

Region's 127mn people need humanitarian aid

Cairo, Egypt - The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region has spiked massively, increasing by 91% since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and displacement, according to World Health Organization.

Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day 2023 on August 19, stated that 127mn people in the region are currently in need of humanitarian aid, representing 37% of people in need globally.

"In Sudan, the number of people in need has increased by 57% since April 2023 as a result of the war," he said.

Eight countries - Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen - already experience protracted crises exacerbated by armed conflict, population displacement, disease outbreak, hunger and natural disasters.

"On this World Humanitarian Day, we come together to recognise the unwavering dedication and compassion of communities, humanitarian workers and healthcare workers who tirelessly serve those in need



People in need of humanitarian assistance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region has spiked massively, increasing by 91% since 2020

DR AHMED AL MANDHARI

worldwide."

This year's theme - No Matter What - resonates deeply, he said, "as we reflect on the challenges faced by the humanitarians caught in crises and their re-

markable efforts to alleviate the suffering of those around them".

This year's World Humanitarian Day coincided with "unprecedented culminating crises and emergencies worldwide", most

significantly in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region.

In 2022 and 2023, the WHO Regional Office for Eastern Mediterranean responded to five of the world's ten largest natural disasters, including droughts, massive flooding and earthquakes in the Greater Horn of Africa, Pakistan, Syria and Afghanistan.

Twelve of the region's 22 countries are experiencing armed conflict resulting in an increased trauma burden, displacement and attacks on healthcare. As a result of the war in Sudan, a devastated health system is struggling to respond to ever increasing needs, and already vulnerable populations are facing challenges related to displacement, food insecurity and circulating disease outbreaks.

"In 2023, people in our region are facing the threat of 49 disease outbreaks, including cholera, measles, COVID-19 and other public health emergencies of international concern," Dr Mandhari said, adding that disrupted health systems contribute to increased morbidity and mortality from infectious diseases, malnutrition, obstetric complications and non-communicable diseases.

Initiative to support rural women and jobseekers

Project to boost food production and income of social security families is open to all citizens who are owners or tenants of a house



Our Correspondent Muscat

To achieve self-sufficiency in vegetable production and support low-income families, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has launched a new initiative to plant home gardens throughout the sultanate.

An official of MAFWR informed that the plan is to grow vegetables and fruits such as lettuce, parsley, spinach, tomato, cucumber, strawberry and pepper in home gardens, and bolster not just production but also income of households, especially those under social security.

Under the project, home gardens will employ hydroponics to produce high quality vegetables. "With hydroponics, farmers are able to grow crops in a controlled environment. This allows them to extend cropping into higher priced periods or grow crops that are not normally suited to a par-

ticular climate. A key aspect to this is being able to maintain a stable root zone temperature that promotes healthy growth and oxygen retention within the nutrient solution," the MAFWR official said. The project targets rural women farmers, jobseekers, social security families and women entrepreneurs in the agricultural field.

Explaining the eligibility rules, the official said participation is open to all citizens who are owners or tenants of a house. "The ministry will provide training and qualification for the participants to be able to use the correct methods of agriculture and irrigation."

Besides promoting the culture of home gardens, the initiative will encourage the use of modern technologies in the field of agriculture, while caring for home gardens and strengthening community partnerships.

MAFWR will receive applications for those wishing to partici-

pate through the departments of agriculture, fisheries and water resources in all wilayats of Oman.

Elaborating on the ministry's efforts to support rural women, the MAFWR official said, "In 2021, the ministry and Oman Development Bank launched a financing programme for rural women, called Rifi, which targets facilitating around 800 women entrepreneurs in Oman."

He said the bank received 135 applications to finance projects worth RO667,400 under Rifi till March 2023. "The programme aims to localise advanced agricultural methods, enhance and increase contribution of rural women's projects to the gross domestic product, increase facilities for rural self-employment, develop the agricultural sector, and facilitate access to finance for women entrepreneurs in agricultural work."

He urged Omani women - especially jobseekers - to participate in the new initiative.

NEWS BRIEF

RAFO BAND WINS THIRD PLACE AT WORLD MUSIC COMPETITION IN SCOTLAND

Muscat - The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) music band, represented by its bagpipes and drums divisions, won the overall third place among 40 bands that took part in the fourth stage competitions of the World Music Competition held in Perth, Scotland.

The RAFO band also secured second place in the drums category of the competition. The fourth stage of the competition included musical performances by bagpipes and drums, in addition to concerts, infantry musical compositions scheduled for the competition, a walking stick competition and military marches.



Sohar International-HSBC Bank Oman merger complete



Spain win Women's World Cup for the first time

Housing Ministry offers 296 plots of land for investments in H1 2023

Our Correspondent Muscat

To boost investments in the sultanate, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) offered 296 government plots of land via public auction in the first six months of 2023.

According to an official at MHUP, this is in line with the ministry's efforts to support growth of the GDP, boost economic output through manufacturing, commercial and other industrial activities, fuel socio-economic development and support the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Of the 296 plots, 89 are in Dakhliyah, 64 in Musandam, 46 in Muscat, 39 in Dhofar, 16 in Dhahirah, 15 in South Batinah, 12 in Buraimi, five each in North Batinah and North Sharqiyah, four in South Sharqiyah and one in Al Wusta.

The plots offered are not restricted for any particular purpose and are located in areas with large population density.



This is in line with the ministry's efforts to support growth of the GDP and boost economic output

MHUP OFFICIAL

The official added that the ministry also launched five investment sites as part of the national initiative of integrated residential neighbourhoods (Sorouh) in the same period. The initiative aims to achieve the objectives of population and economic growth, while enabling the private sector to attract investments in the governorates to

contribute to the development of integrated and sustainable urban communities.

Real estate worth RO1.4bn was traded in H1 2023, according to statistics released by the ministry. The figures also show the total number of beneficiaries of the Amlak platform, which includes 56 services in all sectors, reached 57,768 this year.

Oman Airports, Oman Air dissolve BoDs, elect new members

Muscat - The general assemblies of Oman Air and Oman Airports convened to dissolve their existing boards of directors (BoDs) and appoint fresh members to each assembly.

The new board of directors of Oman Air and Oman Airports later held separate meetings under the chairmanship of H E Said Hamood al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Chairman of the board.

The meetings approved the new structure for Oman Air and the fresh committees for the Board of Directors. They also appointed a Deputy Chairman of the company's Board of Directors.

In the context of Oman Air, the Board of Directors also approved the implementation of executive actions for its financial sustainability programme. It underscored the significance of

conducting the programme in accordance with a comprehensive reform vision comprising commercial regulations and corporate governance of human capital.

Meanwhile, the Board of Directors of Oman Airports Company discussed the its strategy for the next five years, reviewed the financial reports for the first half of 2023, and agreed on forming new committees for the board. They also chose a Deputy Chairman for the Board of Directors.

H E Maawali emphasised the need for combined efforts in the upcoming phase to enhance the capabilities of civil aviation sector companies. This effort is in line with the government's directives that focus on maximising investment returns, achieving in-country added value and ensuring financial sustainability of the sector.



Russia's Luna-25 probe crashes on the Moon: Roscosmos

Moscow, Russia - The Luna-25 probe, Russia's first Moon mission in almost 50 years, has crashed on the Moon after an incident during pre-landing manoeuvres, Russian space agency Roscosmos said on Sunday.

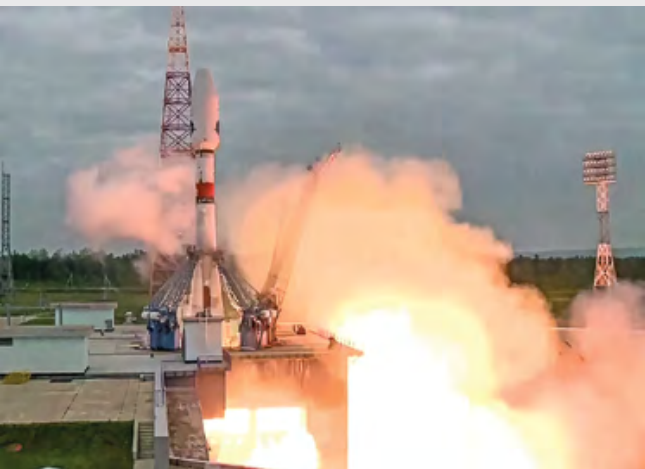
Communication with Luna-25 was lost at 2:57pm (1157 GMT) on Saturday, Roscosmos said. According to preliminary findings, the lander "has ceased to exist following a collision with the Moon's surface".

"Measures taken on August

19 and 20 to locate the craft and make contact with it were unsuccessful," Roscosmos added.

It said a ministerial investigation would be launched into the crash, without giving any indication of what technical problems might have occurred.

With Luna-25, Moscow had hoped to build on the legacy of its Soviet-era Luna programme, marking a return to independent lunar exploration in the face of financial troubles and corruption scandals at the programme and



growing isolation from the West.

The 800kg Luna-25 probe was to have made a soft landing on Monday on the lunar south pole - the first in history. Russia has not attempted to land on a celestial body since 1989, when the Soviet Union's ill-fated Phobos 2 probe to explore the moons of Mars failed due to an onboard computer malfunction.

Roscosmos boss Yuri Borisov had said the venture would be "risky", telling President Vladimir Putin in June that the probability

of it succeeding was "around 70%".

Luna-25 had been successfully placed in the Moon's orbit on Wednesday after being launched from the Vostochny cosmodrome in the Russian Far East. But on Saturday, Roscosmos said an "emergency" had been detected during a manoeuvre by the probe prior to its Moon landing, preventing the operation from being carried out.

AFP



MISSION - SPACE



With its strategic geographical location and growing investment in space technology, Oman holds significant potential to emerge as a notable player in satellite deployment and space exploration. The sultanate's expansive deserts provide ideal conditions for constructing launch facilities. With its stable political environment and commitment to technological advancement, Oman is poised to establish itself as a regional space hub. Collaborative efforts with international space agencies and private aerospace companies could further amplify Oman's capabilities and foster knowledge exchange. Is Oman ready to send satellites into space? Do you think the sultanate has the potential to become a space hub in the near future? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said -

Srikanth Ayyagari
Engineer

While still developing its space capabilities, the sultanate's strategic location and investments indicate potential for growth. With focused efforts, Oman could emerge as a regional space hub in the coming years.

Juslin Juno
Chemist

Oman is making strides in its space efforts. Its potential as a space hub depends on continued investment in infrastructure, technology and partnerships. With continued commitment, it could establish itself as a player in the global space industry.

Bilawal Ali
Sales and marketing head

Oman has been making strides in its space programme, including establishment of the Oman Astronomical Society which encourages interest and raises awareness on space sciences. However, readiness for future satellite missions would depend on technological advancements, funding and international collaborations.

Melissa Schiele
Conservation project manager

It depends on which sensors the satellites will have. Remote sensing devices dedicated to the region could be a game changer for land use change, conservation area monitoring and illegal fisheries and security surveillance.

Harsh Anjaria
Landscape architect

Oman's landscape provides ample opportunities for space experiments. As for launching a space mission, I don't think in the next five to eight years. Additionally, locations near the Equator are preferred to launch rockets.

Ras Aslam
Teacher

Oman's Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has announced the identification of potential space launch sites, marking a significant step in the sultanate's space exploration programme. And with Duqm's space settlement project, the sultanate is not very far from becoming a space hub in the region.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

In light of the 8% increase in divorce rate in Oman in 2022, what measures should young couples take to reduce chances of marital discord?

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

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Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
(PRE/23/128) 2023/MM/HQ-43	Maintenance of Landscaping and Cleaning Works at As Seeb (A)	09/09/2023	21/09/2023	Excellent/ First
(PRE/23/129) 2023/MM/HQ-44	Maintenance of Landscaping and Cleaning Works at As Seeb (B)	09/09/2023	21/09/2023	Excellent/ First
(PRE/23/130) 2023/MM/HQ-45	Maintenance of Landscaping and Cleaning Works at As Seeb (C)	09/09/2023	21/09/2023	Excellent/ First
(PRE/23/131) 2023/MM/HQ-46	Maintenance of Landscaping and Cleaning Works at As Boshier (C)	09/09/2023	21/09/2023	Excellent/ First
(PRE/23/132) 2023/MM/HQ-47	Maintenance of Landscaping and Cleaning Works at Muttrah & Muscat	09/09/2023	21/09/2023	Excellent/ First
(PRE/23/156) 2023/MM/HQ-48	Consultancy Services for Development of Quriyat Seafront	09/09/2023	01/10/2023	First
(PRE/23/180) 2023/MM/HQ-49	Supply of Lighting Materials	09/09/2023	01/10/2023	Specialist
(PRE/23/189) 2023/MM/Q5-50	Consultancy Services for Development of Al Mahaj Commercial Area	09/09/2023	01/10/2023	First
(PRE/23/190) 2023/MM/Q5-61	Design & construction of the Upgradation of Existing AL Marid at Al Uthaiba	09/09/2023	21/09/2023	Excellent
(PRE/23/191) 2023/MM/Q5-62	Reconstruction of Silver Jubilee	09/09/2023	01/10/2023	First

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75 volunteers participate in indigenous tree planting drive in Dhofar held by EA

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Environment Authority (EA) launched a voluntary campaign to plant indigenous trees in Dhofar on Sunday to increase the vegetation cover.

In a statement, EA said, 'The authority, in cooperation with the Supreme Council for the Environment in the Kingdom of Bahrain and OQ company in Salalah, launched a campaign to plant wild seedlings in the Hamreer



Plain in Salalah with the participation of 75 volunteers.'

The campaign to grow wild trees aims to increase green cover in Dhofar and preserve perennial trees at tourist sites, in addition to conserving the environment and attracting tourists.

The campaign is part of EA's mission launched in January 2020 to plant 10mn indigenous trees in ten years. The wild species include ghaf, sumr, sidr, shue, tiq, talh, mitan, sarh and alalan.

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MoHERI holds meeting for scholarship students

Muscat - The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) held an introductory meeting for students who secured admission on foreign scholarships and study grants for the academic year 2023/2024 on Sunday.

The meeting at Sultan Qaboos University aimed at familiarising the students and their parents with the latest developments and scholarship procedures. MoHERI laid emphasis on security and legal awareness and underlined the issues to which students should pay attention during their study period.

Students also learnt about the support they can get from the ministry's Directorate General of Scholarships and offices of cultural attachés abroad.

GEN NU'AMANI RECEIVES IRAQI, SYRIAN ENVOYS



H E Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, received in his office H E Qais Saad al Amri, Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq to the Sultanate of Oman, on Sunday. H E Gen Nu'amani underscored the bilateral relations between Oman and Iraq at the meeting. The two sides reviewed areas of cooperation and means of enhancing these. They also exchanged views on several matters of common concern. On Sunday, H E Gen Nu'amani also received H E Idris Maya, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Sultanate of Oman. H E Gen Nu'amani highlighted the march of relations between Oman and Syria during the meeting. The two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest and means of promoting these (ONA)

MTCIT to hold drone competition on Aug 23

Our Correspondent Muscat

In its efforts to spread awareness on the importance of remote controlled flying robots, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) will conduct a drone competition on August 23, 4pm, at Sultan Qaboos University's College of Engineering.

