



Ties embark on new phase

HM concludes Berlin visit setting stage for deeper and stronger Oman-German relations

Berlin, Germany - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik concluded a historic visit to Germany on Friday, opening a new phase in relations between the two countries.

The new phase in bilateral relations was set in motion by a landmark summit meeting between His Majesty the Sultan, Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of Germany, and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

The visit bodes well for further partnership in various spheres, notably economic, investments, renewable energy, green power, and scientific and cultural fields.

On Friday, His Majesty the Sultan was accorded an official reception at Bellevue Palace in Berlin. Later, His Majesty and President Steinmeier held a round of official talks where the latter expressed his delight at His Majesty's visit to Germany. He hailed the deep-rooted relations between the two countries.

On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his appreciation for the hospitality accorded to him and his delegation. His Majesty commended the strong ties of friendship binding Oman and Germany. The talks dealt with scope of further cooperation and studied ways of upgrading ties in various spheres in a manner that meets the aspirations of their friendly peoples.

Meeting with Scholz

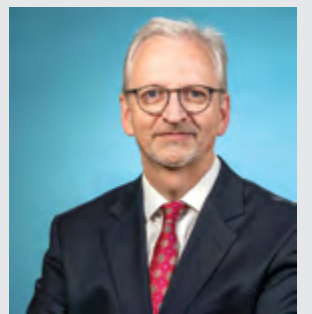
On Thursday, His Majesty the Sultan and Chancellor Scholz

'His Majesty's visit showcases trustful bilateral relations'

Thomas F Schneider, German Ambassador to Oman, said the visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Germany reflects the close bilateral relations between the two friendly nations.

"We are deeply honoured to receive His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in Germany during his first official visit outside the Gulf region. In the year of our 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations, this visit illustrates the close and trustful bilateral relations between our two friendly nations," Schneider said.

He noted that Oman and Germany share a common vision of a rules-based international order, seeking peace



Thomas F Schneider

and understanding between nations.

"Germany highly appreciates Oman as a reliable partner and constructive actor in international affairs. We are confident that this visit will further deepen our ties and open new avenues for cooperation," he said.

held a meeting. Upon His Majesty's arrival at the chancellery, he was welcomed by the chancellor and senior German officials.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan attended a luncheon hosted in his honour by the German Chancellor to mark his visit.

During the banquet, His Majesty the Sultan and Chancellor Scholz reviewed the growing bilateral relations and discussed ways of upgrading existing cooperation and partnership to serve

the common interests of the Omani and German peoples.

They also exchanged views on a variety of issues of common concern in the backdrop of developments in regional and international arenas.

His Majesty the Sultan also granted an audience to several German businessmen and company CEOs on Thursday. The meeting aimed to boost trade relations and promote investment opportunities between the two countries in various spheres.

NEWS BRIEF

129% INCREASE IN HOTEL REVENUES

Muscat - Revenues of three- to five-star hotels rose 129 per cent, amounting to RO73.058mn till May 2022, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The monthly statistical bulletin of tourism indicators issued by NCSI showed that the number of hotel guests increased 46.2 per cent - to 654,807, and occupancy rate increased by 23.3 per cent to 44.1 per cent till May 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.

Among nationalities, European guests recorded the biggest growth - 809.4 per cent - to 176,591 as against 19,419 in five months of 2021. Omani guests dropped by 9.2 per cent to 280,306 compared to 308,818 last year. GCC visitors also grew substantially - 778.5 per cent.

04



Sultanate among most welcoming nations for expats

US will not walk away from Mideast: Biden

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - US President Joe Biden told Arab leaders on Saturday that Washington will remain fully engaged in the Middle East and not cede influence to other world powers.

"We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia or Iran," Biden said during a regional security and bilateral relations summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The summit, the final stop of Biden's Middle East tour, brought together the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.

Oman was represented by Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

Biden had been looking to use the summit to discuss volatile oil prices and outline his vision for Washington's role in the region.

Acknowledging Oman's role in finding a solution to the Yemen crisis, he said, "We worked with Oman and Saudi Arabia to find a political solution in Yemen."

He also stressed that his country's interests are linked to successes in the Middle East. "The United States supports partnerships with countries that adopt an international system based on laws." He added that America is committed to providing assis-



Washington will remain fully engaged in the Middle East and not cede influence to other world powers. We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia or Iran

US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

tance to countries experiencing food crises.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud affirmed in his speech at the opening of the summit that the global economy is linked to the stability of energy prices and called for investment in clean energy.

