Sunak after a summer-long Conservative leadership battle.

Foreign Secretary Truss and Sunak – Zahawi's predecessor as chancellor of the exchequer – have clashed over how to address the crisis.

AFP

Russia economy shrinks as sanctions bite

Moscow, Russia – Russia's economy contracted by four per cent year-on-year in the second quarter, the national statistics agency said Friday, as Western sanctions take their toll in the wake of Moscow's military offensive in Ukraine.

In the period from April to June, gross domestic product "amounted to 96 per cent of the level attained in the same period of 2021, preliminary estimates show", Rosstat said in a statement.

It was the first full quarterly growth data to be published since Moscow sent troops into its pro-Western neighbour in late February and western countries slapped stinging economic sanctions on Russia in response.

After Russian GDP expanded

by 3.5 per cent year-on-year in the first three months of 2022, the country is now facing a long period of recession.

The Russian central bank said Friday that it is projecting economic contraction of between four and six per cent for the whole of 2022 and then a further contraction of between one and four per cent for 2023, before growth picks up again in 2024.

"The decline in GDP will bottom out in the first six months of 2023," said the deputy head of the Bank of Russia, Alexei Zabotkin. "The economy is moving towards a new long-term equilibrium... With the transformation of the economy, growth will resume," he said.

AFP

Samsung boss gets presidential pardon



In this file photo taken on February 22, 2017 Lee Jae-Yong arrives for questioning at the office of a special prosecutor investigating a corruption scandal in Seoul (AFP)

Seoul, South Korea - The heir and de facto leader of Samsung group received a presidential pardon Friday, the latest example of South Korea's long tradition of freeing business leaders convicted of corruption on economic grounds.

Billionaire Lee Jae-yong, who was convicted of bribery and embezzlement in January last year, will be "reinstated" to give him a chance to "contribute to overcoming the economic crisis" of the country, Justice Minister Han Dong-hoon said.

Lee – the 278th-richest person in the world, according to Forbes, with a net worth of US\$7.9bn – was released on parole in August 2021, after serving 18 months in jail, just over half of his original sentence.

Friday's pardon will allow him to fully return to work by lifting a post-prison employment restriction that had been set for five years.

"Due to the global economic crisis, the dynamism and vitality of the national economy have deteriorated, and the economic slump is feared to be prolonged,"

the Justice Ministry said in a statement.

The pardon was given so that Lee – and other similarly pardoned high-level executives – could "lead the country's continuous growth engine through active investment in technology and job creation," the ministry added.

Lee, 54, received his pardon along with three other businessmen on Friday, including Lotte Group Chairman Shin Dong-bin, who was sentenced to a suspended two-and-half-year prison term in a bribery case in 2018.

Lee is the vice-chairman of Samsung Electronics, the world's biggest smartphone maker. The conglomerate's overall turnover is equivalent to about one-fifth of South Korea's gross domestic product.

He was jailed for offences connected to a massive corruption scandal that brought down former president Park Geun-hye. There is a long history of top South Korean tycoons being charged with bribery, embezzlement, tax evasion or other offences.

AFP

Creditors agree to two-year pause on Ukraine \$20bn debt

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine's lenders agreed to a pause for the payment of its US\$20bn debt, as its economy has been severely impacted by Russia's invasion, the prime minister said.

"Investors in Ukraine's foreign debt agreed to postpone payments until 2024. It allows Ukraine to maintain macro-financial stability and strengthen economic sustainability", Denys Shmygal tweeted on Wednesday.

Holders of about 75 per cent of Ukraine's debt agreed to the pause, the finance ministry said in a press release.

A group of Western countries -- including Britain, France, Germany, Japan and the United States -- had already agreed on

allowing Ukraine to postpone interest payments on its debt last month, and had called on other countries to join the effort.

The US\$20bn debt freeze is a new step in the effort to financially support Ukraine during the war.

"We were also happy to hear that the majority of our investors expressed willingness to participate in the post-war reconstruction efforts of Ukraine," Yuriy Butsa, the government's commissioner for public debt management, said in the same press release.

The World Bank estimated that Ukraine's economy could contract by 45 percent this year.

AFP



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SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG

Unaudited Consolidated Financial Statements For the Six-Month Period Ended 30 June 2022

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors ("the Board") of SMN Power Holding SAOG ("the Company"), I have the pleasure to present the unaudited consolidated financial statements for the six-month period ended 30 June 2022.

Corporate Governance

The Company has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and applicable circulars issued from time to time by the Capital Market Authority (CMA).

Operations

Providing a safe working environment is a key priority and the Board is pleased to share that during the six months period of 2022, the Health & Safety ("H&S") performance was excellent with no Lost Time Accident ("LTA") in line with previous years.
The commercial performance of both plants, SMN Barka Power Company SAOC ("SMN Barka") and Al Rusail Power Company SAOC ("Al Rusail"), is measured by their reliability which is the ability to deliver the declared capacity as per the P(WJPA) agreement.
In the first half of 2022, the reliability at SMN Barka Plant was 95.1% (97.3% in 2021) for power and 94.9% (98.2% in 2021) for water. The reliability at Al Rusail Power Plant was 98.6% (99.9% in 2021) for the same period.
The Company produced over the six-month period of 2022 an aggregate net power volume of 1,231 GWh (1,590 GWh in 2021) and a total volume of 16,878,000 m³ of potable water was delivered (15,403,000 m³ in 2021).

Financial Results

Total consolidated Revenues for the six-month period of 2022 amount to RO 34.3 million (RO 39.9 in 2021), representing a decrease of RO 5.6 million compared to 2021, primarily due to reduction in capacity of Al Rusail plant from approx. 665 MW to approx. 186 MW. Total Revenues include variable revenues (Fuel Charge and Variable Operating & Maintenance Charge) and fixed revenues (Fixed Capacity Fees).
The Company generated a consolidated net profit of RO 4.54 million during the six-month period of 2022 compared to a net profit of RO 5.64 million for 2021. The decrease in net profit of RO 1.1 million is mainly due to the following unfavorable variances compared to the same period in 2021:

- Al Rusail Gas Turbine 1 to Gas Turbine 6, have retired from operation on 30th September 2021. The revised installed capacity of Al Rusail Power Plant has gone down from approx. 665 MW to approx. 186MW.
- Lower commercial availability at SMN Barka power plant compared to last year due to higher forced outages on power and water plant.

These downsides were partially offset by the following positive variance compared to 2021:

- Reduction in finance costs following the scheduled repayments of the term loan facilities.

The reduction in **Non-Current Assets** is driven by the depreciation of the plant (fixed assets).
The decrease in **Current Assets** is due to the receipts of the finance lease and the payment received from OPWP of the outstanding Fuel Charges for the year 2021 under the fuel settlement arrangement agreed with OPWP for both SMN Barka and Al Rusail plants. These receipts from OPWP under the fuel settlement arrangement have been utilized to settle the fuel charges with Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) under the back-to-back contractual arrangements resulting in a similar and corresponding reduction in trade and other payables.

Future Outlook

The Company will continue its focus on H&S and maintain the excellent plant reliability at both plants. During last year management had several meetings with all stakeholders on plant cycling. The Authority for Public Services Regulations (APSR) confirmed a change in dispatch methodology which has resulted in a reduced cycling. This reduction is expected to continue in 2022. Management will continue to proactively liaise with Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), APSR and the Load Dispatch Centre on this key matter.
In terms of the latest development on the progress of the initiatives taken to prepare for the future of Al Rusail and SMN Barka power plants:

- After successful completion of trial period, the spot market started operation from January 2022. While both Al Rusail and SMN Barka are participating in the spot market as required by generation license, such participation has no impact on the Company's cash-flows until the time Al Rusail and SMN Barka remains under the P(WJPA) framework.
- After cancelling the Power 2022 Procurement Process in October 2021, OPWP released a Request for Proposal (RFP) to Al Rusail in December 2021 for a short-term extension of PPA to ensure security and stability of the transmission system until transmission system upgrade is completed by October 2022. Accordingly, Al Rusail submitted a competitive proposal for 186 MW capacity to OPWP as per RFP timeline and secured an extension of PPA up to end of October 2022.
- For Al Rusail, the Company will continue its efforts to further renew the PPA beyond October 2022 or find any other viable options.
- For SMN Barka, the Company will continue working closely with APSR, OPWP and all stakeholders of the power and water sector to extend the P(WJPA) agreement.

In terms of dividend distribution, as previously disclosed and in line with the financing arrangements during the IPO, the excess cash generated by SMN Barka is now paid to the lenders and will not flow to the Shareholders until the loans are fully settled or until the time the loans are restructured. The P(WJPA) extension for SMN Barka will be a key factor to potentially restructure the debt in the coming years, remove or defer the cash sweep and allow further dividend distribution. Al Rusail has repaid all its debt outstanding, and any dividend distribution will be contingent on end of term obligations on the expiry of the PPA.
As Chairman of the Board, I would like to thank our Shareholders, not only for their confidence, but also for their continued support and for the expertise they bring into the Company. The Board of Directors expresses its gratitude to OPWP, APSR, CMA and other governmental and non-governmental bodies for their guidance and support.
I also take this opportunity to thank all the operational staff working at SMN Barka and Al Rusail plants as well as the team at our corporate office for their remarkable efforts to ensure reliable power and water supply to the residents of Oman.
Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment allowing us to contribute effectively to the growth of the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr. Abdullah Al Yahya'yey
Chairman of the Board

Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2022 (Unaudited)

	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	30 June 2022 RO '000	31 Dec. 2021 RO '000	30 June 2022 RO '000	31 Dec. 2021 RO '000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	-	-	135,466	139,459
Right-of-use-assets	-	-	326	285
Long-term prepayment	-	-	-	27
Investment in subsidiaries	27,405	27,405	-	-
Goodwill	-	-	14,952	14,952
	<u>27,405</u>	<u>27,405</u>	<u>150,744</u>	<u>154,723</u>
Current assets				
Inventories	-	-	2,837	2,901
Trade and other receivables	40	54	11,077	44,069
Finance lease receivables	-	-	-	316
Fixed term cash deposits	-	-	7,372	7,390
Cash and bank balances	21	24	3,724	3,067
	<u>61</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>25,010</u>	<u>57,743</u>
	<u>27,466</u>	<u>27,483</u>	<u>175,754</u>	<u>212,466</u>
Total assets				
EQUITY AND RESERVES AND LIABILITIES				
EQUITY AND RESERVES				
Share capital	19,964	19,964	19,964	19,964
Statutory reserve	6,522	6,522	6,691	6,691
Retained earnings	923	923	46,580	42,036
Hedging Reserve	-	-	(642)	(2,560)
Net equity	27,409	27,409	72,593	66,131
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	57,578	64,832
Lease liabilities	-	-	394	35
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	102	1,529
Provision for end of service benefits	-	-	75	84
Provision for site restoration	-	-	3,613	3,558
Deferred Operating Income	-	-	808	808
Deferred tax liability	-	-	15,565	15,447
	-	-	<u>78,135</u>	<u>86,611</u>
Current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	14,300	13,795
Lease liabilities	-	-	35	20
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	655	1,484
Trade and other payables	57	74	8,533	41,517
Current tax payable	-	-	1,503	2,908
	<u>57</u>	<u>74</u>	<u>25,026</u>	<u>59,724</u>
Total liabilities	<u>57</u>	<u>74</u>	<u>103,161</u>	<u>146,335</u>
Total equity and liabilities	<u>27,466</u>	<u>27,483</u>	<u>175,754</u>	<u>212,466</u>
Net assets per share (RO)	<u>0.137</u>	<u>0.137</u>	<u>0.367</u>	<u>0.344</u>

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 30 June 2022 (Unaudited)

	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	30 June 2022 RO '000	31 June 2021 RO '000	30 June 2022 RO '000	30 June 2021 RO '000
Revenue	-	-	34,339	39,936
Operating costs	-	-	(26,859)	(30,696)
GROSS PROFIT	-	-	7,480	9,240
General and administrative expenses	(133)	(137)	(516)	(621)
(LOSS)/PROFIT FROM OPERATIONS	(133)	(137)	6,964	8,619
Finance charges	-	-	(1,774)	(2,219)
Other income	133	137	285	272
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	-	-	5,475	6,672
Income tax	-	-	(931)	(1,036)
NET PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	-	-	4,544	5,636
<i>Other comprehensive income</i>				
<i>Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods:</i>				
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments – net	-	-	1,323	2,971
Reclassification to profit or loss - gross	-	-	933	(1,340)
Deferred tax liability – current period change	-	-	(338)	(244)
Other Comprehensive Income/expense for the year, net of tax	-	-	1,918	1,387
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	-	-	6,462	7,023
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO) 0.000	-	-	0.023	0.028

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Bank Muscat helping Omanis for job sector



Said Salim al Aufer

In line with its pioneering role in the development of Omani human resources and the recognition that bank's achievements are powered by its competent employees, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate continues to provide comprehensive multilevel Management Development programmes that are governed by a robust framework.

These programmes aim at transitioning the bank's top talent to assume progressively higher roles and responsibilities and are closely linked with strategic plans, succession planning and the ability to fill critical roles from within.

Speaking on the occasion, Said



Salim al Aufer, General Manager - Human Resources & Administration, Bank Muscat, explained, "Bank Muscat's Executive Management firmly believes that our employees are the very source of the bank's leading position and sustained growth. We ensure that we provide vast development opportunities and the finest working environment which makes us one of the top employers of choice and a magnet for top graduates in the country."

"Our Omanisation achievements of over 83 per cent for Top Management, over 93 for Middle Managers, 100 per cent for clerical and about 94 per cent overall as of 30 June 2022 is a testimonial regarding the development of our employees."

The bank has launched its flagship graduate development programme, which has evolved into the premier High Potential Graduate Development programme in the banking sector,

with a focus on creating a foundation in banking, self-management and building the potential leadership pipeline at the bank by growing and nurturing talent internally to take up additional responsibilities in preparation for managerial roles.

Specific modules throughout the programme emphasise on gaining critical knowledge and skills such as credit, investment banking, corporate finance, treasury and capital markets, re-

tail banking, finance, assurance functions, etc.

A total of 60 graduates have successfully completed the programme and 56 are currently enrolled in it.