An official at MTCIT said, "The ministry, in partnership with Sultan Qaboos University and support of Ooredoo, will hold 'Oman Competition for Drones'. The annual event will feature drones equipped with artificial intelligence systems. The programme will include workshops and training courses to develop and refine skills of participants."

According the official, the programme targets students of colleges and universities who are looking to acquire new technical skills - particularly in the field of



The annual event will feature drones equipped with artificial intelligence systems. The programme will include workshops and training courses

MTCIT OFFICIAL

drones - that will enable them to actively participate in implementing technical solutions and

contribute to building the national economy. It also aims to prepare and support the winning

participants to compete in regional and international competitions.

MTCIT has set conditions to accept participants, including nationality (Omani), being a student pursuing a Bachelor's degree or a graduate with Bachelor's degree and having knowledge of programming languages.

MoH inks agreement with OMIFCO, Oman LNG for dialysis unit in Bidiyah Hospital

Muscat - The Ministry of Health signed an agreement with Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) and Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (Oman LNG) on Sunday to fund the establishment of a dialysis unit in Bidiyah Hospital, North Sharqiyah.

The agreement signing ceremony took place at the ministry headquarters and was signed by H E Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Planning and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Health,

Abdullah Humaid Salim al Hashami, CFO of OMIFCO, and Dr Amor al Matani, CEO of Oman LNG Development Foundation, in the presence of Sheikh Mansoor al Hajri, Representative of Bidiyah in Majlis A'Shura.

H E Dr Fatima stressed the importance of public-private partnerships in the sultanate to achieve the public's interests and needs, while praising OMIFCO and Oman LNG's initiative to finance the setting up of the dialysis unit in Bidiyah Hospital.

According to H E Dr Fatima, signing of the agreement is part of a strategic partnership for the common good of the community and to upgrade public welfare services and developmental projects across the sultanate. She described establishment of the dialysis unit in Bidiyah as among the ministry's top priority projects to serve the people of North Sharqiyah.

On the occasion of the agreement signing, Hashami said OMIFCO is proud to collaborate



(Supplied photo)

with MoH to support the establishment of the dialysis unit, contributing to enhance health services provided to patients with kidney failure in North Sharqiyah.

Hashami informed that signing of the agreement is in line with OMIFCO's corporate social responsibility programmes to enhance the quality of life in communities it works in and to support the health sector.

Commenting on the agreement, Matani said, "Oman LNG has long prioritised the health

sector as one of its key focuses. This support intends to reflect the strategic partnership efforts between the company and MoH. The Kidney Dialysis Unit Refurbishment Project aims to provide the most advanced technical services and cutting-edge medical equipment to accommodate more patients, ensure better healthcare provision and reduce waiting times. This initiative complements Oman LNG's prior funding of dialysis units in Dhofar and Muscat."



(Supplied photo)

NKK Investments to popularise innovative farming techniques

Muscat - Nailesh Kanaksi Khimji (NKK) Investments, a company engaged in the agritech, green hydrogen and sustainability sectors, has announced a partnership with UrbanKisaan, an agritech startup from United States with a research centre in India. This alliance is set to transform hydroponic farming practices in Oman, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Through this joint venture, NKK Investments aims to introduce UrbanKisaan's advanced hydroponic and vertical farming technology to Oman. The focal point of this venture is to popularise UrbanKisaan's innovative farming techniques, making these more accessible to Omani

farmers. By harnessing the power of hydroponics and vertical farming, the joint venture seeks to empower local agriculturalists to achieve higher yields with significantly fewer resources, consequently enabling them to invest wisely in the future.

A key facet of this collaboration lies in the intent to extend UrbanKisaan's revolutionary technology across Oman's borders to benefit farmers in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This technology, proven to be environmentally conscious and resource-efficient, allows crops to flourish with minimal water and land utilisation in comparison to conventional methods.

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16/2023	Services	Excellent & First	Request for Proposal Integrated Marketing Communications Tender for the Sultanate of Oman's Participation in Expo 2025, Osaka, Kansai, Japan

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 26 /08 / 2023. The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 04/09 /2023.

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Sri Lanka	839.72

Rates as on August 20

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Pakistan appoints former central bank chief as finance minister

A former head of Pakistan's central bank has been appointed finance minister in the interim government leading the country to an election due in months.

Shamshad Akhtar – the only woman in the 16-strong cabinet announced Thursday – takes charge with Pakistan's economy in dire straits, reliant on bailouts from the International Monetary Fund and loans from friendly nations to keep afloat.

It is her second stint with the portfolio, having also served as finance minister in the interim government that oversaw elections in 2018, according to an AFP report.

"She is an outstanding choice and fully capable of taking on the economic challenges the country is facing," said Aqeel Karim Dhedhi, a leading Pakistan business tycoon.

Akhtar served as head of the Southeast Asia Department of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) before taking over the governorship of the State Bank of Pakistan in 2006.

She was also previously a vice president at the World Bank in the Middle East and North Africa section, and a former senior special advisor to the United Nations secretary-general.

Sohar International completes merger with HSBC Bank Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar International Bank on Sunday marked a historic moment in its journey by ringing the market-opening bell at the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). The occasion celebrated the successful merger of HSBC Bank Oman with Sohar International, solidifying the bank's position as one of the fastest-growing financial institutions in Oman.

'In accordance with disclosures pertaining to the merger between Sohar International and HSBC Oman, and based on the confirmation issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP), Sohar International is pleased to announce the merger's completion as of August 17, 2023,' Sohar International said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

HSBC Oman has now fully merged with Sohar International, and all rights, obligations, assets (including contracts and employees), and liabilities of HSBC Oman have been transferred to Sohar International (as a going concern), as stipulated by the law, the disclosure said.

After the merger's completion, HSBC Oman has been delisted from the Muscat Stock Exchange.

'HSBC Oman's commercial registration, previously maintained with MOCIIP, has been cancelled, and its separate corporate identity and distinct legal status no longer exist. Further-



Sohar International on Sunday rang the market-opening bell at MSX to announce successful merger with HSBC Bank Oman

Muscat Stock Exchange approved increase of Sohar International's share capital and listing of shares in regular market of MSX, effective from Sunday

more, all its shares have been cancelled,' Sohar International noted.

Sohar International reported that it has received confirmation from the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCD) that all shareholders of HSBC

merger 15, 2022.

As per the bank's disclosure, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) has also confirmed its approval for the increase of Sohar International's issued share capital and the issuance and allotment of Sohar International shares to HSBC Oman shareholders.

The Muscat Stock Exchange approved the increase of Sohar International's share capital and the listing of shares in the regular market of the MSX, effective

from August 20, 2023.

The bell-ringing ceremony was attended by H E Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al-Murshidi, president of Oman Investment Authority, and H E Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, executive president of the CMA. They were joined by Mohammed Mahfooth al Ardhi, chairman of Sohar International, and Ahmed al Musalmi, CEO of Sohar International, along with other members of Sohar International's board and executive manage-

ment.

In a press statement, Ardhi said, "This glorious occasion marks the start of a new era for Sohar International - one that is marked with abundant growth prospects, not only for the bank but also for its stakeholders, investors, customers, and the thriving community that we proudly serve. As we embark on this transformative path, we stand firm in our unwavering commitment to inspire and innovate, steering our banking horizons to new heights of excellence."

Musalmi said, "The merger represents a momentous milestone that galvanizes our ambition to propel Sohar International to the pinnacle of success. It will act as a crucial catalyst in our relentless pursuit of advancing the financial ecosystem in Oman and exceeding the ever-evolving demands of a dynamic market. As we move forward, we will continue to reaffirm our position as a reliable partner in building a resilient economy for the nation."

According to the bank's statement, the merger opens a plethora of opportunities for Sohar International as it embarks on an exciting journey of strategic growth. The bank has diligently laid the groundwork to amplify its operations and expand its reach, both within and outside Oman. The infusion of additional capital allows for increased lending and investments, fortifying the bank's position as a key driver of economic growth and prosperity.

Big potential seen for green hydrogen in North Africa

Paris, France – By 2050 North Africa could become a leading exporter of green hydrogen with Europe its main market, according to a recent report projecting the future of an industry still in its infancy.

So-called green hydrogen is set "to redraw the global energy and resource map as early as 2030, creating a \$1.4tn-a-year market by 2050," according to the report from accounting consultancy Deloitte.

Hydrogen fuel – which can be produced from natural gas, biomass or nuclear power – is considered "green" when hydrogen molecules are split from water using electricity derived from renewables such as solar and wind that do not produce carbon emissions.

Less than one per cent of the world's hydrogen production presently qualifies as green.

But the climate crisis – coupled with both private and public investment – has sparked rapid growth in the sector.

The Hydrogen Council, a lobbying group, lists more than a thousand hydrogen projects in the pipeline worldwide.

Projects launched before 2030 would require about \$320bn dollars in investment, the Council said.

By 2050, according to Deloitte, the main green hydrogen exporters are likely to be North Africa (\$110bn per year), North America (\$63bn), Australia (\$39bn) and the Middle East (\$20bn).

Management consultancy reports can be assumed to heavily reflect the financial interests of their corporate clients, including



Less than 1% of world's hydrogen production presently qualifies as green

some of the world's largest carbon polluters.

But the need to meet climate targets and generous subsidies are driving demand for clean energy of all kinds, including green hydrogen.

Long-haul aviation and shipping industries – for which the type of electric batteries powering road vehicles is not an option – are also keen on hydrogen as an alternative to fossil fuels.

Moroccan Sun and wind

The emergence of a clean hydrogen market from solar and wind could also make the industry more inclusive of developing countries, says the report.

It would also allow Global South steel industries, for example, to leapfrog past coal.

For now, however, 99% of the global production remains "grey," meaning that hydrogen is produced by splitting methane molecules, which releases greenhouse gases no matter what kind of energy drives the process.

Truly green hydrogen releases

hydrogen from carbon-free water molecules (H2O) using an electrical current from a renewable source.

This is where Northern Africa may have a major role to play, says Sebastien Douguet, director of the Deloitte Energy and Modelling team and co-author of the report, which is based on International Energy Agency (IEA) data.

"We're seeing that a number of North African countries such as Morocco or Egypt are taking up the hydrogen issue, and that 'hydrogen strategies' are being announced there just a few years behind the European Union and the United States," Douguet told AFP.

"Morocco has very strong potential for wind energy that is often overlooked, and a great potential for solar power, and Egypt has the means to become the principal exporter of hydrogen to Europe in 2050 thanks to an existing natural gas pipeline" which could be adapted to transport hydrogen, he said.

AFP

Oman's Keryas Paper Industry sees surge in paper packaging demand

Muscat – In the backdrop of the surge in demand for paper packaging across the Middle East, Oman's Keryas Paper Industry is taking part in the upcoming Propaper Dubai 2023, which will run during September 12-14, 2023 in Dubai at the Festival Arena at Dubai Festival City.

"The growth in paper food packaging which surged during and after the pandemic continues to create growth for paper players in the Middle East markets, and specifically in the GCC, where internet penetration is the world's highest aiding online commerce. The opportunity size has also grown with verticals like pharma, personal care and cosmetics taking to paper packaging solutions in a big way riding the e-commerce boom," Omar Ali Abdullah al Hosni, chairman of Keryas Paper Industry, said in a press release.

Anticipating increased demand in this sector, Keryas Paper Industry had announced invest-



ments in kraft paper segment to manufacture re-cycled kraft paper jumbo reels, unveiling a US\$40mn kraft paper project in the UAE during the previous Propaper Expo in 2022.

A statement from the organisers of the expo, Verifair, said that the share of paper packaging in the estimated US\$74bn overall packaging market in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) continues to see an exponential growth with e-commerce boom and consumer preference veers to sustainable and environment-friendly solutions.

Propaper Dubai 2023 will host a large contingent of global paper and packaging companies which are at the vanguard of innovation. The show also incorporates Super Sourcing Dubai under the auspices of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO).

Industry experts participating at the upcoming leading B2B exhibition said that in line with this demand growth, investments in kraft paper mills have also risen in the region in the post-Covid era, with enhanced use of paper packaging across industry verti-

cals such as food, catering hygiene, pharma and cosmetics driving up demand.

"E-commerce continues to be on an upsurge in the GCC and larger MEA markets, and this has in turn catalysed the demand for packaging solutions across the board. Overall e-commerce market in the region may surpass US\$25bn within the next couple of years, and this will obviously fuel the need for paper packaging solutions, and paper industry with its sustainable and alternative propositions stand to gain," said Majid Rasheed, managing director of the UAE's Star Paper Mill Paper Industry.

Quoting a Data Bridge Market Research report, Propaper 2023 spokespeople said that kraft paper market will continue to gain market share. According to the forecast for 2020-2028, kraft paper market will grow at an annual rate of 3.8% in the UAE alone to over US\$54mn.

ADNOC Gas inks 5-year deal with Japan

Dubai, UAE – The United Arab Emirates' ADNOC Gas has signed a five-year liquefied natural gas supply deal with Japan's JAPEX worth up to \$550mn, the company announced.

No volumes were revealed for the agreement, which follows Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit in July and ADNOC Gas's flotation on the Abu Dhabi stock exchange in March.

"Japan is one of the UAE's



largest and most important energy partners and we are very pleased to strengthen this rela-

tionship through this LNG supply agreement with JAPEX," ADNOC Gas chief executive Ahmed Alebri

said in a statement.

Asian countries are major customers of gas and oil from the resource-rich Gulf, which also provides the bulk of Japan's oil supplies.

ADNOC Gas, a subsidiary of oil giant ADNOC that aims to tap into growing demand for the cleaner-burning fuel, became operational in January before going public in a \$2.5bn initial public offering three months later.

AFP

China's youth worry about tough job market

Beijing, China – Freshly graduated psychology major Zhang has failed to find a job in her chosen field of market research despite sending out thousands of CVs to Chinese employers.

The months-long search has taken an emotional toll on the 23-year-old, who had ironically conducted a survey on jobseeking anxiety as part of her university studies.

"After graduating, I've found that the pressure is really huge," she told AFP at a recruitment fair in Beijing this weekend, declining to provide her full name for fear of repercussions.

"For every ten resumes I send out I get one response," she said.

Zhang is one of millions of graduates entering China's job market at a time of soaring youth unemployment.

Recently, the figure has hit a record every month, with 21.3% of people aged 16 to 24 jobless in June.

Authorities on Tuesday abruptly said they would stop publishing age-related employment data, prompting public scepticism and concern over youth joblessness in the world's second-largest economy.