Egyptian president Abdel Fat-

tah el Sisi said that the Jeddah summit bears a clear indication of the renewed resolve for joint action between the Arab countries and the US. He called for concerted efforts to put an end to conflicts and wars in the region.

Sisi said, "An independent Palestinian state must be established as per the 1967 borders. Reversing a peace process is not enough, rather, a final and irreversible solution must be reached."

Although US forces continue to target armed groups in the region and remain deployed in bases throughout the Middle East, Biden suggested that he was turning the page after Washington's invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Today, I am proud to be able to say that the eras of land wars in the region, wars that involved huge numbers of American forces, is not under way," he said.



Announcement



To implement the provisions of the Value Added Tax Law and its Executive Regulations, the Tax Authority calls on those who are subject to the same tax to submit their tax returns for the second quarter of 2022, according to the tax declaration form. The form is available through the electronic services portal: [www. taxoman.gov.om](http://www.taxoman.gov.om)

The Authority also urges people to submit all the required financial data according to the forms. The deadline for submitting is **July 31, 2022** hoping that everyone adhere to the deadline set for submitting the tax return.

New phase in Oman-German ties



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Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) member of Nama Group is a government owned company acting as the single buyer of power and water from all Independent Power Projects, Independent Power and Water Projects, and Independent Water Project (IPP/IWPP/ IWP) within the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour is currently seeking to recruit Omani graduates for its Graduates Development Program. **Successful candidates will be expected to have the following minimum qualifications:**

Degree and Specialization	Required GPA - (Equivalent or above) from an accelerated academic institution
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Interested candidates are requested to apply through OPWP Careers website www.opwpcareers.om not later than 24 July 2022.

You can also access OPWP careers page via:



Oman, Germany sign declaration of intent in energy sector

Berlin, Germany - The Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany signed a declaration of intent for cooperation in the field of energy on Thursday. This will contribute to the exchange of technical knowledge, related integrated systems and smart networks.

The declaration of intent was signed by Salim Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, for Oman, whilst it was signed from the German side by Dr Patrick Graichen, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action.

The declaration was signed within the framework of the official visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Germany.

The signing fulfils the desire of the two countries to continue promoting cooperation in the field of energy on the basis of mutual benefit, as the two countries are party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as fulfilling their desire to establish a framework for the exchange of technical knowledge, advice, skills and expertise related to the field of energy.

The two sides reached an understanding on several matters, including encouraging cooperation in the field of renewable energy technologies, integrated systems and smart networks and energy efficiency in industry, buildings and transportation, green hydrogen and its derivatives, energy regulatory frameworks, and research and market planning with the aim of creating an attractive milieu to invest in



Signing fulfils the desire of the two countries to continue promoting cooperation in the field of energy on the basis of mutual benefit, as both are party to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

energy transition technologies.

The two sides also held a meeting dealing with the existing friendship and constructive co-operation. They discussed the major joint projects that the two countries aspire to achieve in the field of energy and green hydrogen and its lucrative feasible derivatives in a manner that brings mutual benefits to them.

The meeting was attended by Khalid Hashel al Muselhi, Head of Foreign Minister's Office, Thomas Schneider, German Ambassador to Oman, and officials from both sides.

ONA



‘Dialogue needed for settlement of global disputes’

Berlin, Germany - Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, held a meeting with Andreas Michaelis, Secretary of State in the German Federal Foreign Office, on the sidelines of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's official visit to Germany, on Thursday.

The meeting dealt with the two countries' growing bilateral relations and aspects of cooperation in different fields.

The two sides stressed the significance of the Royal visit of His Majesty the Sultan which, they said, ushered in a new era of partnership in various spheres, notably economy, investment, renewable energy, green power, scientific and cultural fields.

The meeting was an opportunity to exchange views on regional and international developments. The two sides underscored the importance of dialogue for the settlement of global disputes by peaceful means to help achieve lasting security and stability.

“Productive discussions with State Secretary Michaelis as Oman-German cooperation continues to grow and expand in many areas - especially trade, economic partnership and culture. We exchanged views on current developments and our efforts on security and stability,” Sayyid Badr tweeted.

He also met Niels Annen, Parliamentary State Secretary to the German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development. “We discussed joint ambitions to develop key sectors such as green energy in the context of economic cooperation, which could be the foundation stone for further innovative investments,” Sayyid Badr stated.

The meeting was attended by Khalid Hashel al Muselhi, Head of Foreign Minister's Office, Thomas Schneider, German Ambassador to Oman, and Terven Bellman, Political Director in the German Foreign Ministry and Head of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear file.