The two-year journey comprises ten workshops and blended online modules with case studies, simulations and technical and leadership assessments.

Participants who demonstrate the highest levels of both on-the-

job performance and potential, proceed in due course to the First Time Line Managers programme.

Here the objective is to develop First Time Managers by equipping them with skills required to transition from job roles as individual contributors to assume managerial roles.

This is achieved through the use of customised technology in learning along with tools, templates and case study simulators.

The programme comprises 6 modules and 35 online modules delivered over a period of one year.

A total of 49 participants are currently enrolled in this programme from across the bank.

Bank Muscat's Middle Management Development Programme has helped the bank to ensure a steady flow of talented, well-developed managers to senior and middle-management roles in the banking sector.

Optimal laser enabled management of kidney stones, enlarged prostate

Kidney stones and the symptoms they cause are one of the commonest conditions which are seen by a urologist in his practice everyday.

Nearly six of every 10 patients walking into a urologist's OPD suffer from stones in the urinary tract and their sequelae. It's important to know that a kidney stone inside the kidney by itself does not cause symptoms. But when it rolls down and obstructs the Ureter (the tube which connects the kidney to the bladder), it can cause urine to collect behind it thereby causing a swelling of the kidney. This swelling then compresses the nerves around it and cause severe pain and nausea/vomiting. If left untreated it can cause infection in the kidney and can even lead to kidney failure.

The treatment of kidney stones and many conditions in urology have greatly benefited from the leaps and advances that science has taken in recent times especially in the field of lasers. Over the past two decades laser energy has been harnessed more efficiently leading to higher energy production with better and more precise focus on complete fragmentation of a stone with minimal to nil collateral damage to surrounding tissue.

From patients needing many sittings of treatments like Lithotripsy (sound waves to fragment stones) to large stones needing multiple open surgeries the treatment for kidney stones has undergone a sea change because of efficient, evolved equipment including advanced and thinner endoscopes and state of the art lasers. Or the two prominently used lasers for stone - Holmium and Thulium - the Thulium laser has proven to be much more effective in fragmenting a stone to dust while not allowing the stone to slip back or move away from target focus zone, followed closely by the Holmium laser in efficiency. Access to the stone can be achieved by various endoscopes and instruments.

For a large stone in the kidney - access is through the flank of the patient through a small 0.5cm cut through a procedure called Mini Percutaneous Nephrolithotripsy (PCNL) and the stone is broken and retrieved. For a stone in the Ureter or kidney - without any incision a flexible scope is passed via the urethra and the stone accessed and completely dusted using a laser. This allows for a stone surgery to be performed in a very quick manner reducing the time of hospitalisation of a patient to just a few hours with almost little or no post operative pain yet achieving good stone free rates.



Dr Shakir Tabrez
Visiting Urologist
Aster Al Raffah Hospital,
Sohar

The Prostate is an organ which is situated between the bladder and the urethra (the tube through which urine comes out from the bladder) in all men. With advancing age beyond 45-50 years, the prostate has a natural tendency to enlarge. Not always does an enlarged prostate mean it would cause symptoms. But when it does, it does so gradually and when it causes symptoms, it obstructs the flow of urine from the bladder. Common symptoms patients present with include straining to pass urine, going to the toilet frequently, sense of incomplete emptying of the bladder, having to rush to the toilet and other related symptoms.

If left unchecked and untreated with urine being stored

in the bladder - it can result in recurrent urinary infections and has a possibility of affecting the kidney function too. The enlargement can sometimes also be due to cancer of the prostate and the symptoms for both benign and malignant enlargement cannot be clearly differentiated.

Hence the need to perform tests like Serum PSA, Ultrasound abdomen and pelvis and Uroflowmetry.

These tests help the doctor in distinguishing benign from cancerous enlargement and also in planning treatment options for the patient. Most often the management for prostatic obstruction is medical management with medications. But if the medicines are not helping or the symptoms are still not controlled the patient is counselled for a laser prostate surgery.

Lasers for surgery or the prostate have evolved from early days when special protective eyewear had to be used and the laser machines were bulky and needed special care with limited benefits. Over the years, developments in technology have allowed newer and more effective lasers to be introduced including the Diode laser, Holmium Laser and the current most effective laser - the Thulium laser. The procedure essentially involves passing a scope through the urinary passage of the patient under anaesthesia and using the laser the tissue is either resected or vapourised to dust and cleared.

This allows the obstructing tissue to be cleared thereby opening the passage wide and would help the patient to pass urine more efficiently and bring down his symptoms significantly. The lasers have evolved with more power, allowing larger prostate glands to be cleared in a shorter time frame with minimal to no bleeding and absolutely no damage to adjoining structures. This also allows the patients to be discharged within a day from the hospital and resume work and everyday life earlier.

Infiniti QX60 heralds new era for brand

The completely reimagined three-row SUV - Infiniti QX60 - creates a new standard all other SUVs will soon be judged by.

The all-new car has arrived with generous standard equipment to complement its soothing interior and sleek exterior, the company said.

The stunning model is magnificent outside, its interior is peaceful and is full of technology that takes the stress out of driving, all of which allow its owners to conquer life in style.

The model features intuitive technology and impressive driveline dynamics with an award-winning, 279HP 3.5-litre V-6 engine, paired with an all-new 9-speed automatic transmission. The powertrain duo delivers a responsive drive that's quiet, confident, and poised. Intelligent All-Wheel Drive is available and significantly enhanced.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "A cornerstone model for Infiniti, the QX60 has been reimagined from the ground up to deliver luxury that should be lived in. The next generation model ushers in a refined,



modern look for Infiniti with an upright stance, bold available colour-contrast roof, and exceptional Japanese-inspired details including an origami-inspired signature mesh grille, kimono folds in 'digital piano key' lighting signatures and the aesthetic of ripples on a pond interpreted in the leather-appointed seats."

With the all-new Infiniti QX60, designers created a new expression for the premium brand by combining powerful athleticism with harmony and simplicity. The combination is a new hallmark in Infiniti's design language, underscored by the

available brilliant Moonbow Blue shade that reproduces deep blues and violets that blanket the summer sky at dusk.

An understated character line runs the length of the QX60, bisecting its equally appealing, available two-tone black roof from its lower body.

The all-new, direct coupling all-wheel-drive system almost instantly engages when it detects wheel slip for a confident driving experience. Up to 50 per cent of the available power can be sent to the rear wheels for increased grip. Infiniti's Active Brake Limited Slip functionality

can brake individual wheels to redirect torque to the wheels that do have grip almost instantly.

Exquisite details, curated materials and tailored artistry adorn the interior of the all-new Infiniti QX60. Available Saddle Brown semi-aniline leather appointments showcase the subtle curves with handsome, double-stitch contrast accents and piping.

The three-row SUV features Infiniti's new InTouch 12.3-inch Interactive Display touchscreen for infotainment with wireless Apple CarPlay and USB-based Android Auto compatibility.

SBA is largely committed to supporting Infiniti Oman's growth in the sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of more than 40 showrooms, service centres and parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of trust, excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers.

Gemstone Jewelry Festival at Malabar Gold & Diamonds

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the leading global jewelry retailer with over 285 outlets across ten countries launches the 'Gemstone Jewelry Festival' across their showrooms in GCC, Singapore and the US.

This festival showcases a dazzling array of jewellery, delicately designed with precious gems and uncut diamonds.

These stunning pieces crafted in gold, perfectly capture the brilliance of real gems and is a treat for the eyes, the company said.

Gemstone Jewellery Festival mainly features Era - uncut diamond jewelry and Precia - precious gem jewelry.

The Era collection, exquisitely crafted in 22K gold, is inspired by the cultural heritage of India and features the magnificence of uncut diamonds and precious gems, symbolizing royalty and sheer brilliance while Precia is a fine assortment of jewellery encrusted with emeralds, rubies



and sapphires and beautifully handcrafted in 22k gold.

It features a graceful collection of precious gem jewellery, designed for contemporary women. Malabar Gold & Diamonds is also offering customers a limited period offer of Zero deduction gold exchange against Era & Precia jewellery as part of the festival.

A whole new collection of jewellery across bangles, earring and necklaces have been curated within the Era and Precia collections, incorporating latest design trends to suit the varied interests of the customer.

These are available across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlets and come with a transparent

price tag and quality certification. As part of the Malabar Promise, the brand also offers tested and certified diamonds, guaranteed buyback, zero-deduction gold exchange, assured lifetime maintenance, jewellery exchange within 15 days and much more for jewellery purchased from Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Samsung Galaxy Z Flip4, Fold4 available for pre-order in Oman

Samsung Gulf Electronics on Thursday announced that pre-orders for its fourth generation of foldable devices is now available across Oman. Galaxy Z Flip4 and Galaxy Z Fold4 push the boundaries of smartphone versatility, providing enhanced productivity, customisation capabilities, and FlexCam experiences. Built with a bold, sustainably conscious design, Galaxy Z Series is crafted to be both beautiful and environmentally conscious.

"As a testament to Samsung's dedication to superior craftsmanship, every component in both form factors has been thoroughly analyzed to deliver a truly optimized experience to ensure that every consumer has a device to fit their needs. Providing upgraded tools in terms of performance, superior-quality camera, power, privacy and security - for all our users to enjoy - is a commitment we have and Galaxy Z Flip4 and Galaxy Z Fold4 promise to deliver to the highest standards," said Seong Hyun Lee, President, Samsung Gulf Electronics.

"In its fourth generation, Galaxy Z series truly continues to break from convention to deliver new, impactful interactions that enhance everyday life."

Galaxy Z Flip4

The Galaxy Z Flip4 builds on the success of Samsung's iconic form factor, adding key features, including an upgraded camera experience, a larger battery and expanded customisation, while enhancing users' favourite features, making it the ultimate tool for self-expression. Its compact clamshell design offers unique experiences not available on any other smartphone.

Users can shoot hands-free videos or capture full group selfies at various angles by partially folding the Galaxy Z Flip4 to activate FlexCam. These can even be enjoyed on users' favourite apps. Thanks to Samsung's partnership with Meta, FlexCam is optimised for the most popular



social platforms, including Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook. Users can start high-quality video recording in Quick Shot mode and then seamlessly switch to Flex mode to continue recording hands-free without stopping the video - ideal for content creators and vloggers. With an upgraded camera equipped with a 65 percent brighter sensor powered by the Snapdragon 8+ Gen 1 Mobile Platform, photos and videos are crisper and more stable - day or night.

Galaxy Z Flip4 can capture, watch and connect longer between charges with the expanded 3,700mAh battery.

Galaxy Z Fold4

The Galaxy Z Fold4 opens up new possibilities for users by delivering Samsung's most comprehensive smartphone experience to-date, offering shape-shifting design, immersive displays and PC-like multitasking features, in addition to advanced camera technology and powerful mobile processors. Galaxy Z Fold4 combines Samsung's collective mobile technology expertise to create a device with increased functionality whether opened, closed, or in Flex mode. Furthermore, it is the first device to ship with Android 12L, a special version of Android created by Google for large-screen experiences, including foldables. Mul-

titasking on Galaxy Z Fold4 is easier than ever, so users can get more done on the move. The new Taskbar provides a layout similar to your PC, offering access to favourite and recent apps. Multitasking is also more intuitive, thanks to new swipe gestures. Users' multitasking experience is complete with S Pen functionality, enabling on-the-go drawing and notetaking with streamlined storage inside the Standing Cover with Pen case. Games are snappier too thanks to the powerful Snapdragon® 8+ Gen 1 Mobile Platform and hyper-fast 5G. Galaxy Z Fold4 takes stunning photos and videos with an upgraded 50MP wide lens and 30x Space Zoom lens. And with the larger pixel size, a 23 percent brighter sensor, and enhanced processing power, users can capture clear images even at night while never worrying about spills as Z Fold4 is also equipped with IPX8 water resistance.

Galaxy lovers across Oman can now pre-order for the Galaxy Z Flip4 and Galaxy Z Fold4 up until August 25 in Samsung stores and authorized online channels and retailers in the following colours:

- Galaxy Z Flip4: Bora Purple and Graphite, Pink Gold and Blue
- Galaxy Z Fold4: GrayGreen, Beige and Phantom Black

Eminent pediatric orthopedic consultant to visit KIMSHEALTH Hospital today

KIMSHEALTH Hospital has announced the visit of Dr Atul Bhaskar, FRCS Orth, FRCS, MCh. MS, DNB, a prominent Paediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon from India, during which he will be available for consultations at its Muscat hospital from Sunday to Tuesday (August 14-16).

Dr Bhaskar has more than 27 years of experience and will be available for consultations as well as diagnosis and treatment of the following conditions: Congenital deformity, clubfoot and hip dislocation, limping, bow-legs and knock knees, fractures



Dr Athul Bhasker

and infections in children in addition to fragile bone disease and short stature, the hospital said.

Dr Bhaskar had earned a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery in 1991 at Bombay University, India, and went on to earn a Master of Surgery in Orthopaedics at the same university in 1994. He then pursued higher surgical training in the UK and obtained an FRCS (in General Surgery) from Glasgow in 1997. He then got his MCh (in Orthopaedic) from the University of Liverpool, UK along with an FRCS (in Trauma & Orthopedics) to become a Consultant in Orthopedic Surgery. In addition, he attended fellowship training in

Canada, Germany, the US and the UK.

Dr Bhaskar is a member of several medical associations including Bombay Orthopaedic Society, Indian Orthopaedic Association, Paediatric Orthopaedic Society of India (POSI), Royal College of Surgeons (Glasgow), Indian Medical Association, Mumbai Branch of the Indian Academy of Paediatrics and the American Academy of Cerebral Palsy.

For appointments please Call: 24760100 Mob 71962435 or WhastApp: 71572000

Coachbuilder Mulliner to debut Batur

Bentley Mulliner, the oldest coachbuilder in the world, is synonymous with the hand-craftsmanship of exclusive coachbuilt grand tourers, at the pinnacle of the Bentley family.

Following the instant success of the Bacalar project, Mulliner will debut a stunning new model - the Batur - at this year's Monterey Car Week. So much more than the successor to Bacalar, the Bentley Mulliner Batur reveals an all-new design lan-



guage for Bentley that showcases themes and forms that will define Bentley's future range of Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs).