At career fairs in Beijing this week, attendees described a challenging landscape for inexperienced candidates hoping to land their first or second jobs.

Yang Yao, an unemployed 21-year-old with experience in media, was disappointed after browsing advertisements at a fair in central Beijing on Thursday



This photo taken on Saturday shows people attending a job fair in Beijing (AFP)

where employers mostly sought staff for low-paying sales and administrative positions.

He had quit his previous job in eastern China's Zhejiang province to move closer to his family in Beijing, and was now wracked with anxiety about his prospects after a fruitless few weeks of searching.

"Every night I find myself worrying, what if I can't find a job

what will I do about living costs? And I can't sleep at night," he told AFP.

Post-Covid slump

China has released a raft of indicators in recent months pointing to a slowdown in the country's post-Covid economic rebound, with weak consumer demand making firms reluctant to hire.

"Recent activity data generally

came on the weaker side, suggesting that the recovery is stalling," Jing Liu, Greater China chief economist at HSBC wrote in a note this week.

"This has been reflected by the labour market data," she added.

Xie Wei, a 39-year-old hiring manager at a telecommunications services firm, told AFP that companies that had survived

three years of disruption during China's zero-Covid pandemic restrictions were now more selective when taking on new employees.

The companies that have bounced back "will pick a direction, and this direction is first of all that the company must survive," he said.

He also said he felt that young workers, especially those born

after the mid-1990s, "are lacking psychological pressure, so they might be lazier" – echoing the government's stance that the youth should be willing to endure hardship.

However, Li Xiangyang, a 26-year-old former social media manager looking for a new job, said that "maybe in terms of promoting employment we are somewhat lacking".

"If you're in a second or third-tier city... there would be very few development opportunities in my industry," he told AFP.

"I feel like the policies have not caught up."

China has in recent weeks announced a series of measures to boost consumption, including large-scale festivals and sporting events, as well as an increase in spending on services involving catering and healthcare.

But economists have said the government needs to do more to boost consumers' and employers' confidence.

In one industry – insurance – positions appear to be plentiful, albeit without a guaranteed income.

Over a third of the booths at a job fair in northern Beijing on Saturday were taken up by insurance companies hoping to hire new sales representatives, with company staff trawling the premises for promising recruits.

"For insurance representatives, we can always expand our teams, so there is no limit on how many we recruit," said Yang, an insurance salesperson in her 40s. After waves of layoffs in other industries like education, "relatively more talent is pouring into this market", she added.

Recruiters at Saturday's fair showed AFP bank records proving that some teammates had made over a million yuan (\$137,300) in half a year, promising limitless wealth from the commission-based jobs.

AFP



A house for sale is seen in Arlington, Virginia, July 13, 2023 (AFP)

US mortgage rate hits highest level in 21 years

Washington, US – Mortgage rates in the United States have surged to the highest since 2002, said a home loan finance company, adding pressure to buyers who are already grappling with high costs and low inventory.

The popular 30-year fixed-rate mortgage reached 7.09% last week, said Freddie Mac in a statement, adding that it last rose above the seven per cent threshold in November 2022.

The housing market has been reeling since interest rates rapidly climbed in recent months, a trend that has made home owners reluctant to put their properties up for sale – having previously locked in lower rates on their mortgages.

The current rate will "make it even more difficult for potential homebuyers to afford the new home that they're looking for," said economist Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics.

"It's just becoming increasingly unaffordable. Rates are high, there're also signs that the flow of credit is being tightened as well and because of this,

there's basically no supply out there," he told AFP.

A year ago, the 30-year rate stood at 5.13% while rates hovered below three percent in late 2020.

The latest 7.09% figure is the highest since April 2002, according to Freddie Mac data.

"The more rates rise, the less likely you are to list your house because it just means that you have to move from your sub-four percent mortgage into a new mortgage," Klachkin said.

This could potentially double the cost of home owners' monthly payments, if rates go to eight percent, he added.

In June, sales of existing homes fell to the slowest rate since January while the median sales price hit the second-highest on record, according to National Association of Realtors (NAR) data.

The NAR noted that a third of homes were sold above list price that month. With a lack of existing homes for sale, buyers have been pushed into the market for new properties.

AFP

Ecuador votes on oil drilling in Amazon

Quito, Ecuador – To some, Ecuador's jungle is a home and a valuable tool in fighting climate change, to others, it is a vital solution to a struggling economy.

In an unusual example of climate democracy, it was Ecuadorians who were deciding what is more important, drilling for oil or protecting the Amazon, in a closely watched referendum on Sunday.

The drilling is taking place in the Yasuni National Park, one of the most diverse biospheres in the world, and home to three of the world's last uncontacted Indigenous populations.

It began in 2016 after years of fraught debate and failed efforts by then president Rafael Correa to persuade the international community to pay cash-strapped Ecuador \$3.6bn not to drill there.

After years of demands for a referendum, the country's highest court authorized the vote in May to decide the fate of "block 43," which contributes 12% of the 466,000 barrels per day produced by Ecuador.

The government of outgoing President Guillermo Lasso has estimated a loss of \$16bn over the next 20 years if drilling is halted.



Aerial view of the Waorani Community of Bamenó, Ecuador, taken on July 29, 2023 (AFP)

"The Yasuni has been like a mother to the world... We need to raise our voices and hands so that our mother can recover, that she is not injured, that she is not beaten," said Alicia Cahuiya, a Waorani leader born in the heart of the jungle.

The reserve is home to the Waorani and Kichwa tribes, as well as the Tagaeri, Taromenane and Dugakaeri, who choose to live isolated from the modern world.

Cahuiya said the reserve was

"a lung for the world," capturing carbon dioxide and pumping out oxygen and water vapor.

"Water vapor helps maintain a low temperature on the planet, it's like air conditioning" for the atmosphere, said Gonzalo Rivas, director of the Tiputini scientific station at the private San Francisco University in Quito.

The Amazon basin – which stretches across eight nations – is a vital carbon sink.

But scientists warn its destruction is pushing the world's

biggest rainforest dangerously close to a tipping point, beyond which trees would die off and release carbon rather than absorb it, with catastrophic consequences for the climate.

"This forest has allowed us to survive until today," said Rivas.

The Yasuni National Park houses some 2,000 tree, 610 bird, 204 mammal, 150 amphibian and more than 120 reptile species, according to the university.

The fate of the reserve has

drawn the attention of international celebrities such as Hollywood star and environmental activist Leonardo DiCaprio.

"With this first-of-its-kind referendum worldwide, Ecuador could become an example in democratizing climate politics, offering voters the chance to vote not just for the forest but also for Indigenous rights, our climate, and the well-being of our planet," he wrote on Instagram this month.

Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg also hailed the "historic referendum."

The NGO Amazon Frontlines said the vote was "a first-of-its-kind demonstration of climate democracy, where people, not corporations, get to decide on resource extraction and its limits.

Opinion polls published earlier this month showed a slight leaning to a "Yes" vote to halt oil drilling.

National oil company Petroecuador argues the block only occupies 80 hectares (200 acres) of more than a million hectares that make up the reserve. Locals in Yasuni are divided, with some supporting the oil companies and the benefits economic growth have brought to their villages.

AFP

Japan's consumer price inflation eases to 3.1%

Tokyo, Japan – Japan's consumer price inflation eased to 3.1% year on year in July, in line with market expectations, government data showed.

The figure for the world's third-largest economy, which excludes volatile fresh food prices, followed a 3.3% reading in June.

Stripping out fresh food and energy, Japan's prices rose 4.3%, data published by the internal affairs ministry showed.

Friday's core consumer price index figure matched



market expectations of 3.1% recorded in a Bloomberg survey.

Prices for processed food,

telecommunication costs and hotel rates rose while electricity bills declined.

Inflation in Japan has been

less extreme than price hikes seen in other major economies such as the United States, which have been fuelled by the war in Ukraine and supply-chain disruptions.

The Bank of Japan's two-percent inflation target has been surpassed every month for more than a year.

But the central bank sees recent price increases as driven by temporary factors, and so has stuck to its easing policies such as maintaining a negative interest rate.

Last month, the BoJ said it will allow "greater flexibility" in controlling bond yields, as it raised its full-year inflation forecast to 2.5% from its previous estimate of 1.8%.

The BoJ took a similar measure in December when it expanded the so-called yield curve control (YCC) range for government bonds to around plus or minus 0.5 percentage points, from a tighter range of plus or minus 0.25 percentage points.

AFP

Oman to hold health exhibition next month

In alignment with the Oman Vision 2040 strategy that identifies the healthcare sector as a pivotal industry for progression, the Oman Health Exhibition and Conference (OHEC) is all set to, once again, drive advancements, foster collaboration, and catalyse innovation within the sector.

Revered as the sultanate's leading international event dedicated to the healthcare and medical industry, OHEC is scheduled to take place from September 18 to 20, at Hall Number 3 of the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Organised by CONNECT (Oman Exhibitions Organising Company LLC) and conducted in strategic partnership with Oman's esteemed Ministry of Health (MoH), the event is supported by the Directorate General of Pharmaceutical Affairs and Drug Control (PADC), the Directorate General of Quality Assurance Center (DGQAC) and the Directorate of Private Health Establishment.

Co-located at the exhibition will be the Oman Health Conference that is organised under the patronage of the MoH and is accredited by CPD certification. While the exhibition timings extend from 9am to 8pm, the conference will follow a predefined agenda from 9am to 5pm on all three days.

As a testament to its expanding resonance, this year's edition



will boast the participation of over 160 local and international exhibitors and is poised to welcome more than 6000 visitors.

Hosted by the Ministry of Health, the Oman Health Conference will give experts from healthcare universities, government institutions and research associations a platform to share technical developments in the

sector and facilitate insightful conversations about the latest trends and innovations in the industry.

The second day of the Oman Health Conference will commemorate World Patient Safety Day with a presentation and panel discussion on Patient Engagement and Community Involvement, honing in on the

contribution of patients and caregivers to safety in healthcare.

Commenting on the significance of OHEC to Oman's burgeoning healthcare sector, Dr Qamra al Sariri, Director General of the Quality Assurance Center, said, "The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with Oman Health Exhibition and Conference, aims to enhance worldwide recogni-

tion regarding the importance of involving patients, families, and caregivers at every level and in all healthcare settings to enhance patient safety."

The expo, now in its 12th edition, will present an extensive exhibitor profile comprising professionals in the field of hospital and medical infrastructure, medical tourism experts, well-

known pharmaceutical brands, and specialists in nutrition and supplements.

A confluence of expertise and innovation, the event simultaneously serves as a platform to showcase the latest state-of-the-art medical technologies, facilitate collaboration between visitors and avant-garde healthcare pioneers, and promote empowerment and sustainability within the domain.

Geared towards promoting medical tourism, OHEC also stands as a model of synergy, where foreign expertise merges with local aspirations. With prominent global hospitals, healthcare establishments, and medical centers from around the world taking part, the event will feature dedicated Country Pavilions which include India, Iran, Malaysia, and Thailand.

In addition, companies from Lebanon, Oman, Poland, Pakistan, Turkey, and United Kingdom will showcase their latest offerings.

Apart from exploring a diverse spectrum of cutting-edge medical products, services, equipment, and technology, visitors to OHEC can glean firsthand insights into the latest developments and emerging trends in the industry through interactive opportunities with industry experts.

Beyond the knowledge exchange, visitors can connect with

an esteemed cohort of over 6,000 qualified key buyers, influential decision-makers, potential business partners, industry stakeholders and end-customers from both local and global markets, thereby, fostering a dynamic atmosphere for collaboration.

The multifaceted landscape at OHEC will also provide unparalleled opportunities to learn about Oman's pivotal healthcare projects and uncover fresh business avenues that stem from these initiatives.

In line with the Health Vision 2050, Oman aims to capitalise on these initiatives and collaborate with foreign firms to inject international facilities and expert resources into Oman.

Centred upon the tenets of constructing an efficient, responsive, and inclusive healthcare ecosystem, Oman's strategic focus on healthcare stands as a cornerstone in the edifice of nurturing a sustainable and thriving society. Within this context, OHEC stands resolute and is in perfect harmony with the country's visionary objectives. Meticulously curated as a gateway to bring in foreign expertise, specialised equipment and treatments, and the latest innovations in the realm, OHEC will enable Oman to reinstate itself as a leading medical hub while furthering its journey toward excellence in the field.



OAB reopens Nakhal branch

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) celebrated the opening of its upgraded and relocated Nakhal branch under the patronage of Said al Hakmani, Member of the Municipal Council of Nakhal.

Located at Nakhal Mall, the new relocated branch is offering customers an enhanced banking

experience from a new, more advantageous location and will allow OAB customers to be served more efficiently.

With enhanced digital capabilities, the Nakhal branch will also feature increased privacy for customers, including personal and business clients. The renovation

is part of OAB's ongoing programme of branch improvements, opening new branches and updating existing branches with new design and customer experience elements.

Other recent openings include the enhanced and relocated Ibra and Duqm branches.

Meethaq children savings account suitable to enhance saving habits

Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat continues to enhance its partnership with the community by encouraging people to develop healthy savings habits and enhance financial literacy. Throughout the past years, Meethaq has been keen to customize its services and products to meet the needs of different segment in society. Children are one of the most important segments as they can learn through the customised account to build a foundation to grow enhancing their financial management practices, which are bound to assist them later in life.

Meethaq Children Savings Account includes two age groups. For children under the age of 14, Meethaq offers Baraem Children savings account, and for minors in the age range of 14 to 17, they can benefit from a regular savings account.



Children can enjoy profit at competitive rates credited to the account on monthly basis and with no minimum balance requirement for profit eligibility. It offers Tiered/Slab based profit-rates, so the higher the average balance the higher the profit. Profit rates vary each month

based on Mudarabah pool calculation. Any parent or legal guardian can open the account for his/her children under the age of 18 years, from any Meethaq branch with a hassle-free process and minimum documentation. They can enjoy as well from cash withdrawal serv-

ices through any Meethaq branch.

Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager - Meethaq Personal Banking, said, "Meethaq has been keen to provide services that cater to the need of different age groups in society. The children account was developed to enhance savings habit concept for the younger generation and help parents prepare future plans for their children, guide them to learn financial management skills and introduce them to some banking concepts and concepts of sharia'a in this regard in an exciting manner.

"We are really pleased to see the positive feedback the account is receiving. We will continue Meethaq's journey to further develop its products to meet customers' needs and aspirations," he added.

ISWK holds Mission LiFE Mega Event to promote environment-friendly lifestyle

Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir celebrated an impactful event, the 'Mission LiFE Mega Event', under the aegis of the Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman on Wednesday.

The concept of 'Lifestyle for Environment' was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Glasgow in 2021, which seeks to channelise the efforts of individuals and communities into a global mass movement of positive behavioural change.

All the Indian schools in Oman enthusiastically participated in the 'Mission Life' campaign from August 13 to 20 by conducting various activities.