Heavy rains expected on Sunday, Monday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Heavy rains will hit the sultanate starting Sunday as a result of a tropical depression in the Arabian Sea.

A statement from Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said that the low pressure over northeast of the Arabian Sea turned into a tropical depression on Saturday. ‘The centre of the depression is 964km from the coast of Oman.’

Satellite images showed the position of the depression near the coast of India (Gujarat) with chances of rain on Sunday and Monday in most parts of Oman.

CAA stated that on Sunday, the tropical depression will start to affect with rains of varying intensity; between 20-60mm in North Sharqiyah, South Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and south of Muscat. ‘Wind speeds are expected to be between 30 and 60kmph.’

On Monday, 30-80mm of rains are expected in North Sharqiyah, South Sharqiyah, North Batinah, South Batinah, Muscat, Dakhiyah, Dhahirah, Buraimi, Al Wusta and Musandam. ‘Winds speeds are expected to be be-

Ibri records 41mm rainfall in three days

Ibri recorded 41mm rainfall in three days from July 13 to July 15, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has stated.

Data collected from the rain monitoring stations of the ministry from Wednesday till Friday showed that Yanqul and Liwa received 35mm of rainfall, Al Hamra 32mm, Khabourah 25mm, Adam 23mm, Buraimi 20mm, Rustaq 15mm, Mudhaibi 10mm, Awabi 7mm, and 6mm in Dhank and Sohar.

tween 40 and 80kmph.’

Meanwhile, 16 people lost their lives and 48 others were rescued in different governorates during the inclement weather experienced in the sultanate from July 7 to July 14.

Rescue teams of Royal Oman Police and Civil Defence and

Ambulance Authority (CDAA) continue to search for three missing persons in Dhofar.

On Sunday, July 10, the CDAA received a report of eight people being swept away into the sea after they crossed a safety barricade at Mughsail Beach. Three of them were rescued immediately. On July 12, the bodies of two people were found.

CDAA stressed the need to follow safety guidelines during the period of stay in Dhofar and not swim in undesignated areas, including springs, pools and beaches. ‘The height and intensity of waves increase significantly with the advent of the khareef season,’ it warned.

With many parts of Oman likely to receive rain in the coming days, ROP warned motorists against crossing overflowing wadis. ‘Crossing an overflowing wadi can attract imprisonment of up to three months and/or a fine of RO500, according to Article 49 of the Traffic Law. Moreover, the act puts others’ lives at risk,’ ROP said.

‘Motorists should be careful when driving on wet roads to avoid losing control and skidding.’

Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Nonrefundable)	Tender Purchase deadline	Clarification deadline	Tender Submission Date
TENDER/2022/07/ENG/001	Modification of Filling Station, Construction of Shop Building & Top Loading Facility at Nimr in Dhofar Governorate	50.000 OMR	21.07.2022	26.07.2022	28.07.2022

Bank Name & Account Number Bank Muscat (0423005687760617)

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with a minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om The tender may be collected on any working day between 08:00 AM – 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** The tender bid should be submitted in a sealed envelope and addressed to the Chairman of the Tender Committee, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- For any enquiry email us at (procurement@almaha.com.om) or by calling 24610289/24610287/24610355

SHABAB OMAN II WINS BEST SHIP AWARD IN NETHERLANDS



Royal Navy of Oman's *Shabab Oman II* was crowned the best ship in the Port of Harlingen, the Netherlands, on Thursday as part of its international voyage titled 'Oman, the Land of Peace.' A statement issued by *Shabab Oman II* on Twitter said, 'At the end of the first stage of the Tall Ships Race in Harlingen, *Shabab Oman II* won the best ship award.' The ship received a large number of visitors when it was docked in Harlingen. 'Visitors were acquainted with the ship and its role in spreading love and harmony among people all over the world, as well as given a tour of the exhibition on board.' The ship is on its sixth international voyage, which concludes on October 23 (Supplied Photos)

Oman among most welcoming countries for expatriates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is among the most welcoming countries in the world for expatriates with the sultanate ranked second for general friendliness towards foreign residents, according to the Expat Insider 2022 survey. Oman comes 12th out of 52 destinations in the survey with the country ranking best in the Ease of Settling In and Expat Essentials Indices (fifth for both). The country ranks third in the Local Friendliness Subcategory, with 89 per cent describing Omanis as generally friendly towards foreign residents (vs 65 per cent globally).

In fact, Oman ranks second worldwide for general friendliness towards foreign residents, only beaten by Mexico.