Like the Bacalar, the Batur is named after a beautiful natural body of water. Lake Batur is an 88m deep, 16sqkm crater lake in Kintamani on the island of Bali, Indonesia.

The Bentley Mulliner Batur will be revealed to the world at 07:00 GST on August 21.

Ooredoo's new brand positioning part of business transformation

Ooredoo Group, a leading international communications company operating across the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia, on Wednesday launched its new brand positioning and tagline - 'Upgrade Your World'.

In a fast-moving industry that thrives on innovation, Ooredoo's new brand positioning reflects a future-proof, employee- and customer-centric narrative that forms the core of its corporate transformation strategy.



Upgrade your world

Ooredoo Group's new tagline is about enabling human progress, reflecting the company's commitment to keep improving, never standing still.

'Upgrade Your World' promises to keep moving customers and employees forward - whether in small steps or giant leaps - with every connection, innovation and service provided for every person, business, community and country the Group serves across its global footprint.

Bold, vibrant, distinctive and upgraded, Ooredoo's new visual identity emanates the same spirit and passion for which the company is celebrated, and reflects its forward-thinking attitude.

"This is a hugely exciting new phase for Ooredoo and one to which we have all looked forward for some time," said Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo, MD and Group CEO.

"It is the continuation of our successful transformation programme to embed a culture of continuous evolution in all aspects of our business, from improving the employee and customer experiences to ultimately improving value for our shareholders.

"Anchored to our ethos to enrich the digital lives of our customers, our new tagline 'Upgrade Your World' perfectly encapsulates our mission to place our people and customers

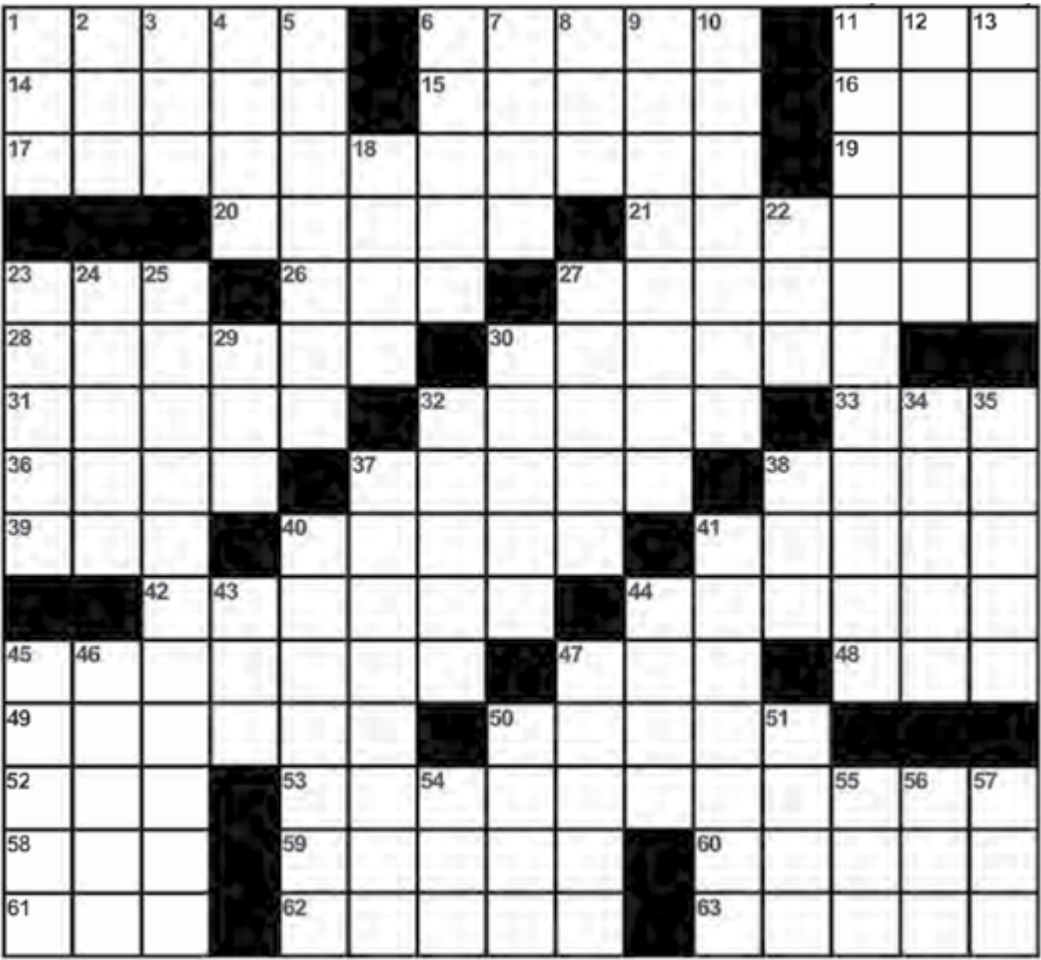
at the heart of everything we do. It is also our promise to move them forward, enabling them to consistently be a step ahead of the curve anywhere they are."

Noor al Sulaiti, CEO of Ooredoo Oman said: "We have always been committed to driving and upgrading digital transformation in Oman, aligning with Oman's 2040 Vision, and taking the country into the next phase of digital leadership.

"Our commitment to the community and to our customers is the driving force behind our aim for continual improvement and innovation. We look forward to taking our customers on an upgraded journey with us to this end."

NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)				
Post Box No. 2740, Ruwi, Postal Code: 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 24628900, Fax: +968 24628990 Email: contact@tanufwater.com, Web: www.nmwc.om				
DIRECTOR'S REPORT				
Dear Shareholders, On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Company hereby reports the unaudited financial results for the six-month period ended 30th June 2022.				
Review of Operations: The consolidated financial statements include the results and the financial position of the Parent company, National Mineral Water Company SAOG and its subsidiary, Valuedeal Trading LLC, for the six months ended 30th June 2022 (together referred to as the Group).				
Sales and Operational Performance: The Parent Company's sales revenue for the six months ended 30th June 2022 is RO 3,912,734 compared to RO 3,322,247 in the previous period, the 18% growth is mainly delivered by the increase of productivity and new commercial strategies.				
The Parent Company's net profit for the six months ended 30th June 2022 is RO 60,253 against a loss of RO (330,308), the significant positive results are driven by the increase of revenue, production efficiencies and cost-saving initiatives despite the challenges still being faced from the previous year of increased PET Resin prices which are key input raw materials to the Parent Company's products and supply chain costs.				
The sales revenue of the Group for the six months ended on 30th June 2022 is RO 3,929,115 compared to RO 3,523,887 in the previous period. The Group's net profit for the period ended 30th June 2022 is RO 62,462 and this was a net loss of RO (329,415) in the previous period.				
Subsidiary Company: Valuedeal Trading LLC (VDT): The Company trades in plastic and other confectionery items.				
Future Outlook Despite the continued and rapid increase of Raw material costs, along with the worldwide supply chain challenges specially PET Resin that is a major component to our business, the group financial performance for the Q2 has improved significantly and the Management is looking forward to maintaining same positive performance over the year through a very solid plan that includes increasing efficiencies, productivity as well as the new diversified portfolio with the new introduced categories.				
Human Resources The Company is currently employing 47% Omani Staff and will continue to support this initiative of employing more Omanis. The Company recognizes the importance of human assets to achieve its objectives.				
Internal Control System The board continues to review the effectiveness of the existing internal control systems and considers the controls to be adequate for the size and nature of the business operations.				
Corporate Governance Code The company has complied with CMA directives on the Corporate Governance Code.				
Acknowledgment On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our patrons, customers, bankers and shareholders for all the support they have extended to us during this period. I also take the opportunity to thank the management for their continued efforts in growing the Company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and his Government for the support extended to the private sector.				
Sayyid Aymen bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi Vice Chairman				
1) The complete accounts, in either Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of written request at the above address. 2) The complete accounts have been uploaded on Website of MSM. 3) Any shareholder who is having incorrect address or not having any address in the company's register or Co. (MDSRC) may approach the registered office to register their correct address. Register maintained by Maintained by Muscat Depository Securities Registration.				
Separate and consolidated statement of financial position for the period ended 30 June 2022				
	Parent Company	Group	30.06.2022	30.06.2021
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	2,609,981	2,715,237	2,610,332	2,715,868
Right-of-use assets	75,302	85,589	75,302	85,589
Intangible assets	16,767	21,099	16,767	21,099
Investment in a subsidiary	95,000	95,000	-	-
Total non-current assets	2,797,050	2,916,925	2,702,401	2,822,556
Current assets				
Inventories	1,087,804	979,951	1,087,804	979,951
Trade and other receivables	2,446,820	2,721,440	2,533,931	2,833,680
Due from related parties	73,698	167,978	16,499	16,124
Cash and bank balances	149,645	54,320	149,913	122,734
Total current assets	3,757,967	3,923,689	3,788,147	3,952,489
Total assets	6,555,018	6,840,614	6,490,548	6,775,045
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304
Share premium	135,169	135,169	135,169	135,169
Legal reserve	478,388	478,388	478,534	478,534
Accumulated losses	(1,052,730)	(956,972)	(1,118,872)	(1,024,149)
	2,261,131	2,356,889	2,195,135	2,289,858
Equity attributable to shareholders of the Parent Company	2,261,131	2,356,889	2,195,135	2,289,858
Non-controlling Interest	-	-	1,526	1,462
Total capital and reserves	2,261,131	2,356,889	2,196,661	2,291,320
Non-current liabilities				
Employees' benefit liabilities	235,008	321,282	235,008	321,282
Bank borrowings	895,814	816,412	895,814	816,412
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	66,274	74,613	66,274	74,613
Capital expenditure payable	-	243,982	-	243,982
Total non-current liabilities	1,197,096	1,456,289	1,197,096	1,456,289
Current liabilities				
Lease liabilities - current portion	14,400	14,400	14,400	14,400
Trade and other payables	1,194,162	1,274,312	1,194,162	1,274,312
Bank borrowings	1,884,258	1,691,078	1,884,258	1,691,078
Income tax payable	3,971	47,646	3,971	47,646
Total current liabilities	3,096,791	3,027,436	3,096,791	3,027,436
Total liabilities	4,293,887	4,483,725	4,293,887	4,483,725
Total equity and liabilities	6,555,018	6,840,614	6,490,548	6,775,045
Net assets per share	0.084	0.087	0.081	0.085
Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 30 June 2022				
	Parent Company	Group	30.06.2022	30.06.2021
Revenue	3,912,734	3,322,247	3,929,115	3,523,887
Cost of revenue	(2,495,741)	(2,118,246)	(2,495,741)	(2,256,318)
Gross profit	1,416,993	1,204,001	1,433,373	1,267,569
Other income	2,971	13,810	2,971	13,810
	1,419,964	1,217,811	1,436,344	1,281,379
Expenses				
Selling and distribution expenses	(1,033,635)	(1,010,518)	(1,040,791)	(1,040,425)
General and administrative expenses	(233,980)	(305,156)	(240,996)	(334,924)
Provision for expected credit losses on trade and other receivables	-	-	-	-
	(1,267,615)	(1,315,674)	(1,281,787)	(1,375,349)
Operating profit/(loss) for the period	152,349	(97,863)	154,558	(93,970)
Finance costs	(92,096)	(85,337)	(92,096)	(85,337)
Provision for expected credit losses on trade receivables	-	(102,462)	-	(102,462)
Net profit/(loss) before tax for the period	60,253	(285,662)	62,462	(281,769)
Taxation	-	(47,646)	-	(47,646)
Net (loss) / profit after tax and total comprehensive (loss) / income for the period	60,253	(333,308)	62,462	(329,415)
Net (loss) / profit attributable to: equity holders of the Parent Company	-	-	62,352	(329,610)
Non-controlling interest	-	-	110	195
Basic and diluted (loss) / earnings per share attributable to equity holders of the Parent Company	0.002	(0.012)	0.002	(0.012)

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Word before "beware!"
- 6) Extraterrestrial realm
- 11) "If I only _ a brain"
- 14) Cloudless sky color
- 15) Two points in time?
- 16) "... it or lose it"
- 17) Vigorous
- 19) "The city that never sleeps," for short
- 20) Amarillo's state
- 21) Major impact evidence
- 23) Venus, to Serena
- 26) It may be cut or paste?
- 27) Transparency
- 28) Insight
- 30) Horror director Wes
- 31) Very good-looking people
- 32) Unlike chickens?
- 33) Guy's honey
- 36) Campus concern
- 37) Bellyache
- 38) Sicilian landmark
- 39) A miner matter?
- 40) Clothes lines
- 41) Slit open, ironically
- 42) Be about to cry

- 44) Granitelike rock
 - 45) One who's left holding the bag?
 - 47) Ungentlemanly type
 - 48) _ Wee Reese of baseball fame
 - 49) Beat to the finish line
 - 50) Felony fire
 - 52) Hockey legend Bobby
 - 53) Make confetti
 - 58) Half a cocktail?
 - 59) Turnpike travelers, briefly
 - 60) Mama Judd
 - 61) "Got that right"
 - 62) Islamic leaders
 - 63) Word with "singing" or "Bible"
- DOWN**
- 1) Word with "cross" or "crow"
 - 2) Action film staple
 - 3) Relative of 61-Across
 - 4) "While" lead-in
 - 5) Breaks a promise
 - 6) "Get out!"
 - 7) Florists' needs
 - 8) Boxing's "Greatest"
 - 9) Secret meeting
 - 10) Carve on, as a monu-

- ment
- 11) It may involve dogs and foxes
- 12) Heretofore
- 13) Complain about
- 18) Cart pullers
- 22) "We" may precede it
- 23) _ Domingo
- 24) Comparatively frosty
- 25) '60s TV show (with "77")
- 27) Vegas shooting game
- 29) Encountered
- 30) Angular hair wave
- 32) Big name in electric shavers
- 34) Biscotto flavoring
- 35) Spell of forgetfulness
- 37) Garden flower
- 38) 180 deg. from WSW
- 40) Warrior of old Japan
- 41) Cause of ruin
- 43) Always, in verse
- 44) Breathe laboriously
- 45) Pirate's plunder
- 46) Distinctive atmospheres
- 47) Symbol of Christianity
- 50) Bit of matter

- 51) Within reach
- 54) After-school bake sale org.
- 55) Pigeon's utterance
- 56) Down Under bird
- 57) Sample, as hot tea

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A common misconception about you is that you love conflict so much that you often go out of your way to create it. That's sometimes true, but it's true for everyone! For the most part, it's your boldness that inspires others to see how far they can push your envelope. Anyone who tries that today should receive a rude surprise. You don't need to tone it down either.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Relationships can be quite odd. They often develop minds of their own once they've been established! For the past few weeks, you've been trying to keep one of your own on its leash, but it hasn't been cooperating well and isn't getting any tamer. Whether it's platonic, romantic, or professional, it's still a challenge to keep it out of the fire. Hang tough and see if you can work this out.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're well known (and much loved) for your bluntness, honesty, and openness under most circumstances, but you're just about to encounter a situation that could be tricky at best for the rest of us. If you're about to surprise yourself, you can just imagine how others are going to feel, especially those who aren't as sturdy as you. Lend a hand if you can.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You should see quite a few similarities between today and a recent day, complete with all those stumbling blocks and roadblocks you had to steer through and around. But it's not like Groundhog Day! You enjoy challenges, and with your recent experience you can navigate every obstacle smoothly and do what it takes to get where you need to be.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Someone is trying to pull something, but it's not likely to work. You've got a tough new attitude, and you're eager to try it out. It involves one simple philosophy: just the facts, ma'am. When someone challenges you or tries to conceal something big, you're all too happy to inform them that you're not buying it. Don't be surprised if an argument ensues, though.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Some big changes are coming your way. Thankfully, right now you're actually able to appreciate what's going on, or at least the outcome. The path along the way might not be all that much fun, especially if you have to say goodbye rather abruptly to someone or something, but the ends definitely justify the means. You've never been afraid of change, though you do prefer to stick with what you know when possible.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your optimism is legendary. You can find the silver lining in almost any cloud. Unfortunately, there's one particular person in your circle who can bring you down, make you doubt what you're doing, and start you wondering if your life is really where you want it to be. Avoid this person, but it doesn't have to be permanent (they do have an important role to play).