ISWK and ISWK Cambridge International conducted various activities as a part of the week-long celebrations: Poster making, preparing podcasts wherein parents shared their views on ways of adopting a healthy lifestyle, culinary competitions, role plays, model making, just to name a few.



The event aimed to raise awareness about adopting an environment-friendly lifestyle, promoting sustainability, and addressing pressing global environmental challenges. The event showcased a diverse range of activities, performances, and initiatives that reflect the commitment of the Indian

schools in Oman towards a greener and healthier future.

The mega event commenced with a grand welcome to the chief guest, H E Amit Narang, the Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman. The student council of ISWK presented a guard of honour to welcome the chief guest and other distin-

guished invitees.

The day's proceedings commenced with the inauguration of a new basketball court on the school premises by H E Narang. The synthetic basketball court, designed for performance and safety, is set to enhance the school's sports culture and encourage students to excel in

sports. The highlight of the event was the moment when H E Narang and other distinguished guests attempted to shoot a few baskets on the new red and blue coloured court.

Aligned with the theme and vision of the 'Mission Life' campaign, students of ISWK demonstrated a plethora of age specific

activities like yoga, Zumba, walking, jogging and cycling, which can help us stay fit.

The inauguration of the basketball court was followed by the inauguration of the exhibition on the seven themes proposed by 'Mission Life' campaign. H E Narang along with the other dignitaries kindled the auspicious

lamp and cut the ribbon in the senior school building.

The ambassador also visited the classrooms in which innovative exhibits were displayed by the students of ISWK as well as other Indian schools in Oman.

He appreciated the efforts put in by the students and teachers, the school said in a statement.



Schools shut as Israeli troops hunt for suspect

Two Israeli men were gunned down on Saturday at a car wash in Huwara - latest attack to rock West Bank

Huwara, Palestinian Territories - Schools were shut on Sunday in the occupied West Bank town of Huwara as troops searched for the suspected killer of an Israeli father and his son who were shot dead over the weekend.

The two Israeli men were gunned down on Saturday at a car wash in Huwara, in the latest attack to rock the territory where violence has surged this year.

Israeli media identified the two as Shay Silas Nigrekar (60) and Aviad Nir (28).

Nablus' acting governor Ghassan Daghlis ordered the closure of Huwara's schools "after requests from parents who are afraid of reactions from settlers", he told AFP.

Huwara, a Palestinian town near the city of Nablus, has seen a number of attacks on Jewish settlers or the Israeli military since early last year.

Settlers have also responded with revenge attacks on the town and surrounding villages.

"Whenever an attack occurs that negatively affects the residents of Huwara... settlers break in, hurl rocks and smash cars," local resident Ashraf Odeh said.

"The army can do nothing for you because its priority is to pro-



Israeli security forces block a road following a reported attack in the town of Huwara in the occupied West Bank, on Saturday (AFP)

tect the settlers before it protects us."

On Sunday, Israeli forces also blocked access to the nearby villages of Beita and Aqraba as their manhunt continued, an AFP correspondent reported from the area.

"Our security forces are currently looking for the murderer... this man's day will also come and sooner than he thinks," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at a Cabinet meeting on Sunday.

It was not the first time that

Nigrekar had visited Huwara, his relatives said.

"Apparently, he knew the car mechanics there," his relative Yitzhak Nigrekar told Army Radio.

"He was going often to Huwara. He had friends there

and I too had gone with him sometimes," Rina, a long-time companion of the victim, told Israel's Kan television channel.

In a separate incident on Sunday, an Israeli civilian was injured in the West Bank when troops fired at a group of 'masked sus-

pects' who turned out to be Israeli citizens.

The incident happened near the Israeli settlement of Maale Levona, not far from Nablus.

The army said a number of 'masked suspects' were seen in the area of Maale Levona at

around 3.00am on Sunday.

"The soldiers opened fire according to standard operating procedures, during which one of the suspects was injured," the army said.

"It was later revealed that the suspects are Israeli citizens who were masked."

The army did not provide further details and said the incident was under investigation.

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence since early last year, with a string of attacks by Palestinians on Israeli targets, repeated Israeli army raids and violence by Jewish settlers against Palestinian communities.

At least 218 Palestinians have been killed in violence linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict this year.

Some 30 Israelis, one Ukrainian and one Italian have also been killed, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources on both sides.

They include, on the Palestinian side, combatants as well as civilians and, on the Israeli side, three members of the Arab minority. Israel occupied the West Bank following the Six-Day War of 1967.

AFP

Firefighters make gains against Spain blaze

La Orotava, Spain - Firefighters made gains in their battle against a vast wildfire on Tenerife on Sunday after better-than-expected overnight weather helped them keep the blaze from destroying homes on the Spanish holiday island, regional officials said.

The huge fire broke out late Tuesday in a mountainous north-eastern area, quickly morphing into the Canary Islands' biggest-ever.

So far the blaze, which has a perimeter of 70km, has burned through 8,400 hectares, or just over 4% of Tenerife's overall surface area, forcing more than 12,000 people to flee their homes.

Despite expectations of a difficult night, things went "much better than expected", Canary Islands leader Fernando Clavijo said. "We warned of a complex situation, with rising temperatures and wind... and it's true the night started very hard with many calls saying the fire was very close to people's homes," he told reporters Sunday morning.

But the firefighters 'worked very intensively' and got through the night without losing a single



Locals gather on a street as a wildfire rages out of control through forested slopes in La Orotava on the Canary Island of Tenerife, in Spain on Saturday (AFP)

home to the blaze, he said, describing it as 'almost a miracle'.

Montse Roman, technical head of the operation, said overnight operations were "mainly focused on defending infrastructure and homes on the northern flank of the fire", confirming there had "not been any more evacuations or confinement orders".

Some 20 aerial units were to join the battle against the blaze on Sunday alongside two more coordination units.

Late Saturday, Clavijo said the wildfire had so far displaced "a total of 12,279 people", citing figures from the Guardia Civil police. As the fire spread down the mountainside towards the northern town of La Matanza de

Acentejo on Saturday afternoon, Candelaria Bencomo Betancor, a farmer in her 70s, looked on in anguish.

"The fire is close to our farm, we've got trucks, vans, chickens, everything... it's a business that is going well but if the fire comes, it will totally ruin us," she told AFP TV, on the verge of tears.

"They have to do something

because the fire is right there."

So far the fire has affected 11 municipalities on Tenerife, the largest of the seven Canary Islands, with the emergency services saying air quality was affected across much of the island "due to the smoke generated by the fire".

Pedro Martinez, who is in charge of firefighting efforts, said the blaze was "behaving like a sixth-generation wildfire" - a term referring to a mega forest fire, and efforts to tackle the flames were being hampered by the huge clouds of smoke and the wind.

The blaze has generated a vast pillar of smoke that now stretches some 8km into the air, rising far above the summit of Mount Teide, the volcano that towers over the island.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is expected to visit the area on Monday.

Last year Spain suffered more than 500 blazes that destroyed more than 300,000 hectares, making it the worst-hit country in Europe, according to the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS).

AFP

Iran realtor arrested after couple sells apartment to dog

Tehran, Iran - Iranian police have arrested the head of a real estate agency after a viral video showed his firm selling an apartment to a dog, officials said on Sunday.

In the video, which spread widely over the weekend, an Iranian couple signed a contract transferring title of their apartment to their furry, white, small-breed dog.

The animal, named Chester, placed its paws on an ink pad with the help of a woman before the contract was stamped.

She said in the video that the couple had no "heirs and that they wanted to sell the apartment to the dog".

There is no law banning dog ownership in Iran but, as in many Muslim countries, they are considered unclean.

Conservative clerics have advised against keeping them as pets.

On Sunday, ISNA news

The animal, named Chester, placed its paws on an ink pad with the help of a woman before the deal was stamped

agency reported that the "police launched an investigation" following the video.

'The police arrested the head of the real estate agency and shuttered the firm on Saturday', the judiciary's Mizan Online website said, quoting deputy prosecutor general Reza Tabar.

Tabar said the sale seeks to 'normalise the violation of the society's moral values', and has 'no legal basis'.

Mizan did not identify the arrested realtor.

AFP

Illegal logging turning Syria's once lush forests into 'barren land'

Damascus, Syria - On a riverbank in war-ravaged Syria's north, felling has reduced what was once a lush forest to dispersed trees and decimated trunks poking out from dry, crumbly soil.

Twelve years of conflict that led to a spike in illegal logging, along with the effects of climate change and other factors, have eroded Syria's greenery.

The dwindling forest on the shores of the Euphrates river "is shrinking every year", said Ahmed al Sheikh (40), a supermarket owner in the village of Jaabar, in the Kurdish-held part of Syria's Raqa province.

Before, "the forest would attract tourists, birds, purify the air and protect the area from dust storms", he said.

But fuel shortages and rampant poverty during the war have pushed many Syrians to chop the trees to sell or use for heating,

dealing a blow to the nature surrounding Jaabar.

Its ancient citadel had made the village a popular pre-war tourist attraction, with a reforestation project launched in the mid-1990s offering rare respite from the searing heat.

"Some people cut down the trees to sell them and earn money, others to keep warm during the winter," Sheikh said.

"If this goes on, desertification will follow."

Residents told AFP they hear loggers riding motorbikes into the forest at night to cut down trees.

Even in broad daylight, young men sneak into the woods to chop trees, evading the handful of forest guards patrolling the vast, green spaces.

Syria's war has killed more than 500,000 people and displaced millions.

It has also devastated the environment, triggering an 'alarm-



Trunks of the felled trees stand at the Tabqa Reserve near the village of Jaabar, in Syria's Raqa governorate (AFP)

ing' loss of forest cover across the country, Dutch peacebuilding group PAX warned in a report earlier this year.

The country has witnessed a "26% decrease in tree cover since 2000", according to data

from Global Forest Watch.

Ten kilometres from Jaabar, the same fate has befallen the trees of Tuwayhina.

"In my childhood, we used to come here with friends to sit under the shade of eucalyptus

and pine trees," said Mohammed Ali, surrounded by tree trunks scattered across the sun-scorched earth.

"But now it is a barren land," said the 30-year-old nurse. "Now, there is no shade left, only

the heat of the sun everywhere."

"The dust storms never stop, the lake is drying up and there are no trees left," Ali said, referring to Lake Assad, Syria's largest freshwater dam reservoir.

Water levels have dropped and pollution has worsened in the Euphrates and the reservoir it feeds, with the river's flow further impacted by upstream dams in Turkey.

Deforestation in Syria is largely attributed to logging and thinning for firewood, according to the PAX report.

'Soaring fuel prices combined with massive displacement form the main driver for large-scale deforestation throughout Syria,' it said.

'Civilians are cutting down trees for cooking and heating, while there are clear indications that armed groups also use illegal logging and wood sales as a source of income.'

The once-dense forests of Syria's west 'have suffered the most degradation caused by the war', mostly from tree felling and wildfires, PAX said.

Latakia, Hama, Homs and Idlib provinces lost at least 36 percent of their trees in the decade following 2011, when the conflict erupted, according to PAX.

In the northeast, authorities have 'no precise data' about the damage but its impact is 'obvious', Ibrahim Asaad, who co-chairs the Kurdish semi-autonomous administration's environment body, said.

The area was the country's breadbasket in pre-war times, but has witnessed severe droughts and reduced rainfall in recent years. On the outskirts of Hasakeh, a city further east, the Mount Abdulaziz reserve has been plagued by dry spells and some illegal logging.

AFP

Ukraine's Zelensky in Netherlands for F-16

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in the Netherlands on Sunday aiming to strengthen his country's air power, a day after a 'heinous' Russian missile strike killed seven people and wounded 148 in Chernihiv.

The United States on Friday approved the transfer to Ukraine of Dutch and Danish US-made F-16 fighter jets, a key demand by Kyiv as it seeks greater firepower from allies during a grinding counteroffensive against Russia. Zelensky's flight landed at a Dutch air force base in Eindhoven at around midday, a Dutch government spokesperson told AFP, although details of the delivery of aircraft to Ukraine have not been unveiled.

"Together with the First Lady and the team, we arrived in the Netherlands. As always, we will have substantive talks with Prime Minister Mark Rutte," Zelensky posted on Telegram in English.

"The main issue is F-16 for Ukraine to protect our people from Russian terror. We are getting stronger."

The Netherlands and Denmark are leading a plan to train Ukrainian pilots on using the US-made aircraft as part of an 11-nation coalition, with training potentially complete by early 2024.

Washington has strict rules on the sale or transfer of US military equipment by its allies.



A journalist inspects a Danish F-16A fighter jet in the hangar at Skrydstrup Air Base in the town of Vojens, northern Denmark, on Sunday (AFP)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said Moscow will regard Western F-16 fighter jets sent to Ukraine as a "nuclear" threat because of their capacity to carry atomic weapons.

Zelensky was in Sweden on Saturday, finalising with Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson the pro-

duction of V90 armoured vehicles in Ukraine and Ukrainian pilots participating in test trials of Swedish Gripen fighter jets.

Russia said it thwarted Ukrainian drone attacks on Moscow and its region on Sunday, the second such incident in two days.

Both sides have reported regular drone incursions during the conflict, with strikes on Russian territory becoming increasingly regular.

'At around 4am, an attempt by the Kyiv regime to carry out a terrorist attack by drone on infrastructure in Moscow and the

Moscow region was thwarted,' the Russian defence ministry said in a statement.

The Moscow-bound drone was destroyed by 'electronic warfare' and crashed into an uninhabited area after losing control, the ministry added, reporting no victims or damage.

Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyenin thanked Russia's military for their work on the Telegram messaging app.

Aviation agency Rosaviatsia said flights to the Domodedovo and Vnukovo international airports were 'temporarily limited' at night before returning to normal, according to the RIA Novosti news agency.

A Ukrainian drone raid also hit a railway station in the western

15 people underwent surgeries," he said in a post on Telegram, adding that "more than 500 homes suffered damage".

Zelensky had noted the dead included a six-year-old girl and that there were 15 children among the wounded.

Denise Brown, UN humanitarian coordinator for Ukraine, said it was "heinous to attack the main square of a large city, in the morning, while people are out

Volodymyr Zelensky vowed 'a tangible answer' to Russian missile strike on Chernihiv, as some attended morning church services on the occasion of Orthodox holiday of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Saturday

Russian city of Kursk, injuring five people, the regional governor said early on Sunday. In the southern region of Rostov that borders Ukraine, Russian air defence intercepted two Ukrainian drones, the governor said.

Zelensky vowed 'a tangible answer' to Saturday's attack on the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv, which came during the Orthodox holiday of the Transfiguration of the Lord as some attended morning church services.

Vyacheslav Chaus, governor of the Chernihiv region, announced "7 people dead, 148 people received injuries" in an update on Sunday.

"41 people remain in hospitals.

walking, some going to church to celebrate a religious day for many Ukrainians".