Mexico (first), Indonesia (second), and Taiwan (third) make up the top three destinations, all ranking very well in the Ease of Settling In and Personal Finance Indices. On the other hand, the bottom three destinations - Kuwait (52nd), New Zealand, and Hong Kong - all perform poorly in terms of personal finances for expats.

This is the ninth edition of the Expat Insider survey published by InterNations, the world's largest expat community with more than 4mn members. With nearly 12,000 respondents, it is one of the most extensive surveys about living and working abroad, providing insights into expat life in 52 destinations.

The survey offers in-depth information on expats' satisfaction with the Quality of Life, Ease of Settling In, Working Abroad, and Personal Finance in their respective country of residence.

For the first time, the ranking also includes the new Expat Essentials Index, which covers digital life, admin topics, housing, and language.

89% describe Omanis as friendly towards foreign residents
65% find it easy to make local friends

63% have a personal support network
75% find it is easy to live in Oman without speaking Arabic

73% find it easy to get used to the local culture
79% say housing is easy to find
79% feel welcome



Although Oman performs well in friendliness and Expat Essentials Indices, expats are unhappy with regard to Working Abroad (39th) and Quality of Life (38th). Oman ranks in a fairly average place for Personal Finance (21st). Overall, 72 per cent of expats are happy with their life in Oman, compared to 71 per cent globally.

A welcoming culture

It is very easy for expats to find their footing in Oman, as the country ranks fifth out of 52 in the Ease of Settling In index. In fact, nearly four in five expats in

Oman (79 per cent) feel welcome (vs 66 per cent globally).

"There is a good, accommodating culture here," says a Pakistani expat. A British expat notes that "the local people are very friendly and make you feel very welcome in the relaxed atmosphere".

Supported and connected expats

With a friendly and welcoming culture, Finding Friends is also a high point. Oman ranks tenth in this subcategory. Nearly two in three expats in Oman (65 per cent) find it easy to make local

friends (vs 42 per cent) globally. Close to two-thirds of expats (63 per cent) have a personal support network in Oman (vs 59 per cent) globally, and 73 per cent find it easy to get used to the local culture (vs 62 per cent globally).

The basics of life in Oman

Oman also excels in the Expat Essentials Index (fifth), ranking in the top ten in both the Housing (eighth) and Language (seventh) subcategories. Expats say that housing is easy to find (79 per cent vs 54 per cent globally) and

to afford (57 per cent vs 39 per cent globally) in Oman.

Additionally, it is easy to live in Oman without speaking the local language (75 per cent vs 51 per cent globally). However, expat life in Oman is not completely free: 13 per cent of expats feel that their access to online services, such as social media, is restricted, nearly twice the global average (seven per cent).

Disappointing job prospects

Expats rate Oman rather poorly when it comes to Working Abroad (39th). The majority of

expats in Oman (53 per cent) is unhappy with the local job market, nearly double the global average (27 per cent).

Oman ends up in the bottom ten for personal career opportunities (46th). Accordingly, nearly one in three expats (31 per cent) are unhappy with this factor (vs 22 per cent globally). An Indian expat feels that "there are no career opportunities for women".

Mixed results for work culture

Salary is another low point for Oman, as about one in four expats (26 per cent) feel that they are not paid fairly for their work (vs 20 per cent globally). What is more, 36 per cent are also worried about their job security, compared to 20 per cent globally. Only 45 per cent feel that the work culture in Oman supports flexibility (vs 60 per cent globally), which makes the country fall behind today's increasingly modern world of business. Still, 66 per cent are happy with their work-life balance (vs 62 per cent globally).

Difficulty getting out and about

Oman falls short when it comes to Leisure Options (46th): over one in three expats (34 per cent) are unhappy with the culture and nightlife (vs 16 per cent globally), and 15 per cent are not satisfied with the opportunities for recreational sports (vs 11 per cent globally).

It also seems hard to get to the activities, since the country ranks in the bottom ten for both affordability (46th) and the availability (52nd) of public transportation. While 73 per cent of expats find it easy to get around on foot and/or by bicycle (vs 77 per cent globally), they are happiest with the infrastructure for cars (91 per cent vs 75 per cent globally).



Private schools perform better in GED exams; results today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The General Education Diploma results for 2021-22 for Grade 12 will be announced on Sunday, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has stated.

MoE announced via Twitter that H E Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, has approved the General Education Diploma (GED) 2021-22 results.

The results will be available on Sunday from 4pm through SMS from Omantel and Ooredoo, and later on the Oman Education Portal.