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You need to manage a delicate balancing act: taking care of your responsibilities to home and family while trying to move forward with your career in some new way. If anyone can pull it off, you can! Balance is your specialty. This time, it could be somewhat tricky, but if you put in some extra hours you can manage it. Just don't forget to get some sleep!



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've done everything humanly possible to keep the peace, but you're not in it alone. While you don't relish having to speak unpleasant truths to someone you care about, it's necessary now, and you should stop blaming yourself for the situation. Say what you have to say and see what happens. If this is a strong relationship, it's just a bump in the road.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

This is one of those days that could just make you crazy because it feels like one step forward and two steps back! If that's how it is for you, with your legendary patience, imagine how intolerant everyone else is feeling. The good news is that once you're all done, you should have a sweet space to return to. Do something soothing tonight to relax.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

First, the good news. Doing battle isn't frightening or intimidating to you. That means that when someone tries to put one over on you today, no matter who they think they are, you absolutely do not stand for it. This goes double for anyone who thinks more highly of their own authority than you do. In fact, it might be time to take them down a peg or two, and you're just the right person for the job.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Don't take any backtalk from anyone who thinks they have you where they want you just because they know one of your secrets, even if they also know how badly you want to protect it. You probably know dirt that is just as potentially uncomfortable for them. While you'd never choose to say anything about it under normal circumstances, you might need to let them know what you know.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959 due to its occupation by troops from what country?

- A. China
- B. Soviet Union
- C. North Korea
- D. Japan

02. Who, after splitting from a long term girlfriend in 2008, briefly dated actress Kate Hudson, and in 2012 was dating Serbian tennis star Ana Ivanovic?

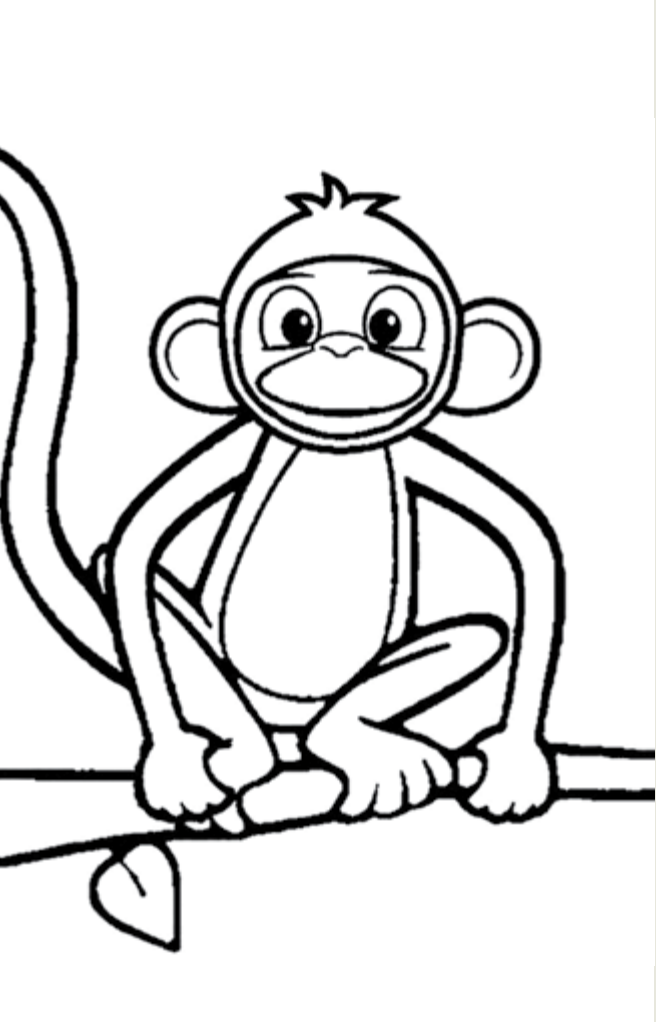
- A. Richard Branson
- B. Roger Federer
- C. Adam Scott
- D. Silvio Berlusconi

03. Which of these bones is the lowest in the human body (when it is standing up)?

- A. Cranium
- B. Sternum
- C. Patella
- D. Pelvis

Answers: 1.A 2.C 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	S	S	A
A	L	S	O
U	R	S	I
E	B	L	T

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

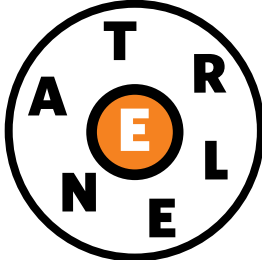
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

United States to boost Taiwan trade

Washington, US - The United States will boost trade with Taiwan in response to China's 'provocative' behaviour, the White House said on Friday, as it insisted on the right of air and sea passage through the tense strait.

A new trade plan will be unveiled within days, while US forces will transit the Taiwan Strait in the next few weeks, said Kurt Campbell, White House co-ordinator for Asia-Pacific issues and an adviser to President Joe Biden. The statement came after Beijing raged at last week's trip by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, launching its largest-ever military drills around the self-ruled island.

Taiwan has accused China of using the visit by Pelosi, the highest-ranking elected American official to visit in decades, as an excuse to kickstart drills that Taipei called a rehearsal for invasion. China views Taiwan as its own territory to be seized one day, by force if necessary.

Campbell said Pelosi's visit was 'consistent' with Washington's existing policy and that China had 'overreacted'.

Beijing used the pretext to 'launch an intensified pressure campaign against Taiwan to try to change the status quo, jeopardizing peace and stability



A fish vendor waits for customers at a market in Taipei on Friday (AFP)

across the Taiwan Strait and in the broader region', he said.

"China has overreacted and its actions continue to be provocative, destabilising and unprecedented." In response to China's drills, the United States is reasserting its involvement in the area, while reiterating its policy of 'strategic ambiguity' - diplomatically recognising China

while simultaneously supporting Taiwan's self-rule.

'Ambitious roadmap'

Campbell said the administration would continue to 'deepen our ties with Taiwan, including through continuing to advance our economic and trade relationship'. 'For example, we're developing an ambitious roadmap for

trade negotiations which we intend to announce in the coming days," he said.

Campbell said that the United States would also reassert its right to use international air and sea space between Taiwan and China.

US forces 'will continue to fly, sail and operate where international law allows, consistent with

our long-standing commitment to freedom of navigation'. "That includes conducting standard air and maritime transits through the Taiwan Strait in the next few weeks," he told reporters.

Campbell did not confirm what kind of deployment would be made to support the maneuvers, saying he had no 'comments about either the nature of

Pelosi's visit was consistent with Washington's existing policy. China has overreacted and its actions continue to be provocative, destabilising and unprecedented.

KURT CAMPBELL

our crossings or the timings across the Taiwan Strait'.

Taiwan's foreign ministry thanked Washington for its 'firm support' in a statement on Saturday that pointed to Washington's 'concrete action to maintain security in the Taiwan Strait and peace in the region'.

Criticising China's decision to halt cooperation with Washington, Campbell said 'we have and will continue to keep lines of communication open with Beijing'. The official noted that Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping have asked staff to arrange an in-person summit, but he declined to comment on reports that this could take place during the G20 group meeting this November.

AFP

Foreigners flock to Canada for monkeypox vaccine

Montreal, Canada - With the monkeypox vaccine in short supply in the United States, thousands of foreigners, including Americans are flocking to Montreal to get their shots.

Canada's second-largest city, located about 70km north of the US border in Quebec province, has decided to make the vaccine available to all those who consider themselves to be at risk.

Robb Stilson, an art director from Denver, Colorado, took advantage of the opportunity during a visit to Montreal last week.

"It's very difficult in the States to get vaccinated," Stilson said as he lined up to get a shot at a pop-up vaccination center together with his husband and two daughters. "I've friends who have waited 8 or 9 hours to get in."

Because contact tracing is difficult, authorities in Montreal decided to offer the vaccine to all those who are at risk to stem the spread of the virus.

"As tourists, they may participate in activities that may expose them and so in a way, we're combatting the pandemic by letting them become vaccinated here so that they don't transmit the infection either here or when they go back home," Donald Vinh, infectious disease specialist at the McGill University Health Center, told AFP.

Since the vaccination campaign was launched in mid-May, as soon as the first cases of monkeypox were detected, Montreal has inoculated 18,500 people, 13 per cent of them foreigners. The goal is to administer 25,000 doses and vaccinate some 75-80 per cent of the population deemed to be at risk, in particular men who have sex with men or with multiple partners.

AFP

Egypt's parliament approves major cabinet reshuffle

Cairo, Egypt - An emergency session of parliament on Saturday approved several cabinet changes in Egypt's first major reshuffle since 2019, with 13 ministers moved, the National Media Authority reported.

A statement said the House of Representatives had approved 'all the nominations set forth in a letter from President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi regarding a ministerial reshuffle'.

Sisi's official Facebook page

said the president had urged parliament to discuss the changes in the more than 30-strong cabinet, which were agreed following consultations with Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli.

There has been only one reshuffle since Madbouli took office in 2018, in December 2019.

Following the parliamentary approval, the new ministers are now expected to be sworn in

soon.

The reshuffle does not include the key defence, interior, finance or foreign ministries.

But it does appoint new ministers of health, tourism and antiquities, commerce and industry, irrigation, civil aviation, immigration, education, higher education, military production, manpower, public business sector, culture and local development.

The decision to replace out-

going irrigation minister Mohamed Abdel Aty comes just a day after Addis Ababa announced it had finished its third filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

The Ethiopian water project damming the Nile is proceeding without agreement from downstream countries Egypt and Sudan.

The new irrigation minister is Hani Sewilam, a professor of sustainable development and

water resources management at the American University in Cairo.

He assumes the post amid increasing fears over water security and an impending water crisis.

Other notable swaps include tourism and antiquities. Khaled Anani is credited with several high-profile attempts to revive Egypt's vital tourism industry, and he is succeeded by Ahmed Issa Abu Hussein.

The health portfolio has been filled by Khaled Abdel Ghaffar, the acting minister since October.

Abdel Ghaffar's former post of higher education minister will be filled by his deputy, Ayman Ashour.

Another notable appointment is Egyptian Air Force chief Mohamed Abbas Helmy, who takes on the civil aviation portfolio.

AFP



Closed trains ticket barriers are seen at Charing Cross train station in London, as fresh railway strikes hit the country on Saturday (AFP)

UK hit by latest railway strikes

London, UK - Football fans and holidaymakers faced travel woe Saturday as train drivers walked out across the UK, the latest in a series of industrial strikes amid spiralling inflation. Members of the Aslef union at nine train companies are staging a 24-hour strike over pay and working conditions, bringing large parts of the network to a standstill, with no service in some areas of the country. "The companies have said that they cannot, or will not, give our members an increase," said Mick Whelan, Aslef's general secretary.

"They blame the government... while the government says it's down to the train operators. So we are caught in a Catch-22 situation where each side blames the other."

The train network has already been crippled by previous strikes,

including a three-day walkout in June that was the country's biggest for 30 years.

They, and other industries, are demanding higher pay to mitigate inflation that is forecast to hit 13 per cent by the end of the year.

Further rail strikes are planned for August 18 and 20, with London Underground and bus staff set to stage action on August 19.

The Department for Transport said claims it was blocking negotiations were 'entirely false'.

"We have said from the outset we urge the unions and industry to agree a deal that is fair for railway staff, passengers and taxpayers," it said in a statement.

Bin collectors and staff in the postal, court and telecom sectors are among those who have voted to strike.

AFP

Wind, thunderstorms expected around contained French wildfire

Hostens, France - French firefighters were keeping a wary eye on a huge blaze that appeared to be contained in the country's southwest, with thunderstorms and strong wind gusts expected in the area overnight.

The 40km fire front in the Gironde and Landes departments around Bordeaux 'did not significantly progress overnight. Firefighters are working on its periphery', police said in a statement.

But officials said it was premature to say that the blaze - which has already reignited once - was under control.

'We remain vigilant' because 'while we can't see huge flames, the fire continues to consume vegetation and soil', Arnaud Mendousse, lieutenant colonel of Gironde fire and rescue, told AFP.

Weather forecasters are expecting thunderstorms with wind gusts of up to 60km an hour in the region in the evening.