Chernihiv, 150km north of Kyiv towards Belarus, had largely been spared from major attacks since the first months of Russia's invasion as fierce fighting rages in the east and south.

The Russian army marched through the city when it invaded Ukraine through Belarus in February 2022, before being repelled by Kyiv's forces.

Ukraine launched its widely expected counteroffensive in June but has come up against fierce resistance from entrenched Russian forces.

AFP

18 burn to death in Pakistan as bus smashes into diesel carrier



Rescue workers remove a victim from the charred passenger bus after an accident on a highway near the town of Pindi Bhattian in eastern Punjab province of Pakistan on Sunday (AFP)

Islamabad, Pakistan - At least 18 people burned to death on Sunday when an overnight bus smashed into another vehicle carrying diesel in eastern Pakistan, officials said.

The accident took place on a motorway at around 4.30am near the town of Pindi Bhattian in eastern Punjab province.

"Within five minutes, the whole bus was engulfed in flames. Eighteen people burned alive whereas 16 others were injured, of whom four are critical," senior police officer Fahad Ahmed told AFP

Within five minutes [of smashing into another vehicle carrying diesel], the whole bus was engulfed in flames

FAHAD AHMED

on the phone. "It seems that the driver of the bus dozed off."

The Suzuki open-back van

was carrying drums of diesel and petrol.

Ramshackle highways, lax safety measures and reckless driving contribute to Pakistan's dire road safety record.

Passenger buses are frequently crammed to capacity and seatbelts are not commonly worn, meaning high death tolls from single vehicle accidents are common.

In January, at least 40 people died when a bus plunged off a bridge in southwestern Pakistan and burst into flames.

AFP

Japan PM says no decision on Fukushima water release date

Tomioka, Japan - Japanese premier Fumio Kishida said on Sunday his government has not yet decided when to begin releasing treated water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean.

Media reports suggest that the discharge of some of the 1.34mn tonnes of water, which Japan insists is safe, could begin as soon as this month, despite anger from China and concern elsewhere.

Speaking at the Fukushima site, wrecked by a tsunami in 2011 in one of the world's worst atomic accidents, Kishida said he would first meet fishing industry officials to discuss their concerns.

"I must refrain from commenting on a concrete timing of the release into the ocean at this point, as the decision has to be made after the government as a whole looks at measures to do with safety and reputational damage (for the fishing industry)," Kishida told reporters.



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (centre) listens to a briefing of the facility for releasing treated water into the ocean, at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture on Sunday (AFP)

try)," Kishida told reporters.

"I hope to meet with fishermen, led by chairman (Masanobu) Sakamoto of Japan's fisheries cooperative federation, as early as tomorrow," the Prime Minister said.

Many Japanese fishermen are against the release, fearing that it will undo years of efforts to improve the industry's image in the wake of the 2011 catastrophe.

The water, equivalent to more than 500 Olympic swimming pools, has accumulated in the past 12 years from water used to cool three melted-down reactors combined with groundwater and rain.

Plant operator TEPCO says that dangerous radioactive elements have been filtered out and that the water it plans to release is safe, a view backed by the UN

atomic agency.

Japan has spent months trying to win over public opinion at home and abroad, with everything from livestreaming fish living in the treated water to efforts to counter online disinformation.

Public concern about the plan remains high in South Korea but its government said its review of the plan found it in line with international standards.

But China, which has frosty relations with Japan, has banned food imports from 10 Japanese prefectures and has imposed stringent radiation tests on food from the rest of the country.

The release of the treated water - a maximum of 500,000 litres per day - TEPCO says, is just one stage of the clean-up.

The far more dangerous task remains of removing radioactive debris and highly dangerous nuclear fuel from the three reactors that went into meltdown.

AFP

Indonesian President Joko Widodo to attend BRICS summit in South Africa

Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesian President Joko Widodo departed for South Africa on Sunday to attend the BRICS summit in Johannesburg amid speculation that the country could join the group as its latest member.

The meeting, which brings together major emerging economies countries led by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, will be held for three days starting Tuesday.

"Indonesia has been invited to the BRICS summit and of course in between the BRICS summit there will be meetings with other world leaders," Widodo told reporters ahead of his departure.

The trip is Widodo's first to Africa as leader of South East Asia's biggest economy.

He said earlier in the week that his government had not de-



A woman walks past a banner outside the venue for the 2023 BRICS Summit, Johannesburg on Sunday (AFP)

cided whether or not Indonesia would join BRICS.

The group, formally launched in 2009, seeks to tame Western economic domination in global affairs.

It represents 23% of the

world's gross domestic product and 42% of the world's population.

Aside from attending the BRICS summit, Widodo said he would also visit Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique to strengthen

cooperation. Tanzania and Kenya opened embassies in Jakarta last year, while Mozambique is the first African country to sign a Preferential Trade Agreement with Indonesia.

AFP

Rights activist and politician detained after rally in Pakistan

Islamabad, Pakistan - A prominent human rights activist and a former lawmaker were arrested on Sunday after they rallied against enforced disappearances in Pakistan.

Lawyer Imaan Mazari-Hazir and politician Ali Wazir appeared at the first protest in months to be staged by the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), which fights for the rights of ethnic Pashtuns.

The pair appeared at a court in the capital Islamabad on Sunday and were remanded in custody in a case registered under the anti-terrorism act, lawyer Zainab Janjua told AFP.

Islamabad police said they faced 'serious charges' in a court document seen by AFP. PTM was launched to fight against what it says are military excesses committed during anti-terrorism operations in the country's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province where most Pashtuns live.

The military has denied the accusations.

On Friday, up to 3,000 people attended the protest in Islamabad, where both Mazari-Hazir and Wazir gave speeches condemning harassment against Pashtuns and called for missing people to be returned.

"You are being stopped as if you are the terrorists, while the (Pakistani) Taliban have taken over your homes again," Mazari-Hazir told the crowds in a video



Police officials present arrested lawyer and human rights activist Imaan Mazari-Hazir (centre) before a court in Islamabad on Wednesday (AFP)

posted on social media.

A PTM spokesman said that dozens more members have also been detained since the protest held in the capital Islamabad.

"It's unacceptable and points to a larger, more worrying pattern of state-sanctioned violence against people exercising their right to freedom of expression

and assembly,' the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said.

Shireen Mazari, the country's human rights minister under former prime minister Imran Khan, said her daughter had been taken from her home in Islamabad by plainclothes women who did not present warrants.

"My daughter was in her night

clothes and said 'let me change' but they just dragged her away," she posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

As she was led into court by officers, Imaan Mazari-Hazir flashed a peace sign, still wearing her black and grey pyjamas and white fluffy slippers.

Wazir is a PTM founding

member who has long been an outspoken critic of the military and their anti-terror operations in the former tribal areas that border Afghanistan.

He was part of the outgoing government, representing the PTM, which dissolved earlier this month and has been arrested many times. Pakistan has long

grappled with militancy in the areas near Afghanistan, with attacks on the rise since the Afghan Taliban seized power in Kabul in 2021.

Locals have staged a series of protests against the increased violence and have demanded better protection from the state.

AFP

N Korean 'hackers' target US-S Korea drills

Seoul, South Korea - Suspected North Korean hackers have attempted an attack targeting a major joint military exercise between Seoul and Washington that starts on Monday, South Korean police said.

South Korea and the United States will kick off the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield drills on Monday through August 31 to counter growing threats from the nuclear-armed North.

Pyeongyang views such exercises as rehearsals for an invasion and has repeatedly warned it would take 'overwhelming' action in response.

The hackers - believed to be linked to a North Korean group dubbed Kimsuky - carried out 'continuous malicious email attacks' on South Korean contractors working at the allies' combined exercise war simulation centre, the Gyeonggi Nambu Provincial Police Agency said in a statement on Sunday.

"Police investigation confirms that North Korean hacking group was responsible for the attack," it said in a statement, adding that military-related information was not stolen.

AFP

Hurricane Hilary to bring 'life-threatening flooding' to US

Cabo San Lucas, Mexico - States across the typically arid US southwest braced on Sunday for torrential rain and potentially life-threatening flooding, as Hurricane Hilary barreled up Mexico's coast, where authorities reported at least one fatality.

At its peak, the storm reached a Category 4 on the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale, but is expected to weaken to a tropical storm before reaching southern California on Sunday afternoon, an advisory from the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

It was still packing nearly 140km per hour sustained winds with stronger gusts as it blew across the Baja California Peninsula on Sunday early morning, the NHC said.

'Heavy rains from Hilary spreading northward over the Baja Peninsula and the southwestern United States,' the US government agency said. 'Catastrophic and life-threatening flooding likely.'

One person died in Mexico after a vehicle was swept away by a rising stream, Mexico's Civil Protection agency said in a statement on Saturday, while warning of landslides and road closures on the Baja California Peninsula.

Hilary is expected to track inland and north over the next day or two, depositing up to 254mm of rain on parts of Mexico, California and Nevada, according to the NHC.

Tornadoes were also on the cards from mid-morning through Sunday evening in parts of the Colorado River Valley, Mojave Desert and Imperial Valley.

Despite slowing down, the storm remains treacherous, with millions of people urged to take precautions.

The US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has deployed teams to areas in



Customers buy plastic tarps from the nearly empty shelves of a store in preparation for rains from Hurricane Hilary in Los Angeles, California, on Saturday (AFP)

Heavy rains from Hilary are spreading northward over the Baja Peninsula and the southwestern US. Catastrophic and life-threatening flooding likely

US government agency

Hilary's path, while California Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency for much of the state's southern area. Nancy Ward, director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, said Hilary could be one of the worst storms to hit the state in more than a decade.

"Make no mistake," she told a press conference on Saturday. "This is a very, very dangerous and significant storm."

As large waves crashed ashore and winds lashed the Mexican tourist resort of Cabo San Lucas on Saturday, residents and workers put up protective boarding and laid thousands of sandbags. Military personnel were seen patrolling the beach, a

popular destination for both Mexican and foreign tourists.

"We took all the precautionary measures last night," Omar Olvera told AFP at the Cabo San Lucas beachfront restaurant where he works. With sandbags piled protectively around the restaurant, he said, "We're just looking out for the workers and waiting for the weather to come."

Streets in the town of Todos Santos, on the west coast of the peninsula, were largely deserted Saturday while the nearby beach in Los Cerritos was closed due to rough waves.

"Last night, we felt the wind picking up, it wasn't as strong as we were expecting but it still caused us to worry," said Marco Segura, a 57-year-old worker in

Los Cerritos.

The Mexican government deployed almost 19,000 soldiers in the states most affected by the storm, while the federal electric utility has sent 800 workers and hundreds of vehicles to respond to any outages.

US President Joe Biden, who was at a rented vacation home with his family on Lake Tahoe along the California-Nevada border, was briefed Saturday by senior staff on preparations for the storm, the White House said.

Biden and his wife, First Lady Jill Biden, are planning to visit Hawaii on Monday to survey wildfire damage as recovery operations continue.

In San Diego, the US Navy said ships and submarines would be heading out to sea on Saturday ahead of the storm's arrival.

"Safety remains our top priority, and putting all capable ships to sea makes it easier for us to manage the situation ashore," said US Third Fleet commander Michael Boyle in a press release.

AFP

11 labourers killed in bomb attack in Pakistan: Official

Islamabad, Pakistan - Eleven labourers were killed in a bomb blast in northwestern Pakistan near the border with Afghanistan, a local government official said on Sunday.

The device exploded after being attached to the vehicle they were travelling in on Saturday evening, Rehman Gul Khat-tak, senior government official for North Waziristan, said in a statement.

"The labourers were working at an under construction post for the Pakistan army," Khat-tak said.

Amir Muhammad Khan, a senior police official in the area, confirmed the bomb blast and the number of casualties to AFP.

"Heartbreaking to know about the terrorist attack in North Waziristan which claimed the lives of 11 innocent labourers. Strongly condemn this senseless act of violence and stand in solidarity with the families affected," caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Pakistan has seen a sharp rise in militant attacks since the Afghan Taliban surged back to power in neighbouring Afghanistan in 2021.

The militant assaults have been focused in regions abutting Afghanistan, and Islamabad alleges some are being planned on Afghan soil - a charge Kabul de-

nies.

Pakistan's home-grown Taliban group, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has waged a growing campaign against security officials, including police officers.

In January, a suicide bomber linked to Pakistan's Taliban blew himself up in a mosque inside a police compound in the northwestern city of Peshawar, killing more than 80 officers.

Last month, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed at least 54 people, including 23 children, at a political party gathering ahead of elections due later this year.

AFP

Young Zimbabwean voters dare to hope for change of old guard

Harare, Zimbabwe - Just days before a national election to pick a president and lawmakers, one word is on the lips of most young Zimbabweans - 'Change'.

Yet, questions about who can deliver change and whether it might happen draw elusive or conflicting answers on the bustling and trafficked streets of Harare, the capital.

"There needs to be a change in almost everything, we need change," said Tsitsi Chifura, a 22-year-old human resources student, echoing the concerns of many others at the lack of work opportunities. "We have nothing to do, we are just sitting (around)," she said.

About two-thirds of Zimbabweans are under 25, according to the United Nations.

Many will be voting for the first time on August 23, in an



A supporter waves a Zimbabwe flag during a Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) rally in Shurugwi on Saturday (AFP)

election where unemployment, estimated by economists at about 70% in the formal sector, is one of the top concerns.