MoE stated that 49,046 students appeared for the GED regular programme this year and their pass percentage is 81.55. The success rate of private schools (bilingual), in which 1,449 students appeared, is 90.81 per cent. Royal Guard of Oman Technical College (bilingual), where 49 students appeared, has a success rate of 93.88 per cent.

A total of 187 students took the GED in Islamic Sciences; their success rate is 97.33 per cent.

MoE prepared 355 centres for the GED examinations in various governorates this year. Twenty-five violations were recorded during the exams; legal measures were taken against the violators.

The ministry announced that students can apply for revaluation of examination papers from July 18 to 24.

ROP arrests 25 for speeding, drifting in Dhofar, Al Wusta

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested 25 people for drifting and speeding in Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates.

A statement issued by ROP said, 'The Dhofar Governorate Police Command arrested 22

drivers on charges of drifting and violating public peace.'

ROP arrested three other drivers for speeding, driving recklessly and overtaking dangerously, endangering their own lives and the lives of others in Al Wusta.

'Legal measures have been taken against them,' it stated.

MHT, RAO sign pact to enhance safety in adventure tourism

Jabal Akhdar - The Ministry of Defence, represented by Royal Army of Oman (RAO), and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) signed a training agreement in the field of adventure tourism in Jabal Akhdar on Thursday.

According to the agreement RAO's Combat Training Centre will work on examining and training personnel in matters of secu-



rity and safety for adventure tourism activities. This will ensure offering adventure tourism in a professional and secure manner.

The agreement was signed at the Combat Training Centre in the wilayat of Jabal Akhdar, Dakhliyah.

It was inked by Brig Abdullah Mohammed al Badi, Director General of Training and Inspec-

tion at RAO Command, and Said Harib al Obaidani, Director General of Tourism Development, MHT.

The signing ceremony was attended by Maj Gen Mattar Salim al Balushi, Commander of RAO, H E Azzan Qassim al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in MHT, and Brig Said Zayed al Habsi, Commandant of RAO Academy, among others.



Bank Muscat profit rises 4.9% to RO99mn in H1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO99.26mn for the first six months of 2022 compared to RO94.65mn reported during the same period in 2021, an increase of 4.9 per cent.

The bank, which is the flagship financial institution in the sultanate, on Thursday announced its preliminary unaudited results for the six months ended June 30, 2022.

Bank Muscat's net interest income (from conventional banking) and net income from Islamic financing decreased by 1.3 per cent to RO166.25mn in the first six months of 2022 compared with RO168.44mn for the same period in 2021, mainly due to higher interest expenses.

Non-interest income of the bank grew by 9 per cent to RO81.44mn in the first half of this year against RO74.70mn

recorded in the same period of last year, mainly due to higher income from sale of investments.

Operating expenses for the six months period ended June 30, 2022 were RO102.71mn as compared to RO95.12mn for the same period in 2021, an increase of 8 per cent.

'The decrease (in net impairment for credit losses) is mainly attributed to the precautionary and collective provisions created by the bank during the first half of 2021, due to the ongoing pandemic situation and the improving global crude oil prices,' the bank said in a press statement.

Conventional loans and advances dropped by 4.1 per cent to RO7.577bn as of June 30, 2022 compared with RO7.897bn recorded a year ago. Islamic financing receivables, by contrast, grew by 6.3 per cent to RO1.426bn compared with RO1.341bn as at June 30, 2021.

Total assets of Bank Muscat marginally decreased 0.2 per cent to RO12.860bn as of June 30, 2022 compared to RO12.886bn a year ago.

Total customer deposits (including Islamic customer deposits) increased by 1.9 per cent to RO8.834bn as against RO8.670bn as at June 30, 2021.

Conventional deposits increased by 1.4 per cent to RO7.621bn at the end of June this year against RO7.518bn recorded a year ago. Islamic customer deposits grew by 5.3 per cent to reach at RO1.213bn from RO1.152bn as at June 30, 2021.

Bank Muscat's net loans and advances (including Islamic financing receivables) decreased by 2.5% to RO9bn as of June 30, 2022 compared to RO9.238bn a year ago, due to certain large repayments

Bank Muscat said its net impairment for credit and other losses for the six months period ended June 30, 2022 decreased to RO28.4mn as against RO35.33mn for the same period in 2021.

Bank Muscat's net loans and advances (including Islamic financing receivables) decreased by 2.5 per cent to RO9bn as of June 30, 2022 from RO9.238bn a year ago, due to certain large repayments.