The wind 'could reignite the fire' that 'is in a state of pause', Menousse warned.

Authorities on Saturday reopened a highway linking Bordeaux and Spain after closing a 20km stretch on Wednesday.

Traditional firework displays for the Catholic Feast of the Assumption on Monday, when Mary is believed to have entered heaven, have been banned in



A silhouette is seen in front of flames at a wildfire near Belin-Beliet, southwestern France, overnight on Thursday (AFP)

several areas.

Corsica was lashed by winds travelling at 95km an hour overnight and hit by hail, Meteo-France said.

Forecaster Claire Chanal said the storms expected this weekend could lead to flooding and hail. EU members including Germany, Poland, Austria and Romania have pledged reinforcements totalling 361 firefighters to join the roughly 1,100 French ones on the ground, along with several

water-bombing planes from the European Union fleet.

Most of the reinforcements had arrived on the ground, with the last 146 firefighters from Poland expected later on Saturday. "Here we are all volunteers. We're trained, we want to help," said Tone Neuhäfel, a German firefighter aged 36.

France has been buffeted this summer by a historic drought that has forced water use restrictions nationwide, as well as a series of heatwaves that experts

say are being driven by climate change.

Forests off limits

In eastern France, police said on Saturday they were banning entry to most forests in the Bas-Rhin region near the German border.

Cars, bicyclists, hikers, hunters and fishermen are prohibited from entry until Tuesday, police said in a statement. Only residents will be able to access the area.

"It's an extreme step in the face of an exceptional situation," said Pierre Grandadam, president of a group that includes the Alsace forested communities.

"It's very difficult to enforce the closing of a forest, we can only do this as a last resort, but at the moment, everything is dry, the slightest gesture can lead to a conflagration. I've never seen anything like it," said the 74-year-old. "We're praying for rain."

The blaze near Bordeaux erupted in July - the driest month seen in France since 1961 - destroying 14,000 hectares and forcing thousands of people to evacuate before it was contained. But it continued to smoulder in the tinder-dry pine forests and peat-rich soil.

Officials suspect arson may have played a role in the latest flare-up, which has burned 7,400 hectares since Tuesday.

Fires in France in 2022 have ravaged an area three times the annual average over the past 10 years, with blazes also active in the Alpine Jura, Isere and Ardeche regions this week.

European Copernicus satellite data showed more carbon dioxide greenhouse gas - over one million tonnes - had been released from 2022's forest fires in France than in any summer since records began in 2003.

AFP

Taliban fire into air at women's protest

Taliban fighters beat women protesters and fired into the air as they violently dispersed the rally in the Afghan capital

Kabul, Afghanistan - Taliban fighters beat women protesters and fired into the air on Saturday as they violently dispersed a rare rally in the Afghan capital, days ahead of the first anniversary of the headline Islamists' return to power.

Since seizing control on August 15 last year, the Taliban have rolled back the marginal gains made by women during two decades of US intervention in Afghanistan.

About 40 women - chanting 'bread, work and freedom' - marched in front of the education ministry building in Kabul, before the fighters dispersed them by firing their guns into the air, an AFP correspondent reported.



Taliban fighters fire into the air to disperse Afghan women protesters in Kabul on Saturday (AFP)

Some women protesters who took refuge in nearby shops were chased and beaten by Taliban fighters with their rifle butts.

The demonstrators carried a banner which read 'August 15 is a black day' as they demanded rights to work and political participation.

"Justice, justice. We're fed up with ignorance," they chanted, many not wearing face veils.

"Unfortunately, the Taliban from the intelligence service came and fired in the air," said Zholia Parsi, one of the organisers of the march.

"They dispersed the girls, tore

our banners and confiscated the mobile phones of many girls."

But protester Munisa Mubariz vowed to continue fighting for women's rights.

"If the Taliban want to silence this voice, it's not possible. We will protest from our homes," she said.

Some journalists covering the demonstration - the first women's rally in months - were also beaten by the Taliban fighters, an AFP correspondent saw.

'Making women invisible'
While the Taliban authorities

have allowed and even promoted some rallies against the United States, they have declined permission for any women's rally since they returned to power.

After seizing control last year, the Taliban promised a softer version of the harsh Islamist rule that characterised their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001.

But many restrictions have already been imposed, especially on women, to comply with the

Taliban, Hibatullah Akhundzada, ordered women to fully cover themselves in public, including their faces - ideally with an all-encompassing burqa.

Since the secondary school ban was announced in March, many secret schools for these girls have sprung up across several provinces. The United Nations and rights groups have repeatedly slammed the Taliban government for imposing the restrictions on women.

These policies show a 'pattern of absolute gender segregation and are aimed at making women invisible in the society', Richard Bennett, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, told reporters in Kabul during a visit in May.

Human Rights Watch on Thursday called on the Taliban to 'reverse their horrifying and misogynistic' decision to bar women from education.

"This would send a message that the Taliban are willing to reconsider their most egregious actions," Fereshta Abbasi, Afghanistan researcher at the rights group, said in a statement. Some Afghan women initially pushed back against the curbs, holding small protests.

But the Taliban soon rounded up the ringleaders, holding them incommunicado while denying they had been detained.

AFP

They dispersed the girls, tore our banners and confiscated the mobile phones of many girls

ZHOLIA PARSI

movement's austere vision of Islam.

Tens of thousands of girls have been shut out of secondary schools, while women have been barred from returning to many government jobs.

Women have also been banned from travelling alone on long trips and can only visit public gardens and parks in the capital on days separate from men.

In May, the country's supreme leader and chief of the

Sri Lanka allows entry for controversial Chinese ship

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's government granted permission on Saturday for a controversial Chinese research vessel to visit the island despite neighbouring India's concerns that it could spy on New Delhi's military installations, officials said.

The Yuan Wang 5 is described as a research and survey vessel by international shipping and analytics sites, but according to Indian media it is a dual-use spy ship.

New Delhi is suspicious of Beijing's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean and influence in Sri Lanka, seeing both as being firmly within its sphere of influence.

The Yuan Wang 5 was originally due to call at Sri Lanka's Chinese-run Hambantota port

on August 11, only for Colombo to ask Beijing to indefinitely defer the visit following India's objections.

But Sri Lanka's harbour master, Nirmal P Silva, said he had received foreign ministry clearance for the ship to call at Hambantota from August 16 to 22. "The diplomatic clearance was received by me today. We will work with the local agent appointed by the vessel to ensure logistics at the port," Silva told AFP.

Foreign ministry sources confirmed that Colombo had renewed permission for the visit, which had initially been granted on July 12, a day before former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled following months of protests over the country's worst-ever economic crisis.

Rajapaksa - whose brother Mahinda borrowed heavily from China while president from 2005 to 2015 - resigned after escaping to Singapore.

Tens of thousands of protesters overran his palace and home in Colombo after accusing him of mismanagement in an economic crisis that has led to acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines.

Port officials said the Chinese vessel was about 1,000km south-east of Sri Lanka on Friday night and was heading slowly towards the Hambantota deep sea port.

Sri Lanka leased the port to China for 99 years for US\$1.12bn, less than the US\$1.4bn Sri Lanka paid a Chinese company to build it. AFP

North Korea lifts mask mandate, eases curbs

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea has lifted a mask mandate and eased other virus restrictions, state media said on Saturday, days after leader Kim Jong Un declared 'victory' over COVID-19.

The announcement comes after Pyongyang earlier this week blamed Seoul for causing the COVID-19 outbreak in the North and threatened to 'wipe out' the South Korean authorities, if necessary. Virus restrictions were eased as 'the public health crisis created in the country was completely defused and its whole territory was turned into a clean one free from the malignant virus in the shortest period', Pyongyang's official Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

"The step for obligatory mask-wearing was lifted in all areas except frontline areas and borderline cities and counties, given that the whole country was turned into an epidemic-free zone," KCNA said.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is seen with participants of the review meeting for emergency anti-epidemic work, in Pyongyang last week (AFP)

North Korea declared a 'shining victory' over COVID earlier this week just months after announcing its first cases in May.

Social distancing and other anti-virus measures were also lifted except for border regions.

But people with symptoms of respiratory disease were recommended to wear masks and

the North has long protested against.

Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of Kim Jong Un, on Wednesday blamed these activities for the North's COVID outbreak, vowing 'deadly' retaliation against Seoul.

Kim Yo Jong also revealed that the top leader himself had fallen ill during the outbreak and suffered from a 'high fever'.

North Korea has recorded nearly 4.8mn 'fever' cases - while only identifying a fraction of those as COVID - since late April, with just 74 deaths, according to KCNA.

Experts, including the World Health Organization, have long questioned Pyongyang's COVID statistics and claims to have brought the outbreak under control. North Korea has one of the world's worst healthcare systems, with poorly equipped hospitals and few intensive care units, experts say.

AFP

'Top secret' records seized in raid on Trump home

Washington, US - FBI agents seized records marked 'top secret' during their search of former president Donald Trump's Florida estate, according to documents made public on Friday in a probe that includes possible violations of the US Espionage Act.

The search warrant and related materials, unsealed by a Florida judge, showed agents carted away a significant number of items from the raid, which ignited a political firestorm in an already bitterly divided country.

The warrant, which was personally approved by Attorney General Merrick Garland, authorized the FBI to search the '45 office' - a reference to the 45th US president's private office at his Mar-a-Lago residence - and storage rooms.

It directed them to seize documents and records 'illegally possessed' in violation of three criminal statutes, including one falling under the Espionage Act, which makes it a crime to illegally obtain or retain national security information. Trump, who is



Former Trump Organization chief financial officer Allen Weisselberg arrives for a hearing on his criminal case at Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City on Friday (AFP)

weighing another White House run in 2024, vehemently denounced the FBI raid on his Florida home and claimed that all of the material confiscated during the search had been previously 'declassified.'

"They didn't need to 'seize' anything," he said in a statement on his Truth Social platform.

"They could have had it anytime they wanted without playing politics and breaking into Mar-a-Lago." Legal experts cautioned that while the warrant cites the Espionage Act, any potential charges remain unclear and Trump is not necessarily suspected of espionage.

"The Espionage Act encom-

passes a ton of crimes that have nothing to do with 'spying,'" Bradley Moss, a national security lawyer, said on Twitter. "It's about unlawful storing of information relating to the national defense."

Orin Kerr, a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, agreed, saying the 'Es-

pionage Act is a pretty broad law about mishandling classified documents, not just espionage'.

Among the records seized during the raid were documents marked 'Top Secret', 'Secret' and 'Confidential.' Some of the papers were marked 'SCI' - sensitive compartmented information - meaning they were meant to be viewed only in secure government facilities.

FBI agents also seized binders of photos, a handwritten note, information about the 'President of France,' and the grant of clemency made by Trump to Roger Stone, an ally of the former president, according to the list.

The Justice Department had asked a federal judge to unseal the search warrant on Friday barring objections from Trump.

The 76-year-old Trump did not block the release, but complained that he was the victim of 'unprecedented political weaponisation of law enforcement' by 'radical left Democrats'. AFP

Actress Anne Heche legally dead after crash

Los Angeles, US - Hollywood actor Anne Heche has been declared legally dead, one week after she crashed her car into a Los Angeles building, a spokeswoman said on Friday.

Heche, 53, had been comatose in hospital with a severe brain injury since the fiery collision on August 5.

Having lost all brain function, she is 'legally dead according to California law', though her heart is still beating as her family keeps her body on life support while exploring organ donations, spokeswoman Holly Baird told AFP.

"Today we lost a bright light, a kind and most joyful soul, a loving mother, and a loyal friend," the family said in a joint statement. "Anne will be deeply missed but she lives on through her beautiful sons, her iconic body of work, and her passionate advocacy."

"Her bravery for always standing in her truth, spreading her message of love and acceptance, will continue to have a last-



Actress Anne Heche (AFP)

ing impact." Heche, best known for 1990s movies *Donnie Brasco* and *Six Days, Seven Nights* as well as a high-profile relationship with talk show host Ellen DeGeneres, crashed her car into a two-story house in the Mar Vista neighborhood of Los Angeles.

The violent collision resulted in 'structural compromise and... heavy fire' at the scene, according to the Los Angeles Fire Department. The ensuing blaze took 59 firefighters more than an hour to contain and fully extinguish, the department said.

AFP

Salman Rushdie on ventilator after stabbing attack in NY



Salman Rushdie (AFP)

New York, US - Salman Rushdie, who spent years in hiding after an Iranian fatwa ordered his killing, was on a ventilator and could lose an eye following a stabbing attack at a literary event in New York state on Friday.

The British author of *The Satanic Verses*, which sparked fury among some Muslims who believed it was blasphemous, had to be airlifted to hospital for emergency surgery following the attack.

His agent said in a statement obtained by *The New York Times* that 'the news is not good'.

"Salman will likely lose one eye; the nerves in his arm were severed; and his liver was stabbed and damaged," said agent Andrew Wylie, who added that Rushdie could not speak.

Carl LeVan, an American Uni-



Salman Rushdie is seen being loaded onto a medical evacuation helicopter after being stabbed in Chautauqua, New York on Friday (AFP)

versity politics professor attending the literary event, told AFP that the assailant had rushed onto the stage where Rushdie was seated and 'stabbed him repeatedly and viciously'.

Several people ran to the stage and took the suspect to the ground before a trooper present at the event arrested him. A doctor in the audience administered medical care until emergency first responders arrived.

New York state police identified the suspected attacker as Hadi Matar, a 24-year-old from Fairfield, New Jersey, adding that he stabbed Rushdie in the neck as well as the abdomen.

The motive for the stabbing remains unclear.

An interviewer onstage, 73-year-old Ralph Henry Reese, suffered a facial injury but has been

Salman will likely lose one eye; the nerves in his arm were severed; his liver was stabbed and damaged

ANDREW WYLIE

released from hospital, police said.

The attack took place at the Chautauqua Institution, which hosts arts programmes in a tranquil lakeside community 110km south of Buffalo city.

"What many of us witnessed today was a violent expression of hate that shook us to our core," the Chautauqua Institution said in a statement.

LeVan, a Chautauqua regular, said the suspect 'was trying to stab him as many times as possible before he was subdued', adding that he believed the man 'was trying to kill' Rushdie.