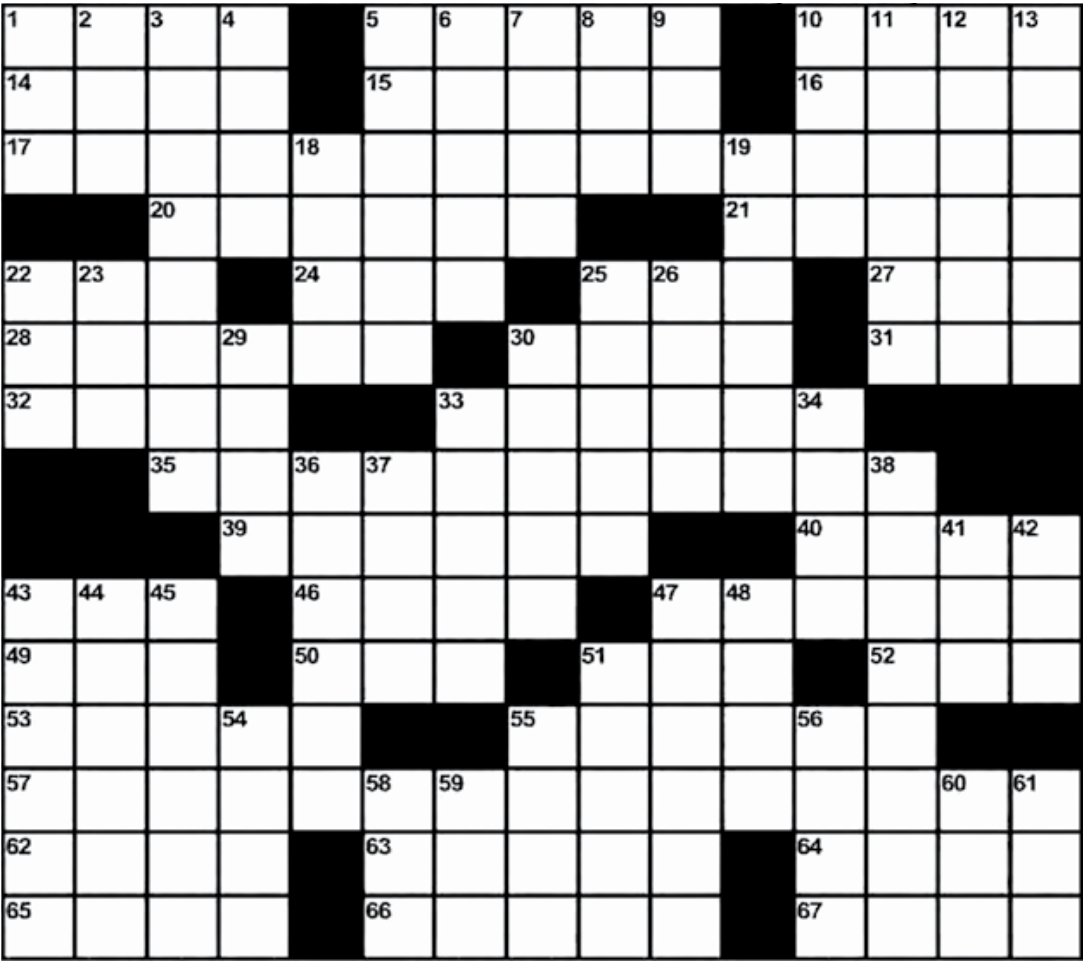
Talk of change often implies support for the opposition, led by Nelson Chamisa, a 45-year-old lawyer and pastor. But almost no one says that out loud.

The ruling ZANU-PF party of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, in power since independence in 1980 has a low tolerance for dissent and has been accused by rights groups of resorting to violence, repression and intimidation to secure a favourable vote.

AFP

DAILY

CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1) Inflatable lifesaver

5) California border lake

10)_ Linda, Calif.

14) Slick with lubricant

15) Love, French-style

16) Common and Christian

17) Works Christmas eve?

20) Men and women

21) Mania

22) Letters for a toddler

24) "To Kill a Mockingbird" author Harper

25) "Erie Canal" mule

27) 2,000 pounds

28) Web-footed males

30) "Out," to an editor

31) Suffix for the very best

32) Munro's nom de plume

33) Brilliant

35) What a good weepie does?

39) Ore of lead

40) Ancient South Ameri-can emple

43) Start to function?

46) Like some food orders

47) Well-seasoned stew

49) "What was _ think?"

50) Female sheep

51) Charged-up atom

52) Tiny

53) Drummer Ringo

55) Refuse to take no for an answer

57) Has a long-awaited meal?

62) Frosts cupcakes

63) More sick

64) Opera feature

65) Button on a butcher's scale

66) Manicurist's board

67) Class ender

DOWN

1) One way to cross a river

2) Breathe it in

3) Griddle creation

4) Use an old IBM Selectric

5) Brownish grays

6) Abundant

7) Thing to never give up

8) "Days of _ Lives"

9) Palindromic "before"

10) Look rudely

11) Showily adorned

12) Passover dumplings

13) Give the OK

18) Filet favorite

19) Cornea's companion

22) Classified things

23) One of Victoria's secrets

25) Nasal dividers

26) Nautical direction that avoids the wind

29) Card in a royal flush

30) "Beats me," slangily

33) Attack on a fort

34) Navy lockup

36) Steady twosome

37) Like a snail

38) Winter accessory in Buffalo

41) Give a signal to

42)Munched

43) Loner

44) Infamous New York prison riot site

45) Auto repair shop offer-ing

47) Beads for the prayerful

48) Licorice-flavored liqueur

51) Conclude from the facts

54) Swell, as a river

55) Speck in the ocean

56) Pierce with a harpoon
- 58) Hotfoot it

59) Horrible Freddy's street

60) Shutout score, in soccer

61) Guy's go-with
- NOTE PAD

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

DAILY

HOROSCOPE
- ARIES

MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Playing games with someone can be fun sometimes, but it can also be frustrating. So if you've been engaged in a tedious game of phone tag for far too long, today you need to try to put an end to it. Make it clear that you aren't interested in communicating in any way other than face-to-face right now. It might mean that you won't be communicating with someone for a long while, but at least when you do it will be a useful and pleasant experience for both of you.
- LEO

JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You'll probably find yourself in a group conversation today where every member agrees with each other except for one, and that one person could be you! Stick to your guns and share your unique point of view freely, no matter how unpopular it might be. Debating issues isn't everyone's forte, so you can expect one or two people to get a little hot under the collar. Just keep smiling and be calm. Don't take anything personally, and you might just change a few minds!
- SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

No matter how slowly things go today (and they could go pretty slowly), you need to keep busy! If you have to, use your massive creativity to cook up some job or task that you can do to make sure your hands aren't idle. Being bored is simply unacceptable, now. If you're left with nothing to do, your brain could go off in some negative direction and your imagination could cook up some bad notions about a certain someone you want to get to know better.
-
- TEST YOUR

KNOWLEDGE
01. What city is the subject of "The Book of the City of Ladies" (finished 1405)?
- A. The perfect city between the clouds in "The Birds" by Aristophanes, Cloud-Cuckoo-Land

B. The city formed by the book itself

C. Cockayne

D. The Garden of the Hesperides
02. Someone is unsuccessfully trying to look well-dressed is said to be "dressed up like a" what?
- A. Budgie's dessert

B. Elephant's breakfast

C. Dog's dinner

D. Gerbil's lunch
03. Which composer created "Le Bœuf sur le toit" (The Ox on the Roof) as "fifteen minutes of music, rapid and gay, as a background to any Charlie Chaplin silent movie", although in fact it premièred in 1920 as a short ballet?
- A. Darius Milhaud

B. Erik Satie

C. Aaron Copland

D. George Gershwin
- Answers: 1. B 2. C 3. A
- 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
- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 5 | | 3 | | | | | |
| | 2 | 1 | | | | 3 | 9 | 8 |
| | 9 | 8 | 1 | | | 4 | 7 | |
| | | | | 7 | | 8 | | 9 |
| | | | | 2 | 1 | 3 | | |
| 5 | | 4 | | 8 | | | | |
| | 6 | 5 | | | 7 | 1 | 3 | |
| 7 | 4 | 3 | | | | 9 | 8 | |
| | | | | | 9 | | 5 | |
- WORD

BUILDER
-
- You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.
- Rules:** Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count
- SUDOKU EASY ANSWER
- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 1 |
| 2 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| 4 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 6 |
| 3 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 9 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 6 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 3 |
| 5 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 3 |
| 8 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| 1 | 9 | 2 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 4 |

REIGN OF SPAIN

Carmona scores as La Roja tame England to win Women’s World Cup

Sydney, Australia - Spain won the Women’s World Cup for the first time in their history with skipper Olga Carmona sweeping in the only goal for a deserved 1-0 victory over England in Sunday’s final.

In front of a crowd of nearly 76,000 at Stadium Australia in Sydney, Spain were the more accomplished side and had more chances, including missing a second-half penalty.

Spain’s triumph is vindication for Jorge Vilda and the Spanish football federation, who stuck with the coach even after 15 players last year said they no longer wanted to represent their country under him.

England coach Sarina Wiegman, who has now suffered back-to-back defeats in the final, and her European champions can have few complaints.

Spain are the fifth team to lift the World Cup since the tournament began in 1991, joining outgoing champions the United States, Germany, Norway and Japan.

In front of Spain’s Queen Letizia, defender Carmona scored what turned out to be the winner, rampaging from left-back to thrash the ball in low and hard on 29 minutes.

Wiegman had resisted the temptation to recall Chelsea attacker Lauren James after her two-match ban and kept faith with the team that beat co-hosts Australia 3-1 in the semi-finals.

Playing in their blue second kit, England had the first sniff of a chance in the fifth minute but Lauren Hemp shot weakly at goalkeeper Cata Coll.

There was little to choose between them in the opening exchanges before both teams had golden opportunities on the quarter-hour mark.

First, Manchester City forward Hemp struck the bar with a curler that had Coll well beaten.

Spain went up the other end

In front of Spain’s Queen Letizia, defender Carmona scored what turned out to be the winner, rampaging from left-back to thrash the ball in low and hard on 29 minutes

and should have scored but Salma Paralluelo - in for Alexia Putellas - missed the ball in the six-yard box.

Then Alba Redondo hit a first-time strike straight at goalkeeper Mary Earps with the England goal gaping.



Spain’s Queen Letizia lifts the trophy as their players and officials celebrate after beating England in the Women’s World Cup final in Sydney on Sunday (AFP)

at the Women’s World Cup until this tournament and had lost 4-0 to Japan in the group phase, were ahead.

Mariona Caldentey slid in an inch-perfect pass for Carmona, who came flying unmarked down the left before lashing the ball into the bottom corner.

Vilda, who recalled three of the 15 mutineers for the World Cup, did not even raise a smile on the sidelines.

England looked uncharacteristically rattled and the 19-year-old Barcelona attacker Paralluelo,

who was a constant threat, shaved the post with the last kick of the half.

Hermoso fails from spot

Wiegman, who suffered agony in the final four years ago when her Netherlands team lost 2-0 to the United States, made a double change at the break.

James and Chloe Kelly replaced Rachel Daly and Alessia Russo as Wiegman switched from a back-five to a flat back-four.

But it was Spain who nearly doubled their lead almost straight after half-time, Caldentey dinking inside and forcing Earps to turn the ball around the post.

Hemp was booked for clipping Laia Codina as England’s frustration mounted.

Midfield schemer Aitana Bonmati, who has been one of the players of the tournament and was one of the three refuseniks recalled by Vilda, fired narrowly over Earps’s bar.

With 20 minutes left, Spain

were awarded a penalty when VAR was called into action and, after a long review, Keira Walsh was judged to have handled the ball in the box.

Jennifer Hermoso stepped up but her penalty was weak and Earps saved comfortably to keep England just about alive.

Officials indicated 13 minutes of injury time at the end, but if anything, it was Spain who looked the more likely to score as England’s dreams of a first World Cup melted away.

AFP



Spain’s Olga Carmona celebrates after scoring against England (AFP)

We had the feeling we were going to do it, says Spain’s Carmona

Sydney, Australia - Spain’s goalscoring hero Olga Carmona hailed her “unstoppable” side as they beat England 1-0 to win the Women’s World Cup for the first time on Sunday in Sydney.

Carmona drilled home after 29 minutes to put La Roja ahead and they held onto their lead to triumph.

“It was a really tough game, we knew it would be tricky, England have a great team, but I think it was our game,” Carmona told Spanish national broadcasters La 1.

“We had the feeling we were going to do it, and this is unstoppable, the truth is I don’t know what to tell you.”

Carmona celebrated her goal by revealing a message on an undershirt, reading “Merchi”.

The 23-year-old said it was a tribute for a friend whose mother had passed away.

“I want to say this victory is for one of my best friend’s mother, who died recently, I celebrated the goal with that shirt,” added Carmona.

Spain coach Jorge Vilda said he was extremely proud of his team. Vilda was heavily criticised in the build-up to and during the tournament for his tense relationship with a number of players who quit the national team in protest against the coach and the Spanish football federation.

Three of the 15 protesting players returned for the tournament - Aitana Bonmati, Ona Batlle and Mariona Caldentey, all of whom started in the final.

“It’s difficult to describe, immense joy, I’m so proud of this team,” said Vilda.

“I’m so happy for everyone watching us right now, we’ve made them happy too. We’re champions of the world.”

From mutiny to World Cup glory for derided Spain coach Vilda

Sydney, Australia - Coach Jorge Vilda was derided as a control freak who was not up to the job, but he has now made history by taking Spain to their first Women’s World Cup crown.

His team beat England 1-0 in front of a sell-out crowd of nearly 76,000 in Sydney in Sunday’s final to seal an achievement which seemed unthinkable less than a year ago.

Discontent between players on the one side and the Spanish football federation (RFEF) and Vilda on the other had been brewing for some time. In September 2022 the situation exploded - 15 of the squad emailed the RFEF to say they did not want to be considered for selection, citing their “emotional state”.

The exact nature of their complaints was never officially made public, but Spanish media had previously reported that they wanted the 42-year-old Vilda sacked. The players later denied that, but they were reported to



Spain’s coach Jorge Vilda kisses the trophy after his team’s victory (AFP)

have a litany of complaints about how things were run on and off the pitch.

Reports said the players, many of whom were at Barcelona, accused Vilda of being “dictatorial” and did not approve of his training methods or tactics.

Mundo Deportivo and other publications said he would insist on the players keeping their hotel doors open before midnight while on national duty so he could personally check that they were asleep on time.

There were also claims that if

Heartache but pride for England fans after defeat

London, United Kingdom - England fans watched the World Cup final against Spain on giant screens in parks with picnics, in packed local football clubhouses, and with early morning tea and coffee in pubs and bars.

There were stetson hats and blaring vuvuzelas, a sea of replica tops and red and white facepaint, and even a knight in a full suit of armour at one venue.

England’s unofficial anthem “It’s Coming Home” was belted out with good-natured gusto. “God Save the King” - the national anthem - got the full-throated treatment.

But their hopes of a first



England’s players look crestfallen after losing to Spain on Sunday (AFP)

World Cup victory since the men’s side in 1966 were not to be, even after goalkeeper Mary Earps’ second-half penalty save - and 13 minutes of stoppage time - raised hopes of a comeback.

Spain’s 1-0 victory was met with silence, tears and also sporting applause.

“It’s upsetting,” admitted administrator Yvonne Roswell, 43, watching with her 11-year-old

the players went out, Vilda wanted to know where they were going, with whom and what they were buying.

Vilda said in the lead-up to the World Cup that the dispute was “practically over”, but of the 15 mutineers, he only called up three. Suggesting that all was still not well, one of the refuseniks, Barcelona’s Mapi Leon, said: “I can’t go back, there has to be changes.”

At the World Cup, Vilda was repeatedly asked by non-Spanish reporters about the controversy.

He is a typically guarded character, but following Spain’s 2-1 win in the semi-finals over Sweden, he said that the turmoil had “made all of us stronger”.

“The support of Luis Rubiales, the president of the federation, and everyone at the federation, means so much and will always stay with me, as well as that of my family because they have suffered this year,” said Vilda.

AFP



Millie Bright

England ‘heartbroken’ by defeat, says captain Bright

Sydney, Australia - England captain Millie Bright said the Lionesses were left heartbroken by a 1-0 defeat to Spain in the Women’s World Cup final on Sunday despite not being at their best in Sydney.