Arkan to develop container freight station and logistics complex at Sohar Port



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone has partnered with Arkan Sohar Logistics to develop a port-based container freight station (CFS) and logistics complex that will occupy 26,000 sqm area.

Through this agreement, Arkan Sohar Logistics will offer bonded and non-bonded facilities, ambient and covered storage, as well as temperature controlled, dry, chilled and frozen storage facilities, according to a press statement issued by Sohar Port and Freezone.

These facilities will also provide value added services such as cross stuffing for import, re-export and transshipment cargo, lashing, crating, staging, labelling, re-packing, kitting, and order processing.

An Oman-based company, Arkan Sohar Logistics has become one of the fastest-growing logistics service providers in the region with a total investment of approximately RO2.7mn.

The CFS will allow importers

and exporters using Sohar Port to securely store goods and products for consolidation and expedited shipping. Arkan Sohar Logistics' CFS services have become a landmark success for the company, offering state-of-the-art customs-bonded areas for cargo, a racked warehouse facility and custom-built dock levelers to facilitate easy access to trailers for safe and efficient loading and unloading.

Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone and deputy CEO Sohar Port said, "As we continue to expand and position Oman as a world-class logistics hub, it is important that we consolidate and de-consolidate shipments coming into Sohar Port by offering CFS services within the port and in close proximity to the container terminal."

"This will speed up the clearance and processing functions in order to move goods and products on to their next destination efficiently. Arkan Sohar Logistics have a well-earned strong reputation as an excellent and de-

pendable service partner and we are looking forward to welcoming them to Sohar."

Ali al Muttawa, CEO of Arkan Sohar Logistics, said, "Our experience in operating CFS, and warehousing facilities for frozen commodities will benefit Sohar Port's clients and ensure they can meet the needs of a growing consumer market by handling goods safely and securely and providing end-to-end logistics solutions. Our facilities can be customized to suit their requirements, and by maintaining shipping containers, we are able to increase cost efficiency and keep businesses moving without delays caused by damaged goods, during processing or transportation."

"Sohar Port and Freezone is one of the fastest-growing industrial and logistics hubs in the region and our presence here aims to add significant value to Oman's supply chain capabilities and shipping lines choosing Sohar Port, positioning Oman as a global leader in the logistics sector," he added.

UAE to remain 'reliable' global energy provider: President



UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan (left) discussed with US President Joe Biden the strategic relations between their countries during a meeting on the sidelines of Jeddah Security and Development Summit on Saturday (WAM)

Dubai, UAE - OPEC member the United Arab Emirates will support "global energy security", its president said as oil prices remain volatile due to supply concerns stemming from the war in Ukraine.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan made the pledge in an address to the nation on Wednesday night, the first since he became president of the energy-rich country in May, following the death of his half-brother.

"We will also continue to consolidate our nation's position as a reliable energy provider, and support global energy security as a fundamental driver of global eco-

nomic growth and development," he said in the televised speech.

His comments came as US President Joe Biden arrived in Israel on a Middle East tour that also took him to oil kingdom Saudi Arabia.

Biden's trip to Riyadh is seen as part of efforts to stabilise oil markets rattled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and resultant sanctions on Moscow.

Oil prices have dipped below US\$100 per barrel in recent days, but remain elevated compared to historical norms.

Biden was expected to try to persuade Saudi Arabia - the world's biggest oil exporter - to increase supplies to sustain-

ably shepherd down prices that have in recent months fuelled inflation around the world.

Earlier Wednesday, the International Energy Agency (IEA) warned that the global economic recovery could be derailed unless governments take measures to reduce fuel prices and consumption.

The IEA also predicted that oil demand would continue to rise, likely outstripping supply.

It noted that the world has little spare capacity to increase production, with the combined buffer of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates set to fall to just 2.2mn barrels per day in August. AFP



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China growth falls to two-year low on COVID, property woes

Beijing, China - China logged its slowest economic growth since the initial COVID outbreak Friday, expanding just 0.4 per cent in the second quarter with lockdowns and property market weakness pushing the government's target further out of reach.

Beijing has dug its heels in on a zero-COVID policy of stamping out virus clusters with snap lockdowns and long quarantines, but this has battered businesses and kept consumers jittery.

The slowdown comes after China's biggest city Shanghai was sealed off for two months as it battled a virus resurgence, tangling supply chains and forcing factories to halt operations.

"Domestically, the impact of the epidemic is lingering," National Bureau of Statistics spokesman Fu Linghui said Friday, noting shrinking demand and disrupted supplies.

"The risk of stagflation in the world economy is rising" also, he told reporters, adding that external uncertainties were growing.