"There were gasps of horror and panic from the crowd," the professor said.

A decade in hiding

Rushdie, 75, was propelled into the spotlight with his second novel *Midnight's Children* in 1981, which won international praise and Britain's prestigious Booker Prize for its portrayal of post-independence India.

But his 1988 book *The Satanic Verses* transformed his life when Iran's first supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa, or religious decree, ordering his killing.

The novel was considered by some of the Muslims as disrespectful of Islam and the Prophet Mohammed.

Conservative media in Iran hailed Friday's attack on Rushdie, with one state-owned paper saying the 'neck of the devil' had been 'cut by a razor'.

Ultra-conservative newspaper *Kayhan*, whose chief is appointed by current supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, wrote: "Bravo to this courageous and duty-conscious man who attacked the apostate and depraved Salman Rushdie in New York."

Rushdie, who was born in India to non-practicing Muslims and identifies as an atheist, was forced to go underground as a bounty was put on his head.

AFP



A party supporter rides a bike with Kenyan flags and political messages in downtown Nairobi, Kenya, on Saturday (AFP)

Kenya's Odinga slightly ahead in presidential race

Nairobi, Kenya - Kenya's one-time opposition leader Raila Odinga is slightly ahead in the race for the presidency against the incumbent Deputy President William Ruto, partial official results showed on Saturday.

Odinga has 52.54 per cent of the vote against 46.76 per cent for Ruto, according to figures issued by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission in the early afternoon based on results from about 30 per cent of polling stations.

Kenyans are still waiting for final results five days after the country, considered one of the most dynamic democracies in Africa, went to the polls on Tuesday.

Odinga, 77, is making his fifth stab at the top job with the support of his longtime foe, the outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta who has already served two terms and

cannot run again.

Ruto, 55, has been deputy president for almost a decade but was left out in the cold after a pact between Odinga and Kenyatta in 2018 that stunned the nation.

The election commission on Friday acknowledged that the vote tallying was moving too slowly after appealing for the nation to be patient.

It also denied that its results portal had been compromised, insisting its systems were secure. Kenyans had been left confused when television stations which have been providing rolling coverage of the election, suddenly stopped broadcasting provisional results on Thursday.

The election is being seen as a test of the stability of the East African powerhouse, which has seen past votes marred by rigging and deadly violence.

AFP

ONE YEAR UNDER TALIBAN - PART III

Torn over reforms one year after seizing power

Kandahar, Afghanistan - One year on from the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, some cracks are opening within their ranks over the crucial question of just how much reform their leaders can tolerate.

Infamous during their first reign for their brutal crack-downs on rights and freedoms, the Islamists vowed to rule differently this time.

On a superficial level at least, they appear to have changed in some respects.

Officials in Kabul have embraced technology, while cricket matches are cheered in full stadiums.

Televisions were banned under the Taliban government's first incarnation, while Afghans now have access to the internet and social media.

Girls are allowed to attend primary school and women journalists are interviewing government officials - unthinkable during the Taliban's first stint in power in the 1990s.

The group's hardline core, composed of battle-hardened veteran fighters, is against any significant ideological change that could be viewed as a sign of capitulation to their enemies in the West.

"You have one (Taliban) camp, which is pushing ahead with what they're seeing as reforms, and another camp that seems to think even these meagre reforms are too much," said Ibraheem Bahiss, an Afghanistan analyst with International Crisis Group.

The United States and its allies - which had bankrolled Afghanistan for 20 years - have locked the country out of the



A man preparing breakfast in a stall in Kandahar (AFP)

global banking system and billions in frozen assets abroad, as they hold out for reforms from the Taliban.

Without significant progress, it is the Afghan people who suffer as the country reels under a massive economic crisis that has seen some families choose between selling their organs or their infant daughters.

'Retrograde dogmatic views'

On whether the Taliban are even capable of reform, analysts are wary that recent policy changes amount to little more than 'tokenism'.

"There are some cases where we could point to an evolution in policy, but let's be very clear... We're still looking at an organisation that has refused to move beyond very

retrograde, dogmatic views," said Michael Kugelman, an Afghanistan specialist with the Washington-based Wilson Center think tank.

Most secondary schools for girls remain closed. Many women have been forced out of government work, while many fear venturing out and being chastised by the Taliban.

Simple joys such as music, shisha and card games are strictly controlled in the most conservative areas, while protests have been crushed and journalists regularly threatened or detained.

Demands from the West for an inclusive government were ignored, and the assassination of Al-Qaeda's leader in Kabul last week underlined the Taliban's ongoing ties with militant groups.



Afghan children studying in a madrasa in Kandahar (AFP)

Reform as capitulation

It is from the Taliban's power base of southern Kandahar that the secretive supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada gathers his powerful inner circle of veteran fighters and religious clerics to impose a harsh interpretation of sharia.

And for them, ideological concerns outweigh any political or economic drivers to effect change.

"The needs of the Afghans remain the same as 20 years ago," Mohammad Omar Khitabi, a member of a council of clerics who advise Akhundzada in Kandahar, told AFP.

His thoughts are echoed by Kandahar's Vice and Virtue Director Abdul Rahman Tayabi, another close aide of the

supreme leader.

"Our people do not have too many demands, like people in other countries might have," he told AFP.

Afghan families were left stunned in March when Akhundzada overturned the education ministry's decision to reopen secondary schools for girls.

Some analysts believe he felt uneasy over what could be seen by hardliners as an act of surrender to the 'West on girls' rights.

Hopes of restoring international money flows were shattered - to the dismay of many Taliban officials in Kabul, some of whom spoke out against the decision.

Relations with Western diplomats - who meet regularly with Taliban ministers but have

no access to Akhundzada - suffered a major setback.

A slew of directives that harked back to the first reign of the Taliban quickly followed.

"The decisions that (Akhundzada) has made so far are all based on the opinions of religious scholars," said Abdul Hadi Hammad, the head of a madrasa and member of the supreme leader's advisory council.

Akhundzada has stressed the need for unity in the movement as he carefully seeks to balance several factions - including competing groups that claim the credit for the 2021 victory over US-led forces.

While advisers to Akhundzada claim the Taliban can survive without foreign income, unlocking billions of dollars in frozen assets abroad

would be a crucial lifeline.

"We know the Taliban can be transactional, but they cannot appear to be transactional," a Western diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Economic pressure

Within the movement, no one dares openly challenge Akhundzada's power, but discontent is quietly growing among the lower ranks.

"Taliban guards are getting their salaries late, and their salaries are low too. They are unhappy," said one mid-level Taliban official based in north-western Pakistan, who asked not to be named.

Many have returned to their villages or travelled to Pakistan to take up different work, another Taliban member added.

Attempts by the movement to shore up revenue through lucrative coal mining have sparked infighting in the north, exacerbated by ethnic divisions and religious sectarianism.

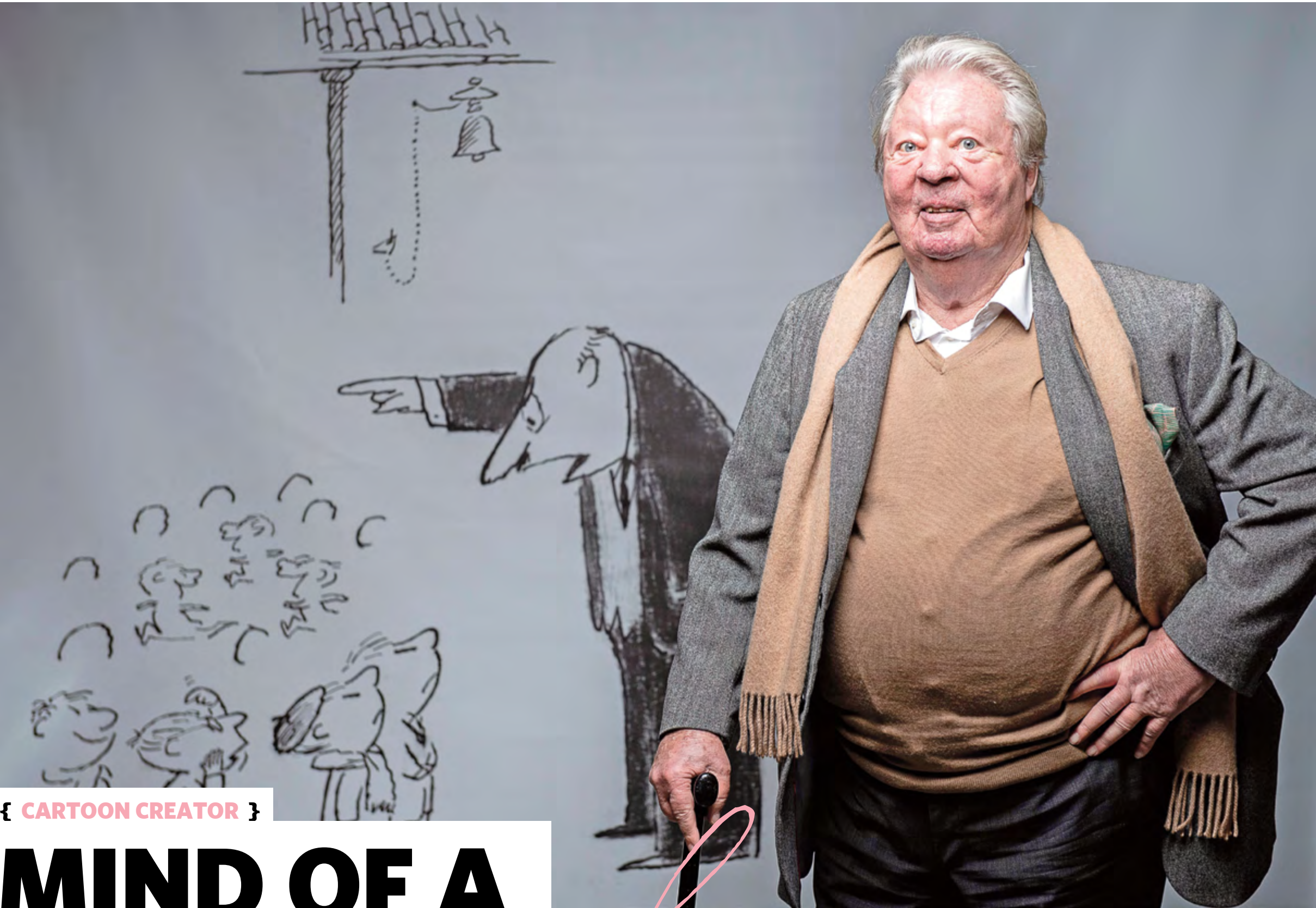
With winter only a few months away, food security and freezing temperatures will put even more pressure on the leaders of one of the world's poorest countries.

These mounting stresses have the potential to worsen divisions, Kugelman said, though likely not enough to force any dramatic shift in policy.

"If the Taliban leadership start to feel very real threats to their political survival, then could they change?" he asked.

"Given that they are ideologically focused, that may not be the case."

AFP



{ CARTOON CREATOR }

MIND OF A *maverick*

France's 'Little Nicolas' illustrator **Jean-Jacques Sempe**, who died last Thursday, leaves behind a huge void in the field of meaningful illustrations

Jean-Jacques Sempe, who illustrated the beloved 'Little Nicolas' series of French children's books, had found artistic expression for the struggles of his early childhood through his sketches which went on to become iconic in France.

The cartoonist who breathed his last peacefully on Thursday at his holiday residence, was surrounded by his wife and close friends, Marc Lecarpentier, his biographer and friend, disclosed.

Sempe will always be remembered for his work on 'Le Petit Nicolas', an idealised vision of childhood in 1950s France, that became an international best-seller. He had also illustrated more New Yorker magazine covers than any other artist.

Sempe, who originally wanted to be a jazz pianist and had a difficult childhood, dropped out of school aged 14 before lying about his age to join the army. Army life, however, didn't agree with him, and he began selling drawings to Parisian newspapers.

While working at a press agency, he be-

friended cartooning legend Rene Goscinny of 'Asterix' fame, and together in 1959, they invented 'Little Nicolas'.

"The Nicolas stories were a way to revisit the misery I endured while growing up while making sure everything came out just fine," Sempe had said in 2018. Today, the books are international best-sellers, with more than 15 million copies sold in 45 countries, and have been adapted into a popular film and cartoon series.

In 1959, however, they went largely unnoticed, and he continued to sell drawings to newspapers to make ends meet, an early career he had once described as 'horrible'. It was only in 1978 when he was hired by The New Yorker that he found sustainable success.

"I was almost 50 and for the first time in my life, I existed! I had finally found my family," Sempe was quoted in an interview.

Miserable childhood

Sempe was born near Bordeaux, in the vil-

lage of Pessac in 1932 - the illegitimate son of an affair his mother had. He lived in an abusive foster home before his mother took him back, only to subject him to her own violent streak.

"Come closer, I'll slap you so hard the wall will slap you back," he had recounted her telling him once. They lived with his alcoholic stepfather and Sempe's true paternity was a mystery that haunted him for life.

In his work, Sempe put diminutive characters in an outsized world of soft lines, revealing amusing, and sometimes caustic, truths about the world without ever resorting to mockery. But the kindness that Sempe showed his subjects was in stark contrast to the misery of his own upbringing.

"You never get over your childhood," he revealed well into his 80s, having avoided the subject for decades. "You try to sort things out, to make your memories prettier. But you never get over it."

For many years, Sempe refused to be-

The Nicolas stories were a way to revisit the misery I endured while growing up while making sure everything came out just fine"

JEAN-JACQUES SEMPE

lieve in his talent, attributing what he achieved to hard work and sacrifice.

The artist said he could spend as long as three weeks getting a single drawing right and that he was capable of anything - not bathing, not sleeping, to finish work on time.

"The jazz, the tender irony, the subtle intelligence... we will not be able to forget Jean-Jacques Sempe," French President Emmanuel Macron wrote on Instagram.

Culture Minister Rima Abdul Malak added that his drawings were 'timeless'. "With tenderness, poetry and mischief... he taught us to look at the world with the eyes of a child," she tweeted.