Olga Carmona scored the only goal as Spain kept the European champions at bay and could have won by a bigger margin had England goalkeeper Mary Earps not saved Jennifer Hermoso’s second-half penalty.

“We’re heartbroken. We gave everything, unfortunately we just weren’t there today,” said Bright.

“The girls are unbelievable. We had a lot of critics at the start of the tournament, a few lost belief in us, but we never stopped believing in ourselves.

“We had full belief, but sometimes football goes for you, sometimes it goes against you.

“We’ve played in a World Cup final. In a few weeks we’ll appreciate this day and coming second, but it’s hard to take because we’re winners, we want to win.”

England nearly got off to a flying start in their first World Cup final in the women’s game as Lauren Hemp struck the bar.

A peak of 11.5 million people tuned in to watch England beat Australia in the semi-final midweek.

AFP

GULF IN CLASS

Julian Alvarez scores stunner as Manchester City beat Newcastle



Manchester City's Julian Alvarez (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Newcastle United in their English Premier League match on Saturday (AFP)

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester City showed the mentality of champions, said Pep Guardiola after his team laid down an early-season marker in the Premier League title race by beating Newcastle 1-0 on Saturday.

Julian Alvarez's stunning strike secured a club record 17th consecutive home victory for the treble winners despite their exertions in lifting the UEFA Super Cup in midweek.

Guardiola was furious at the Premier League for scheduling the game just three days after his side were forced to penalties to beat Sevilla under baking heat in Athens.

It is the second game of the season, but it is proof of the reason why we won a lot. The mindset and mentality of this group of players amaze me every time

PEP GUARDIOLA

City's squad has also been stretched early on in the campaign by the absence of Bernardo Silva and John Stones, while Kevin De Bruyne will be out for up to four months with a hamstring injury.

But on this evidence, Guardiola's men will still take some stopping in their quest to be-

come the first side to ever win four consecutive English top-flight titles.

"It is the second game of the season, but it is proof of the reason why we won a lot," said Guardiola.

"The mindset and mentality of this group of players amaze me every time."

Newcastle's 5-1 thrashing of Aston Villa last weekend had raised hopes on Tyneside they could be the pick of the challengers to City's crown as English champions.

But dreams the Saudi-backed Magpies could pose a challenge for their first top-flight league title in 97 years were dampened by City's dominance before tiredness crept in late on.

"It's a reminder we've got work to do, but I was under no illusions that was the case," said Newcastle boss Eddie Howe.

"I think we can play a lot better than that. There are always reasons, it's difficult to say (why). There are two teams and

your team have to react to the conditions you are playing against." Alvarez could be one of the benefactors of De Bruyne's lengthy lay-off.

The Argentine scored 17 goals in his debut season in Manchester despite having to play largely second fiddle to Erling Haaland.

Guardiola may now be forced to pair Alvarez with the Norwegian more often and he showed what he is capable of with a superb finish into the top corner from Phil Foden's pass on 31 minutes. Only a rare night off for Haaland in front of goal then prevented City's dominance showing in the scoreline.

AFP

Fulham's Mitrovic joins Al Hilal for club record fee

London, United Kingdom - Aleksandar Mitrovic joined the Premier League exodus to Saudi Arabia by leaving Fulham for a club record fee to join Al Hilal on Saturday.

The Premier League club confirmed the Serbian's departure following Saturday's 3-0 Premier home defeat against Brentford.

Al Hilal are reported to have negotiated a £50 million (\$64 million) deal for the 28-year-old.

"The club can confirm that Aleksandar Mitrovic has this evening left to join Al Hilal in the Saudi Pro League for a club record transfer fee," Fulham said in a statement.

"The club had reluctantly accepted a revised offer as the player had consistently made his desire to leave known."

Mitrovic pushed for a move in order to join the growing list of players swapping Europe for a lucrative switch to the Gulf state.

He will be Al Hilal's latest



Aleksandar Mitrovic

high-profile signing after their swoops for Neymar, Kalidou Koulibaly, Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Ruben Neves and Malcom.

Mitrovic scored 14 times for Fulham last season as he finally made his mark in the Premier League.

Since joining Fulham in 2018, Mitrovic had played an important role in Fulham's three separate promotions from the Championship.

AFP



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior (L) celebrates with Jude Bellingham after scoring against Almeria on Saturday (AFP)

Bellingham hits brace as Madrid beat Almeria

Barcelona, Spain - New arrival Jude Bellingham struck twice for Real Madrid to help them come from behind to beat Almeria 3-1 in La Liga on Saturday and said he was "ten times better" than last season.

After netting on his debut last weekend, Bellingham again played a key role for Carlo Ancelotti's side as they maintained their 100 per cent start to the season.

Vinicius Junior added the third after being teed up by Bellingham to wrap up Los Blancos' victory at the Power Horse Stadium on Spain's east coast, after Sergio Arribas had sent the hosts ahead early on.

Without talisman and Balon d'Or holder Karim Benzema, who left the club in the summer, Bellingham has

quickly filled the void with three goals in his first two games after his move from the Bundesliga.

The former Borussia Dortmund and Birmingham City star has hit the ground running in Spain, wearing former Madrid great Zinedine Zidane's number five shirt.

"I'm ten times better than I was last season," Bellingham told Real Madrid TV.

Real Madrid started German duo Toni Kroos and Antonio Rudiger in place of Eduardo Camavinga and the injured Eder Militao.

Andriy Lunin continued in goal despite Kepa Arrizabalaga's arrival from Chelsea to help cover for Thibaut Courtois, set to miss most of the season.



Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring against Toulouse on Saturday (AFP)

Mbappe scores on PSG return in Toulouse draw

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe won and converted a penalty on his Paris Saint-Germain return on Saturday in a 1-1 draw at Toulouse after being reinstated to the first team following a contract dispute with the French champions.

The France captain started on the bench but came on in the 51st minute and promptly broke the deadlock, drawing a foul from Rasmus Nicolaisen and tucking away the resulting spot-kick just past the hour mark.

Zakaria Aboukhmal equalised with a penalty three minutes from time after he was tugged back by Morocco team-mate Achraf Hakimi, leaving Luis Enrique still searching for his first win as PSG coach. "The result is a disappointment. The draw is mainly down to a lack of luck," said the Spaniard, refusing to be drawn into a debate over Mbappe beginning the game as a substitute.

"I know you (the media) like these controversial questions but

my staff and I are going to keep managing things how we see fit."

Mbappe's appearance was his first for PSG since a friendly on July 21 after not being invited to the pre-season tour in Japan and South Korea and then missing the opening 0-0 draw against Lorient. He had been made to train with players the club are trying to offload after he refused to sign an extension to his PSG deal, but the 24-year-old was brought back into the fold last Sunday.

Saudi football rise 'long-term project', says top official

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia's extraordinary football expansion is a "long-term project" with strong government support, unlike the short-lived Chinese boom, a senior league official told AFP.

The Saudi Pro League has a years-long commitment from the oil-rich kingdom's rulers in its goal to become one of the world's top competitions, chief operating officer Carlo Nohra said.

Nohra was speaking at Al Hilal's unveiling of Brazilian superstar Neymar, who joins Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and a host of other big names in a spending binge costing hundreds of millions of dollars.

"It's not something that we

expect will happen overnight. It's not a one-weekend event - this is a long-term project, and everybody accepts that that's what it's going to take," Nohra said at the King Fahd International Stadium late on Saturday.

"And it's not a function of throwing money at it and it will happen," he added. "It is ensuring that we do all the right things along the way to bring everything and everybody and the ecosystem up together."

The Saudi league's rapid expansion has drawn comparisons with the Chinese Super League, which sucked in players for exorbitant sums until clubs hit financial problems.

At one stage, Guangzhou Evergrande made little-known



Neymar enters the pitch during his unveiling ceremony at Al Hilal in Riyadh on Saturday (AFP)

Argentine Dario Conca one of the world's best-paid players, and Shanghai Shenhua was lavishing a reported 730,000 euros (\$795,000) a week on an ageing Carlos Tevez.

It's not a function of throwing money at it and it will happen. It is ensuring that we do all the right things to bring everything and everybody and the ecosystem up together

CARLO NOHRA

"These comparisons are inevitable," said Nohra. "But for us, the fact that this project is part of a transformation project that's moving this country where it wants to go... provides the suste-

nance that we need in order to keep moving forward."

The no-expense-spared revamp is part of 37-year-old Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious Vision 2030

project, which aims to reshape the economy of the world's top oil exporter.

Also part of the de facto ruler's plans are Neom, a futuristic new city costing \$500 billion,

plus tourist resorts and sports events including Formula One and the upstart LIV Golf, which has effectively seized control of the US PGA Tour and Europe's DP World Tour. "Ultimately what we're really trying to do is deliver, through football, entertainment for the Saudis," Nohra said.

"The strategy is 360 degrees, many elements to it. At the heart of it, one of those objectives set for us is how do we improve performance on the pitch, with world-class sports performers."

Nohra said Pro League clubs - including four recently acquired by the Public Investment Fund, a sovereign wealth vehicle - were still on the hunt for players before the Saudi transfer window closes on September 20.

PICTURE PERFECT

Messi leads Miami to first trophy with Leagues Cup win

Nashville, United States - Lionel Messi scored a screamer and won his first trophy in North American soccer as Inter Miami beat Nashville on penalties (10-9) after their final ended 1-1 in 90 minutes.

The Argentine World Cup winner had put Miami ahead in the 24th minute with a wonder strike into the top corner but Fafa Picault levelled for Nashville in the second half.

After Messi hit the post and Leonardo Campana missed a last second chance to win the game in regulation for Miami, the game went to a shoot-out which ended in a duel between the two keepers and Elliot Panico's shot being saved by Miami's Drake Callender.

Messi and his team-mates rushed to celebrate with the American goalkeeper, who had made some key saves late in the game to keep his team alive.

Miami, in their third season of existence, were rock bottom of Major League Soccer when Messi joined them a month ago but Messi, along with Spanish pair Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba, has utterly transformed the team leading them on a seven game unbeaten run to the League Cup title.

Co-owner David Beckham, who created the club, said he was stunned by the way the for-



Inter Miami players toss their captain Lionel Messi in the air as they celebrate after winning the Leagues Cup on Saturday (AFP)

Miami, in their third season of existence, were rock bottom of MLS when Messi joined them a month ago but the Argentine, along with Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba, has utterly transformed the team

mer Barcelona trio had been able to bring about change so quickly.

"It is like a movie, you watch these players play and it is, emotionally, everything about their play is beautiful," he said.

Seven-times Ballon d'Or winner Messi has now scored 10 goals in seven games in the pink

shirt of his new club and on Wednesday the superstar has the chance to reach another final when his team take on Cincinnati in the semi-final of the US Open Cup.

This was not the dominant, entertaining Miami that in the past month has lit up the tourna-

ment, featuring MLS and Mexican Liga MX clubs, but the win was sweet nonetheless.

"I am very happy to win our first title in just one month, the club's first. The team is growing by leaps and bounds and we are very happy," said midfielder Busquets.

Leaps and bounds

"We have infected the team with our spirit, our work, our character and experience. We are making a solid team ... And then we have Leo, who makes a difference because he's the best in the world."

Nashville set out with the clear intention to limit the impact of Busquets and by extension Messi and they were effective in forcing Miami to play a slower type of possession football, deeper in their own half.

Gary Smith's side sent an early warning that they could trouble Miami at set-pieces with Walker Zimmerman's header from a Lukas MacNaughton corner forcing Callender into a low save.

Miami were probing, with Messi dropping deeper and looking for gaps in the home defense.

But with Walker Zimmerman marshalling the back line well chances were hard to come by until Robert Taylor spun and turned and fired a fierce drive which Nashville keeper Elliot Panico did well to keep out.

Three minutes later, Miami had the lead - and the source of their breakthrough was no surprise.

Taylor's attempted pass inside was blocked and the ball fell to Messi who zipped past Zimmerman, opening enough space to his left to unleash an unstoppable drive from over 25 yards out which flew into the top corner past the helpless Panico.

Miami looked in total control, playing with confidence bordering on swagger, but it was a different story after the interval.



Francesco Bagnaia celebrates on the podium after winning the MotoGP Austrian Grand Prix on Sunday (AFP)

MotoGP world champion Bagnaia completes perfect Austrian weekend

Spielberg Bei Knittelfeld, Austria - Ducati's world champion Francesco Bagnaia dominated the Austrian MotoGP at Spielberg in style on Sunday to take another step towards a second successive title.

Brad Binder (KTM) came in a distant second with Marco Bezzecchi (Ducati-VR46) in third.

For Bagnaia this was a third dream double weekend of the season after winning both Saturday's sprint and Sunday's main event. Maximum points at the Red Bull Ring circuit lifted him 62 points clear of Jorge Martin in the 2023 standings with 10 of the 20 races completed.

"I was expecting a stronger race but conditions were tough for everybody," beamed Bagnaia.

"We managed everything and demonstrated our potential from yesterday," added 'Pecco'.

For Binder it was another runner-up spot 24 hours after his sprint second in front of his Austrian KTM team's home fans.

"I did everything I could," said the South African.

"There was a moment when the rear grip said goodbye so I knew I had to be intelligent and bring the bike home and get on the podium twice this weekend."

Bagnaia set off from pole for the gruelling 28 laps in front of a 94,000 crowd braving blistering heat in the Styrian mountains.

The Italian had the perfect launchpad to gain his fifth race win of 2023 and move a significant step closer to back-to-back world championships.

He sped off the line on his trusty factory Ducati to hold off Binder to turn one as Maverick Vinales, who qualified in second, suffered another poor start as he had done 24 hours earlier in the sprint. That sluggish getaway thwarted the Aprilia rider's quest to make MotoGP history by winning a grand prix with three different teams after wins with Suzuki and Yamaha.

Binder went all out for a quick pass on Bagnaia as the front pair drew over a second clear of the chasing pack headed by Jack Miller on the other KTM.

AFP

Gauff topples Swiatek to set up Cincinnati title clash with Muchova

Cincinnati, United States - Coco Gauff (right) and Karolina Muchova scored upset wins on Saturday to line up Cincinnati WTA title clash in the first Masters-level final for both.

Gauff toppled world number one Iga Swiatek 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 6-4, while Muchova stunned reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 6-2.

The 19-year-old Gauff, ranked seventh in the world, snapped a career-long jinx against Swiatek, taking her first victory after seven losses to the Polish powerhouse in just under three hours after four match points.

"I knew playing her was going to be tough," Gauff said. "I really took my opportunities when I got them and I really just

fought every point.

"I was a little bit negative in the second but I got it back and I was telling myself, 'You're a warrior and you can do this.'"