Economic expansion for the April-June period in the world's second-largest economy was also down 2.6 per cent from the previous quarter, the NBS said.

China has only logged a GDP contraction once in recent decades, and analysts expect the latest reading will drag further on full-year growth.

Still, industrial production rose 3.9 per cent on-year in June, up



Workers disinfect an area at a port in Qingdao, in China's eastern Shandong province on July 13 (AFP)

from 0.7 per cent in May as Covid controls eased, while retail sales picked up 3.1 per cent after plummeting 6.7 per cent the month before, in what analysts called an encouraging sign.

The economy is "on track for a slow recovery", said Zhiwei Zhang of Pinpoint Asset Management.

"Nonetheless, economic growth is still much lower than its potential, as the fear of Covid outbreaks continues to hurt consumer and corporate sentiment," he added in a note.

The urban unemployment rate ticked down to 5.5 per cent

in June, NBS data showed.

But the figure for those aged 16 to 24 was significantly higher at 19.3 per cent, adding to challenges in a year with a record number of college graduates.

In Shanghai, where GDP plunged 13.7 per cent in the second quarter, the jobless rate stood at 12.5 per cent.

The weak figures could give room for authorities to roll out stimulus.

"Fiscal stimulus will continue to do the heavy lifting before consumption demand fully recovers," said Chaoping Zhu of JP Morgan Asset Management.

Zhu added that the central bank is expected to maintain low rates to support government spending and the property market.

'Hard to square'

Economists have long questioned the accuracy of official Chinese data, suspecting that figures are massaged for political purposes.

China's second quarter growth is "hard to square with the large hit to activity from lockdowns", said Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics.

EU cuts GDP growth forecasts amid record high inflation

Brussels, Belgium - The European Commission has slashed growth forecasts for the eurozone, saying the consequences from the war in Ukraine were continuing to destabilise the economy because of record high inflation.

The EU executive, which tracks the economy for the 27 countries in the European Union, said GDP growth in the eurozone would reach 2.6 per cent in 2022 and a sharply lowered 1.4 per cent in 2023.

Inflation would end the year at 7.6 per cent, much higher than previously forecast, and 4.0 per cent in 2023. This is still well above the EU's target level of 2.0 per cent and up from a previous prediction of 2.7 per cent.

"The evolution of the war and the reliability of gas supplies are unknown, so this forecast is subject to a high degree of uncertainty and downside risks," EU Economy Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni told a press conference.

In its forecast, the commission said the Russian invasion of Ukraine had put "additional upward pressure" on energy and food prices, which were eroding the purchasing power of households.

Other factors negatively affecting growth include the "faster than expected" tightening of monetary policy by the European Central Bank, which it says is needed to curb inflation.

Added to this is the "continued deceleration of growth in the



Paolo Gentiloni speaks during a press conference in Brussels on Thursday (AFP)

US" and the impact of Beijing's anti-Covid lockdowns, which have led to factory closures and depressed demand.

On the inflation front, the commission estimates the peak should be reached in the third quarter of this year and will then fall gradually to below 3.0 per cent by the end of 2023. Consumer price inflation hit a new record high in the eurozone in June, at 8.6 per cent year-on-year.

The growth and inflation forecasts "depend heavily on the evolution of the war and in particular its implications for Europe's gas supply", the commission said.

"Further increases in gas prices could further raise inflation and stifle growth."

AFP

Panasonic to build \$4bn EV battery plant in US

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese electronics giant Panasonic said it will spend US\$4bn to build a new battery factory in the United States for electric vehicles (EV).

The lithium-ion battery plant in Kansas could create up to 4,000 new jobs, Panasonic said, as the Tesla supplier drives to expand its presence.

"With the increased electrification of the automotive market, expanding battery production in the US is critical to help meet demand," Kazuo Tadanobu, president and CEO of Panasonic Energy, said in a statement.

The factory will be Panasonic's second electric car battery operation in the United States, joining its facility in Ne-

vada.

The announcement comes with Tesla struggling to boost production, after unveiling two new factories in Germany and the US state of Texas earlier this year.

The decision was also welcomed by US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, who said the decision to be "one of the largest battery production sites for the next generation of electric vehicles" in Kansas was "a vote of confidence" in the US economy and its workers.

The new factory is expected to be located in De Soto, Kansas, though the move is subject to approval by Panasonic's board.

AFP

IMF agrees with Pakistan to resume suspended loan after fuel, tax hikes

Islamabad, Pakistan - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said it had agreed with Pakistan to resume a suspended loan programme that will inject US\$1.17bn into the struggling economy.