AFP

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A MID-TERM EXHIBITION OF SHORTLISTED FINALISTS OF THE ANNUAL YOUNG EMERGING ARTIST PRIZE 2022 OPENS AT STAL GALLERY TOMORROW WHEREIN EIGHT PROMISING ARTISTS WILL SHOWCASE THEIR OWN INTERPRETATIONS OF 'A REFLECTION ON SELF-PORTRAITS'

Hubert Vaz

Creativity is currently a multi-dimensional concept in the world of art and budding artists the world over have been breaking out of the conventional two-dimensional canvas to present art that is not just visual, rather something that speaks and appeals to all the senses of the viewer.

And if you view the unique presentations put forth by emerging young Omani artists at the annual exhibition of emerging artists, year after year, you would discover that contemporary art has, indeed, adorned a new avatar – one that also needs a multi-pronged outlook to comprehend.

Today, the canvas is multi-dimensional and the viewer isn't far removed from what is presented, often part of the presentation. So, when you walk into Stal Gallery today, you would discover that young Omani artists have taken that road with ease, and attempted to provoke an instant response from viewers with regard to unique artistic presentations that are not always installed on walls.

Stal Gallery's Young Emerging Artist's Prize (YEAP), initiated and mentored by internationally known Omani artist Hassan Meer, has become a unique platform for budding artists in Oman since 2015. The programme of nurturing young artists and helping them find their feet has been the first of its kind in Oman supporting the new generation of emerging artists.

With emphasis on professional skills development, online profiling, usage of multimedia technology, and displaying a wider presentation of the visual arts, this contest has grown to become the most anticipated art programme of Oman at a non-profit art gallery - Stal Gallery - the Alserkal Group's first cultural project in the Sultanate of Oman.

The programme is focused on the educational aspect and will culminate in an open-ended public demonstration which would include three key aspects - artist talk, a workshop and the final exhibition that would showcase the journey as well as prowess of the short-listed artists, one of whom would bag the coveted trophy and a much sought after scholarship to study art abroad.

The mid-term exhibition will be inaugurated under the auspices of H H Sayyida Basma al Said this evening and would feature the artworks of the finalists - Salim al Masoudi, Bashair al Balushi, Kawthar al Harthi, Israa al Balushi, Huria al Harrasi, Marwa al Bahrani, Khadija al Maamari, Ammar al Kiyumi - along with the work of Majeda al Hinai - Grand Prize winner of Young Emerging Artist Prize 2020.

Curated by Hassan Meer, art director, Stal Gallery and Ruqaiya Mazar, assistant curator, the programme has been conducted under the supervision and direction of Dr Volodymyra Sobolevska, manager, Stal Gallery.

"You are the centre of the universe. The world revolves around you. Because life is not linear and we don't all reside in. We are all on the same flat surface of existence, in which everything that happens is uniform. The Earth is a sphere, our lives are dynamic, and we all experience the world differently," says Meer, adding that the exhibition delivers artworks in ways that haven't been delivered before, with regard to concept, materials or presentation.

Meer further said, "This group was selected in the beginning of this year and went through practices to examine their own creativity. The mid-term show is the first show of the programme using photography and installation art. The theme is about the post-COVID-19 experience showing how each individual felt after the relief of the lockdown. 'Center of the Universe' as well as a reflection of the individual is the key concept as each person is the center of his/her imagination."

About the current batch of finalist nurtured by him, Meer said, "This year's programme is more advanced and it shows how the awareness of contemporary art has spread among the new generation. In previous years, students tried to explore what experimental art is, but now it is quite clear to them, he said, asserting that this annual show has helped in changing the young art scene in Oman.

"The difference and improvement in Omani art can now be seen quite clearly. We train and improve the work of young artists and they themselves can feel the difference," he added.

The exhibition will be on display at Stal Gallery throughout the month of August.



The difference and improvement in Omani art can now be seen quite clearly. We train and improve the work of young artists and they themselves can feel the difference

HASSAN MEER

ISRAA AL BALUSHI



SALIM AL MASOUDI



THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

Surprise date-change overshadows World Cup 100-day countdown

Doha, Qatar - FIFA and Qatar organisers on Friday counted the cost of bringing forward the start of the World Cup by a day as they launched the 100-day countdown to the event.

Football's ruling body and the wealthy Gulf state both promised to help fans, sponsors and broadcasters hit by the change but did not give details.

The organising committee said "huge excitement" was building for the World Cup, which will now start on November 20, but only a small group of migrant workers gathered at the main

7:00pm.

FIFA said tickets for the affected matches "will remain valid" and added that it would "seek to address any issues arising from this change in a case-by-case basis."

Billions of dollars spent

Qatari organisers, who have spent billions of dollars preparing for the event, welcomed FIFA's gesture for their "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to host the event.

"The impact of this decision on

The impact of this decision on fans was assessed by FIFA. We will work together to ensure a smooth tournament for the supporters affected by the change

ORGANISERS

countdown clock on the Doha seafront to see the 100 days tick over.

The sudden move to bring forward Qatar's match against Ecuador - to make it the gala opening match - has added to Qatar's public relations battle as it counters fan worries about what to expect when they arrive.

FIFA said its senior leaders had unanimously agreed that the Qatar-Ecuador game and the opening ceremony at the Al Bayt stadium should be a "stand-alone" event.

The move maintained the tradition of featuring the host country or the reigning champions at the first match. Qatar had been scheduled to play the official inauguration game on November 21, but the third match of the day behind Senegal-Netherlands and England against Iran.

The Group A game between Senegal and the Netherlands has now been shifted from 1:00pm (1000 GMT) on November 21 to

fans was assessed by FIFA. We will work together to ensure a smooth tournament for the supporters affected by the change," organisers added in a statement, without giving details.

Some Ecuador fans may have to change flights to arrive in Qatar earlier.

Paul Flores, a car company manager in Quito, said he would have to change flights and was doubtful he would get compensation. Flores, his wife and two children, had planned to go to the Formula One grand prix in Abu Dhabi on November 20 and then Ecuador's World Cup game the next day. He has tickets for five World Cup games in all.

"We don't know what to do," he told AFP, highlighting that he would have to sacrifice one of the two events. "It's crazy." "We cannot even start calculating how much it will cost and I don't think FIFA is going to pay me."

Ricardo Fort, a sports industry consultant and former head of



Lusail Stadium, the 80,000-capacity venue, which will host the World Cup final (AFP)



The Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup countdown clock in Doha marking 100 days ahead of the event, on August 12

sports marketing for Coca Cola - a major FIFA backer - said the date change would be "a huge problem for sponsors".

"They invited and confirmed hospitality guests, booked flights and hotels, and contracted with all the necessary logistics. Imagine changing it all!" Fort wrote on Twitter.

Some companies linked to the first World Cup in an Arab country, expressed confidence, however, that any disruption would be overcome.

'Not large problem'

"It is really not - compared to the other challenges that we could have faced or have faced in the past - a particularly large prob-

lem," said Jaime Byrom, chairman of Match Hospitality, which has a contract with FIFA to organise hospitality packages for World Cup matches and has locked in 450,000 tickets for the tournament. He said the priority would be to help Ecuadorian clients.

Official countdown clocks for the event were quickly changed and events for the last 100 days were hastily moved from Saturday to Friday.

Most events were low-key even though Hassan al Thawadi, secretary general of the Qatar organising committee, said there was "huge excitement" building in the state of 2.8 million people. AFP

New Zealand cruise past West Indies in 2nd T20

Kingston, Jamaica - New Zealand pulverised a demoralised West Indies by 90 runs in the second T20 International at Sabina Park on Friday to take an unbeatable 2-0 in the three-match series.

In a one-sided encounter which magnified the rapid decline of the two-time World T20 winners over the past 12 months, the Black Caps piled up 215 for five.

They then limited the home team to just 125 for nine in reply to hand the Caribbean side a sixth defeat in their last seven matches in the format.

Glen Phillips' blistering 76 off 41 balls with six sixes and four fours highlighted the tourists' dominant batting performance and earned him the man of the match award after captain Kane Williamson chose to take first strike.

He received excellent support from Daryl Mitchell (48) in an 83-run fourth-wicket stand while opener Devon Conway again made a useful contribution in getting to 42.

"It has been great to come back to Sabina Park and get a good score today," said Phillips in reflecting on his time playing at the venue for the Jamaica Tallawahs in the Caribbean Premier League.

AFP

Hurkacz ends Kyrgios streak, sets semi-final clash with Ruud

Montreal, Canada - Hubert Hurkacz overcame 53 winners from Nick Kyrgios to halt the Australian's nine-match win streak with a three-set quarter-final victory on Friday at the ATP Montreal Masters.

The Polish eighth seed managed 43 winners of his own in a rapid-fire 7-6(7/4), 6-7(5/7), 6-1 triumph that put him into his fourth semi-final at the Masters level. Hurkacz will next face Norway's fourth-seeded Casper Ruud, who crushed home hope Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-1, 6-2, in 74 minutes.

Ruud will play his third Masters semi-final this season on Saturday, having defeated Hurkacz in their previous meeting in May at Roland Garros.

At the bottom of the draw, Dan Evans completed a come-



Hubert Hurkacz (L) of Poland shakes hands with Nick Kyrgios after defeating the Australian in Montreal on Saturday (AFP)

back to defeat American Tommy Paul 1-6, 6-3, 6-4, needing two match points to overcome Paul in two and a quarter hours.

But the chance of an all-British semi-final at this elite level fell away as Jack Draper lost 7-6

(7/4), 6-1 to Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta after saving a pair of match points.

The 39th-ranked Evans, who managed only 15 winners, was decisively out-hit by Paul with 40. AFP

Hard work for Halep in Toronto win over Gauff

Toronto, Canada - Simona Halep served twice for her match against Coco Gauff without success on Friday before finally securing a 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) quarter-final victory at the WTA Toronto Masters.

The former number one, a two-time winner in Canada, made hard work of her triumph over the rising American teenager who just missed a chance at cracking the world



Simona Halep

ranking top-10 for the first time.

Halep needed a second-set tiebreaker to advance into the semi-finals lining up a meeting with seventh-seeded American Jessica Pegula.

In other quarter-final action, Brazil's giant-killer Beatriz Haddad Maia claimed another victim as she upset Olympic champion Belinda Bencic with a 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 comeback win. AFP

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CITY CITY BANG BANG!

Manchester City storm to the top of Premier League standings with a 4-0 thumping of Bournemouth

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester City stormed ominously to the top of the Premier League by cruising to a 4-0 win over Bournemouth, while Gabriel Jesus opened his Arsenal account in a 4-2 win over Leicester on Saturday.

As soaring temperatures across England forced the need for water breaks at all this weekend's Premier League games, it was City who were on fire at the Etihad.

Erling Haaland failed to score on his home debut, but the Norwegian showed there is more to his game than goals as he used his strength before sliding in Ilkay Gundogan to open the scoring.

Bournemouth mustered a response through Ben Pearson, whose 20-yard snapshot forced Ederson into his only save of the game, but with Pep Guardiola's side enjoying near total control a second goal was inevitable.

It arrived just past the half hour mark when Kevin De Bruyne bamboozled Lloyd Kelly with the

drop of the shoulder and curled into the bottom corner with the outside of his right boot from 20-yards to complete an incisive counter-attack that punished the Cherries' carelessness in possession.

It was a similar story for the third, as another loose pass allowed the hosts to break at pace, with De Bruyne turning provider with a perfectly timed pass for Phil Foden, who managed to beat Travers with a low drive.

The one-way traffic continued after the break, and, though Bournemouth offered more resistance, Joao Cancelo's fiercely struck cross saw Lerma inadvertently divert the ball beyond Travers to ensure the scoreline reflected City's superiority.

There was further cause for celebration as 17-year-old right-back Rico Lewis become the fifth youngest debutant in the Club's history.

Jesus shines
Haaland's arrival at City was one



Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne celebrates after scoring against Bournemouth in their English Premier League match on Saturday (AFP)

of the factors behind Jesus' departure and the Brazilian is already looking like a bargain for the Gunners as he marked his home debut with two goals and two assists to maintain Arsenal's perfect start.

Jesus was often deployed in wider areas in recent seasons by City boss Pep Guardiola, but was brought to Arsenal to be a number nine as he aims to secure a place at the World Cup later this year with regular games as a centre-forward.

The 25-year-old showed his eye for goal with a sumptuous chip over Danny Ward to break Leicester's resistance and doubled his tally by heading home a corner at the back post.

William Saliba's own goal gave Leicester a foothold against the run of play.

But the Foxes quickly threw that hope away when Ward dropped a simple cross into the box and Jesus teed up Granit Xhaka to slot home.

AFP

Gerrard wins duel with Lampard to get Villa off the mark

Birmingham, United Kingdom - Steven Gerrard won his first managerial clash with former England teammate Frank Lampard as Aston Villa beat Everton 2-1 to get off the mark in the Premier League.

Goals from Danny Ings and Emi Buendia eased the pressure on Gerrard after a run of two wins in their previous 12 games dating back to last season.

However, Villa had to survive

a nervy finish as Lucas Digne's own goal gave Everton hope before Emi Martinez denied Anthony Gordon an equaliser in stoppage time.

"I always expected when we conceded that sloppy goal that there would be a bit of nervousness towards the end. That was a big test of our character and resilience and we managed to stay firm," said Gerrard.

"We did enough to get over

the line and I think we deserved the win."

Gerrard was in the firing line after a 2-0 defeat to newly-promoted Bournemouth on the opening weekend of the season.

The former Liverpool captain had also controversially dropped Tyrone Mings last weekend after stripping the England centre-back of the club captaincy.

Mings was restored at the heart of the Villa defence, but

their problems defending set-pieces persisted. Lampard's men are badly missing the presence of the injured Dominic Calvert-Lewin up front, but were a constant threat from dead balls.

The Toffees did have the ball in the net midway through the first-half when Gordon pressured Matty Cash into slicing the ball into his own goal after Villa failed to clear a corner.

However, Gordon was flagged

offside. Moments later, Ollie Watkins' run down the right stretched the Everton defence before Ings spun onto his strike partner's cross and smashed the ball low past Jordan Pickford.

Watkins was the creator again for Villa's second as a one-two with Buendia gave the Argentine a tap-in to seemingly secure the points five minutes from time.