Swiatek, the reigning US Open and French Open champion, had not dropped a set in sweeping her prior matches against

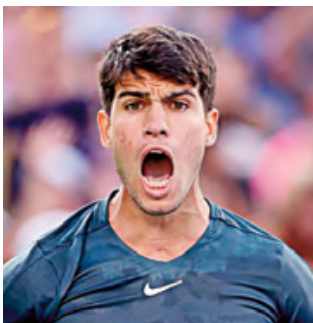
Gauff.

"There are things that I want to work on, it's always like that when you lose," Swiatek said.

"Overall today I fought till the end. That's something that I should be proud of.

"For sure I would want the result to be different. Coco's a great player, so I guess she deserved (the win) more."

At least the defeat gives Swiatek a bit of extra rest before her title defense at the US Open, which starts a week from Monday. "I would say my tank of fuel is pretty empty," Swiatek said. "Honestly, I'm not even going to regret (anything) because I'm happy that I'm going to have days off now."



Carlos Alcaraz

Alcaraz and Djokovic line up all-star Cincinnati title clash

Cincinnati, United States - Carlos Alcaraz saved a match point on the way to a three-set victory over Hubert Hurkacz Saturday as he lined up title clash with Novak Djokovic at the ATP Cincinnati Masters.

World number one Alcaraz held on for a 2-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 victory over Hurkacz, rallying to beat the big-serving Pole for the second time in as many weeks.

World number two Djokovic beat Germany's Alexander Zverev 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 to reach the final, which will be a repeat of last month's epic Wimbledon final won by Alcaraz.

Alcaraz has won two of three career meetings with Djokovic.

AFP

Osimhen gives Napoli winning start as Inter's Martinez sinks Monza

Milan, Italy - Victor Osimhen and Lautaro Martinez both struck opening day doubles on Saturday as Napoli got their Serie A title defence off to a winning start at Frosinone and Inter Milan beat Monza 2-0.

Nigeria striker Osimhen netted in each half to help ensure the champions came from behind to win 3-1 on Rudi Garcia's debut as coach following the resignation of new Italy boss Luciano Spalletti.

Matteo Politano scored Napoli's other goal, getting the away side back on level terms midway through the first half after Abdou Harroui had given hosts Frosinone a shock early lead from the penalty spot.

Osimhen scored 31 times last season, including the goal which sealed the league title, and he is in talks for a contract extension despite big-money interest from clubs abroad.

"The president is the boss. We are still negotiating, maybe at the end of the transfer window we will see what will happen," added Osimhen, whose current deal expires in June 2025, to DAZN.

"But for now I'm a Napoli player which is the most important thing and I will give my heart



Napoli's Victor Osimhen scores against Frosinone in their Italian Serie A match on Saturday (AFP)

and soul for the team."

Garcia has a tough job on his hands defending Napoli's first championship crown since 1990 and didn't have things all his own way at the Stadio Benito Stirpe.

His team, missing injured star winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, were trailing in the seventh minute when Harroui slotted

home a penalty following a clumsy foul from Jens Cajuste.

But they were level when Politano pounced following chaos in the Frosinone box and lashed in a powerful left-footed shot which should have been stopped by home goalkeeper Stefano Turati.

And there was no stopping Osimhen from crashing in his first

of the season in the 42nd minute when Giovanni Di Lorenzo won the ball high up the pitch and fed last season's Serie A top scorer, who thumped home a rocket of a first-time finish.

The 24-year-old then sealed the points with 11 minutes remaining after being sent clean through by Di Lorenzo.

Fraser-Pryce, Warholm cruise but too soon for Miller-Uibo

Budapest, Hungary - Jamaican Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce ensured her quest for a sixth 100m title continued Sunday as a slew of world and Olympic champions safely negotiated heats at Budapest's National Athletics Centre.

In sweltering conditions, Fraser-Pryce clocked 11.01 seconds in her heat to advance to Monday's semi-finals (1640 GMT), with the final slated for two hours later the same night.

"I think I have the strength to give my best in the semis and hopefully in the final as well," the 36-year-old said.

In-form American rival Sha'Carri Richardson set the fastest qualifying time of 10.92sec while another Jamaican favourite, Sherricka Jackson, also cruised through her heat.

Norway's Karsten Warholm coasted through to Monday's semi-finals of the 400m hurdles, along with main rivals defending champion Alison Dos Santos of Brazil and American Rai Benjamin.

"Of course, the expectations are always high and people would like to see me winning races," said Warholm, whose world record-setting performance when winning Olympic gold in Tokyo remains one of the stand-out moments in recent Summer Games history.

A loaded morning of qualifiers saw two-time former world champion Wayde van Niekerk, who also set a world record when winning gold at the 2016 Rio Olympics, win his heat to advance into the semi-finals of the



Karsten Warholm

men's 400m on Tuesday.

"These championships are just about putting my best foot forward and seeing what happens," said the South African, beset by injuries since his victory in Rio.

"I've been running some solid times so I feel I'm coming back towards my best. Only time can tell when I get back where I was."

Progressing alongside him were a raft of contenders in what is expected to be one of the hardest-fought events at the worlds in the absence of defending champion Michael Norman.

Reigning Olympic champion and 2019 world gold medallist Steven Gardiner of the Bahamas, Grenada's former Olympic and world champ Kirani James, multiple relay medallist Vernon Norwood of the United States and Britain's world bronze medallist Matthew Hudson-Smith all safely negotiated their heats.

Norwegian prodigy Havarud Bentdal Ingvaldsen, 20, sent out a warning shot as he set a national record of 44.39sec to win his heat, the fastest time of the morning.

Qatar's joint Olympic champion Mutaz Essa Barshim, seeking a fourth world title, will also get his chance to add to his honours after topping qualifying in the men's high jump.

Defending two-time world champion Grant Holloway came through his heat of the 110m hurdles, but there was no such luck for fancied Jamaican Rasheed Broadbent, who clipped a hurdle and crashed out.

AFP



Scottie Scheffler

Scheffler, Fitzpatrick share lead at BMW Championship

Olympia Fields, United States - Top-ranked Scottie Scheffler and 2022 US Open champion Matthew Fitzpatrick each reeled off three consecutive back-nine birdies to share the lead after Saturday's third round of the PGA Tour's BMW Championship.

US star Scheffler made seven birdies against a lone bogey to shoot a six-under par 64 while England's Fitzpatrick had five birdies before a controversial closing bogey left him on 66 at Olympia Fields in suburban Chicago.

That left them on 11-under 199 after 54 holes in the penultimate FedEx Cup playoff event, where the top 30 in season points advance to next week's Tour Championship in Atlanta.

"I played what felt like a great round," Scheffler said. "The winds were shifting around a bunch out there... but I did a good job of when I got into trouble, got out, and my short game was really nice."

American Brian Harman, last month's British Open winner, was third on 200 after a 67 with

countryman Max Homa, who set the course record Friday with a PGA career-low 62, fourth on 201 after a 71.

Reigning FedEx Cup champion Rory McIlroy, a four-time major winner from Northern Ireland, fired 67 to share fifth on 201 with Norway's Viktor Hovland, who shot 65.

Fitzpatrick, leading by a stroke, saved par from a green-side bunker at 17 but at 18 found a fairway bunker and the left rough, where he said a course marshal "semi-stood" on the ball.

"Didn't fully stand on it, but definitely brushed it because you could see the grass was completely moved," Fitzpatrick said.

"It was definitely sat further down than when I got there. They didn't see it, and they can't confirm that, so I wasn't going to fight for it, really."

Instead, he punched into the fairway and went up and down for bogey to fall back level with Scheffler, saying his third shot was impacted.

"Not a different angle, but it just came out heavy," Fitzpatrick said.

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MADRID MUSEUM

Philip II, the second king of the Spanish Austrian dynasty, had inherited the largest European empire of the time. His dominions extended over kingdoms and territories that encompassed today's Netherlands, Germany, and Italy.

As part of his education, Philip II had to travel through his dominions before taking the throne, which generated in the then prince a great interest in all the expressions and styles of art of his time.

Once on the throne, the monarch and emperor began to acquire and commission works of art until he became the greatest patron and art collector of the sixteenth century in Europe.

Philip II did so out of personal taste as well as political motives. He understood the fine arts were a way of spreading a positive and powerful image of the Austrian Monarchy and the Spanish Empire. Today they would call this 'city marketing' or 'country branding'.

A century of art

Aware of the importance of art as the driving force, soul and spirit of any political project, Philip II established in his testamentary dispositions the conditions that all the artistic heritage he inherited and ex-

panded be linked to the monarchic institution and not to personal inheritance. The objective was to prevent the collections from being dispersed.

Not without difficulties, the spirit of Philip II of Spain's project has come down to our time, adapting to them. Under the umbrella of the Spanish National Heritage institution, more than 170,000 artistic pieces curated over the last five centuries are kept and preserved.

An important part of this wealth is open and exposed for the enjoyment of travelers from all over the world in outstanding places such as the Royal Palace of Madrid, El Escorial Monastery, the Monastery of Yuste in Cáceres or the Palace of La Granja in Segovia.

The opening of the Royal Collections Gallery in the heart of Madrid is one more step to share with locals and travelers some of the artistic jewels that the Hispanic monarchy treasured in the last five centuries.

Gallery of Royal Collections

The new museum was inaugurated last July by King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia after investing 25 years and more than 150 million in the new modern building located in the center of Madrid next to the Cathedral of the City and the Royal Palace of Oriente, in what has become the new cultural epicenter of Madrid.

In its first stage, the halls of the Royal Collections of Madrid will bring to the public more than six hundred artistic objects and historical jewels of Spain, including paintings, sculptures, ceramics, fine handcrafted furniture used by the different Spanish monarchs and other types of jewellery such as royal carriages from different periods, many of them signed by great names of universal art such as the painters Diego de Velázquez or Caravaggio or tapestries and paintings by Goya.

The Museum is organised on two floors that follow a chronological order so that the traveler can go through the styles that were in fashion during the reign of each of the monarchs of the Spanish dynasties of Austria and the Bourbons.

For interested travelers, it is recommended to take a visit with an audio guide. The service offers several alternatives, although the 'express visit' option, lasting 90 minutes, offers a desirable alternative to learn about the main pieces of the collections combining historical and artistic aspects from the late fourteenth century to the twentieth century.

(Contributed by: Igor Galo)

A new museum expands the cultural offerings of the Spanish capital. Located next to the Royal Palace of Madrid, it brings together the 650 outstanding pieces of the Royal Collections of the last five centuries



ANTIQUES



People browsing items on display at the Jianguo jade market in Taipei

Jade Trade

Taiwan's antique jade dealers see trade losing lustre as buyers get cautious

Tracing a palm-sized jade animal resting on its haunches, an antique trader in Taiwan said the ears on the nearly 400-year-old piece are a marker of its authenticity.

"The folds in the animal's ears show the handiwork, the ancient handicraft" of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), said the 60-year-old trader, who gave his name as Lee.

"It takes very careful carving. If it were duplicates, they wouldn't make it that delicate and detailed." Lee's shop in Taipei's Da'an district holds ancient treasures worth more than a condominium located in the same neighbourhood.

The value of his merchandise represents just a fraction of an industry that, the island's jade association says, brought in nearly US\$16mn annually in recorded pre-pandemic antique jade sales.

Dealers, however, warn the sector is flagging post-Covid. With the global economy in tatters, buyers are more cautious about taking a chance on expensive items, especially with the market awash with counterfeits.

Taipei's worsening ties with Beijing have also meant restrictions are still in place for visitors from mainland China, effectively cutting out the industry's biggest buyers.

Relations have plummeted since Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who refuses to accept Beijing's claim that the self-ruled island belongs to China, was elected in 2016.

"About seven to 12 years ago, it was very good times for people in Taiwan who are in



Chang Juben, chairman of Taiwan's Association of Jade Collectors, displays a Yuan dynasty (1217-1368) jade belt ornament showing a carving of a dragon among clouds, in Taipei



A Qing dynasty era (1636-1911) royal family jade item with a relief depiction of a phoenix



Chinese people stopped coming in and rich people in Taiwan are not buying. There is no supply in the market... and collectors here are not willing to release their items for sale

LIU SAN-BIAN

the antiques or jade trade," said Liu San-bian, who runs a store in Metropolitan Jewellery and Antiques Emporium, a treasure trove of ateliers.

"It declined when cross-strait politics slowly affected travel between both sides," he said, summing up the dilemma in four Chinese characters meaning, 'hard to buy, hard to sell'.

"Chinese people stopped coming in and rich people in Taiwan are not buying. There is no supply in the market... and collectors

here are not willing to release their items for sale."

INGRAINED IN OUR DNA

Taiwan was the go-to place for hunters of Chinese relics long before it became a powerhouse for hi-tech semiconductors. Collectors said most were carried out of mainland China during the Cultural Revolution, ending up on the island and nearby Hong Kong.

The Chinese government generally considers the trade of antiques from historical

eras to be illegal if they were not passed down through inheritance or bought from authorised venues, such as cultural relic stores.

There is, however, a grey area in Taiwan, where collectors say they have obtained the items through legitimate means, especially if the items were personal belongings.

"To the Chinese, it is ingrained in our DNA," Chang Juben, chairman of Taiwan's Association of Jade Collectors, said.

"Collectors in Taiwan began collecting

when they realised that these were valuable national treasures. Taiwan has a reputation in the Greater Chinese community, that you can come here to see, touch, and buy good jades."

The antique jade market took off around 2011, when Beijing-friendly Ma Ying-jeou was president, bringing in 'an endless stream of buyers from China and other countries', Chang said.

Now Taiwan's market is about a quarter of its former annual value - roughly US\$9.4mn to US\$15.7mn in the boom years - and it is easy to be steered towards unauthentic artefacts.

"It relies on word of mouth," Chang said. "You have to walk the right path and find the right person."

Most reputable collectors are also protective about their stock, refusing to show their best items to a novice who won't appreciate it or to a buyer simply looking to resell for profit.

BUILD A REPUTATION

A two-hour flight to Hong Kong - a hub for Chinese antiques sold in both sprawling markets and upscale auction houses - tells a different story.

Pola Antebi, deputy chairman at Christie's auction house in Hong Kong, said she is seeing a trend in which antique collectors are releasing long-cherished collections held for up to five decades.

"We've sold several substantial collections from Taiwan in Hong Kong in recent years, including the notable Chang Wei-Hwa collection of early jades," Antebi said.

That portfolio of jades from the Qin and Han dynasties fetched US\$9.3mn in November, while three previous auctions of Chang Wei-Hwa's collection brought in US\$24.7mn from 2019 to 2021.

Taiwan's jade 'players' remain confident the trade will survive no matter what, said Lee. His unique shop, which houses aquariums of iridescent corals, gets visitors via word of mouth. One trip can turn into several before any transaction is made - if at all.

"It takes very long to build a reputation, but it is very easy to ruin it. If one item you sell turns out to be fake... that's all it takes to ruin you," he said.

AFF