AFP



Everton's Tom Davies tackles Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins (AFP)

Former Chelsea star Willian leaves Corinthians following death threats

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Former Chelsea and Arsenal midfielder Willian quit Corinthians on Friday following the Brazilians' Copa Libertadores elimination against domestic rivals Flamengo, after claiming he and his family received death threats on social media.

"Willian asked us for his (contract) termination. We are sad not to have him any more and also because it didn't go the way we expected. But we have to keep those here that are happy," said club president Duilio Montei-ro Alves.

It was only a year ago that the 34-year-old only rejoined the club where he made his professional debut in 2006. Local media have linked him with a move to promoted English Premier League side Fulham.

The return to Corinthians in Sao Paulo quickly turned sour for Willian both on the pitch where he scored one goal in 45 matches, and off it.

"Whenever Corinthians lost



Corinthians' Willian (R) and Flamengo's Rodinei vie for the ball during their Copa Libertadores quarterfinal (AFP)

and I didn't play well, my family received threats and insults on social media. My wife, my children, recently they also started attacking my father, my sister," Willian told the Globo Esporte website.

"I didn't play as well as I expected but I was never a player who scored 20 or 30 goals a season," he told ESPN Brasil on Wednesday.

Willian, who also played for Shakhtar Donetsk in Ukraine

and Russians Anzhi Makhachkala, leaves the club three days after they were eliminated from the Copa Libertadores quarter-finals by Flamengo, 3-0 on aggregate.

AFP

Ismaily strikes late to rescue Ligue 1 draw for Lille

Paris, France - Lille moved to the top of the fledgling Ligue 1 table after Ismaily's second half equaliser secured a draw from a tough contest at Nantes on Friday.

Lille went into the game on the back of an impressive 4-1 win over Auxerre in last week's opening round but they were on the back foot when Moses Simon struck for the home side in the 27th minute, tucking in from close range.

French Cup winners Nantes were held to an uninspiring goal-less draw at Angers on the opening weekend but appeared to be closing in on a first win of the season as they held out against some sustained Lille attacks.

Fifteen minutes from time, however, the visitors, who finished a mediocre 10th last season, got their reward when Canadian striker Jonathan David provided the assist for Brazilian defender Ismaily to fire in the leveller.

AFP

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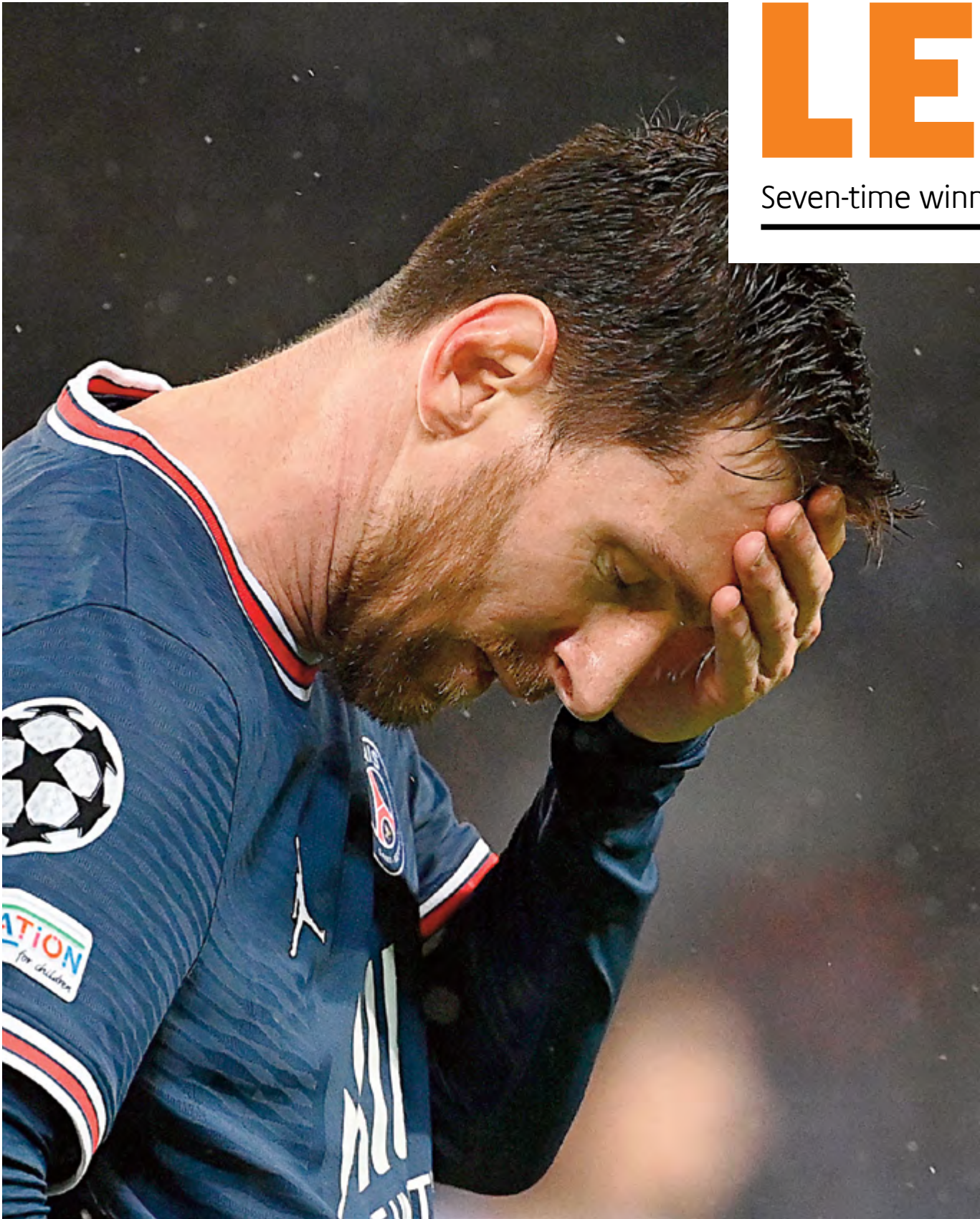
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Lionel Messi scored only 11 goals for PSG last season and his relatively indifferent club form failed to impress France Football magazine

LEFT OUT

Seven-time winner Lionel Messi misses out on Ballon d’Or nomination

Paris, France - Seven-time Ballon d’Or winner Lionel Messi paid a high price for an underwhelming first season with Paris Saint-Germain when he was left off the 30-strong list for this year’s coveted football award.

Lucy Bronze, who was runner-up in 2019, is one of three members of England’s Euro-winning squad to be short-listed for the women’s award.

Messi, who won the title last year, had been an ever-present amongst the nominations since 2006 and a regular feature in the top three since 2007 with the exception of 2018.

But Messi, 35, has missed out on the 2022 award following his switch from Barcelona to the French capital.

A change in the format has also worked against the Argentine superstar with the Ballon d’Or no longer acknowledging the best player over a calendar year.

Instead, it is based on a season’s record highlighting “the individual performances” and the “decisive and impressive character” of the nominees, according to the criteria.

After leaving Barcelona in the summer of 2021, Messi was unable to stamp his genius on a PSG team desperate for a Champions League title.

The French champions suffered a last-16 exit at the hands of eventual winners Real Madrid.

In total, Messi scored only 11 goals for PSG with his relatively

indifferent club form failing to impress France Football magazine, the organisers of the Ballon d’Or which will be awarded in Paris on October 17.

PSG teammate Neymar also misses out after a season where he scored 13 goals in 28 matches.

The remainder of the list of nominees throws up few surprises. French international striker Karim Benzema is the overwhelming favourite after being the architect of Real Madrid’s 14th Champions League title.

French international striker Karim Benzema is the overwhelming favourite after being the architect of Real Madrid’s 14th Champions League title. He finished the European campaign with 15 goals

He finished the European campaign with 15 goals.

Benzema is likely to become the fifth French winner after Raymond Kopa (1958), Michel Platini (1983, 1984, 1985), Jean-Pierre Papin (1991) and Zinedine Zidane (1998). In the 2021/2022 season, Benzema scored 44 goals in 46 appearances for a Madrid side who also won the Liga title.

His goal in Wednesday’s 2-0 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt in the European Super Cup took the 34-year-old to 324 goals for the Spanish giants.

That edged him ahead of Raul

in the club’s all-time list with only Cristiano Ronaldo in front of him with 450.

“He’s in line for the Ballon d’Or. Is there any doubt? For me, no,” said Real coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Manchester United’s Ronaldo, a five-time Ballon d’Or winner, is nominated again this year.

Benzema is joined on the 30-man list by teammates Thibaut Courtois, Casemiro, 2018 winner Luka Modric, Vinicius and former Chelsea player Antonio Rudiger.

Beaten Champions League finalists Liverpool have seven play-

ers nominated, the most of any club. They are Trent Alexander-Arnold, Luis Diaz, Fabinho, Sadio Mane, since transferred to Bayern Munich, Darwin Nunez, Mohamed Salah and Virgil Van Dijk.

There is a 20-strong list for the women’s Ballon d’Or including English stars Bronze, Millie Bright and Arsenal forward Beth Mead who won the Golden Boot at the women’s Euro.

France have four nominations - Selma Bacha, Kadidiatou Diani, Marie-Antoinette Katoto and Wendie Renard.

AFF



Borussia Dortmund’s Jamie Bynoe-Gittens (R) is about to score against Freiburg (AFP)

Bynoe-Gittens propels Dortmund to comeback win over Freiburg

Berlin, Germany - Eighteen-year-old Englishman Jamie Bynoe-Gittens scored one and created another as Borussia Dortmund came back to defeat Freiburg 3-1 on Friday with all their goals coming in the last 13 minutes of the game.

With the game drifting towards defeat, Dortmund were again able to rely on their young brigade, with Bynoe-Gittens and 17-year-old Youssoufa Moukoko scoring two quick goals to see the visitors pick up a valuable three points in their quest for a sixth Bundesliga title.

Dortmund manager Edin Terzic lauded his side’s depth and praised “game-changer” Bynoe-Gittens.

“With him, it’s pretty simple - he’s got the skills to decide games,” said Terzic.

“He’s a game-changer and (I told him when he came on) I wanted to see that from him.

The visitors dominated the early stages, with Anthony Mod-

este - playing in his first game for Dortmund just days after transferring from FC Cologne - striking up an immediate partnership with captain Marco Reus.

Reus teed up Modeste to run into the left side of the penalty box in the 20th minute, forcing Freiburg keeper Mark Flekken into a save.

Modeste also had a chance right in front in the 32nd minute after superb one touch football from Jude Bellingham and Raphael Guerreiro, but the Portuguese’s cross was inches too high.

As if stunned into action, Freiburg then flipped a switch, building pressure on a suddenly shaky Dortmund defence.

Roland Sallai won a free kick on the edge of the box with 33 minutes played.

Dead-ball specialist Vincenzo Grifo stepped up to force a fingertip save from Gregor Kobel in goal.

Freiburg took the lead minutes

later, when former Dortmund defender Matthias Ginter found Michael Gregoritsch who deftly drifted a header over Kobel and into the top right corner of the goal.

Terzic turned to youth halfway through the second half, bringing on Bynoe-Gittens and Moukoko to introduce some potency to Dortmund’s attack.

Known more for his dribbling and assists, the Englishman equalised with a stunning strike from outside the box.

While his shot was helped by a poor attempted save from Freiburg keeper Mark Flekken, the goal spurred Bynoe-Gittens and Dortmund into action

The former Manchester City academy player then set up Dortmund’s second just a minute later when he slalomed past several Freiburg defenders on the edge of the area before delivering a no-look pass to Julian Brandt.

AFF

Barca register Lewandowski, Kessie on eve of new season

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona managed to register new signings Robert Lewandowski, Franck Kessie, Andreas Christensen and Raphinha on Friday in time for their Liga opener against Rayo Vallecano on Saturday.

However, French defender Jules Kounde remains unregistered with La Liga.

Barcelona have spent 153 million euros on transfer fees alone to strengthen their squad, with Lewandowski the most notable new arrival from Bayern Munich.

That deal came a year after Barca were forced to let Lionel Messi go to PSG as the Catalan giants laboured under eye-watering reported debts of 1.35 billion euros (\$1.39 billion).

Faced with severe limits on spending in order to comply with La Liga’s financial controls, Barcelona needed to raise money quickly to be able to invest in signings and, crucially, to register new players. Earlier Friday, Barcelona sold another part of their media production unit “Barca Studios” for 100 million euros to Orpheus Media.

Barcelona have already sold



Barcelona’s Robert Lewandowski (L) with team-mates Pedri (C) and Gavi (AFP)

25 percent of their domestic television rights for the next quarter of a century to US investment firm Sixth Street for some 400 million euros. They had already sold 24.5 percent of Barca Studios, which manages the club’s digital business and audio-visual productions, to Socios.com for 100 million euros on August 1,

and then another 25 percent to US investment firm GDA Luma for 100 million euros more.

In the space of a few weeks, 600 million euros had been brought in to fill the coffers.

According to Marca, French international Kounde can only be registered if the club reduces its payroll. “So in the next few days,

players in the squad will have to leave,” claimed the daily.

Kounde signed at the end of July on a five-year deal.

According to the Spanish press, Barca paid 50 million euros, with 10 million in bonuses, to recruit the defender from Sevilla.

AFF

Osasuna stun Sevilla in La Liga opener

Madrid, Spain - Osasuna stunned Champions League qualifiers Sevilla 2-1 in the opening match of the new Liga season on Friday.

Argentine striker Ezequiel ‘Chimy’ Avila gave Osasuna a ninth-minute lead. However, the advantage lasted just two minutes before Rafa Mir made the most of a fine pass from Papu Gomez to equalise.

Sevilla finished last season in fourth spot in La Liga, 27 points

ahead of Osasuna in 10th.

But the underdogs were not overawed and grabbed a 74th-minute winner from the penalty spot courtesy of Aimar Oroz.

Sevilla lost centre-backs Jules Kounde and Diego Carlos to Barcelona and Aston Villa respectively in the summer.

On Friday, they were also without veteran striker Isco who arrived on a free transfer from Real Madrid.

AFF



Osasuna’s Ezequiel Avila (L) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Sevilla in the Spanish league on Friday (AFP)

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