A statement from the IMF said a "staff level agreement" - which is still subject to board approval - will bring to US\$4.2bn the amount dispersed under an extended fund facility (EFF) that could increase to US\$7bn and stretch until June next year.

An original US\$6bn bailout package was signed by former prime minister Imran Khan in 2019, but repeatedly stalled when his government reneged on subsidy agreements and failed to significantly improve tax collection.



The new agreement follows months of deeply unpopular belt-tightening by the government of Shehbaz Sharif, which took power in April and has effectively eliminated fuel subsidies and introduced new measures to broaden the tax base.

"Pakistan is at a challenging economic juncture," Nathan

Porter, who headed the IMF team, said in a statement, adding external factors and domestic policies were to blame.

Pakistan is desperate for international support for its economy, which suffers from poor revenue collection and dwindling foreign reserves to pay its crippling debt.

The new government has slashed a raft of subsidies to meet the demands of global financial institutions but risks the wrath of an electorate already struggling under the weight of double-digit inflation.

A new coalition government - which came to power after Khan was ousted by a parliamentary no-confidence vote - has said it will make the tough decisions needed to turn the economy

around.

Successive administrations blame their predecessors for the country's economic woes, but analysts say the malaise stems from decades of poor management and a failure to tackle endemic corruption and widespread tax avoidance.

In a bid to secure the IMF loan, Prime Minister Sharif has imposed three fuel price hikes - cumulatively totalling 50 per cent - and raised the cost of electricity to effectively end the subsidies introduced by Khan.

Islamabad has so far received US\$3bn from the programme, but with the facility due to end later this year, officials sought an extension until June 2023.

"It became essential to resume the IMF programme to

save the country from default," finance minister Miftah Ismail told the national assembly last month. "We knew it would damage our political reputation, but still we did it."

The latest budget has earmarked 3.95tn rupees (US\$18.8bn) just to service the country's whopping debt of US\$128bn.

Agreed policy priorities included steadfast implementation of the budget, the IMF's Porter said in the statement.

Pakistan also agreed to continue power sector reforms, introduce a proactive monetary policy to tackle inflation, strengthen governance, combat corruption, and improve the social security net.

AFP

EU seeks cuts in heating, cooling of buildings to save gas

Prague, Czech Republic - The European Commission is expected this week to ask EU countries to reduce heating and cooling of public buildings and offices to cut demand for gas, according to a document seen by AFP.

In order to better withstand the drastic fall in Russian gas supplies, which could be cut off altogether, the commission is expected to urge governments across the 27-nation bloc to set limits on the amount of energy used by public buildings, offices, commercial properties and outdoor terraces.

For optimal energy use, it will recommend the rules require that public buildings be heated to no more than 19 degrees Celsius (66 degrees Fahrenheit) and cooled by air conditioning units set no lower than 25°C (77°F°).

"Energy saved during the summer is energy that can be used in winter," the commission points out in the document.

Energy experts say lowering the thermostat by one degree could cut a building's heating bill by about 10 per cent. Air conditioning units generally struggle and fail to cool a room below 20°C so they waste energy trying.

The recommendation is part of a series of measures Brussels is investigating to cut the European Union's gas consumption by 25 to 60bn cubic metres (880 to 2,120bn cubic feet) per year.

The EU imported around 140bn cubic meters of gas by pipeline from Russia last year, according to the International Energy Agency.

"Acting now could reduce the impact of a sudden supply dis-



ruption by one third," says the document, which is due to be published on July 20 and could be modified in the interim.

It calculates that 11bn cubic metres of gas could be directly saved from reducing excessive heating and cooling, and between four and 40bn cubic metres via reduced electricity

demand. Another 10-11bn cubic metres could be saved from use by industries, which have already slowed production due to soaring prices.

The document urges EU governments, where this is "technically feasible and enforceable" to introduce binding limits on heating and cooling in "public build-

ings, offices, commercial buildings (in particular large buildings) ... and open spaces like outdoor terraces".

"The role of public authorities in leading by example and as an important gas consumer - 30 per cent of the energy consumption - is key in this regard," the document states.

The commission says that during the "gas winter" - October to March - "large savings can be achieved by deploying alternative heat sources for district heating, heat pumps in households" and energy saving campaigns urging the public to turn their thermostats down by one degree Celsius this winter.

Such "protected" energy customers - under EU legislation that means households, district heating that cannot switch to other fuels and certain essential

social services - represent 37 per cent of total EU gas consumption.

Simulations show these customers would be the last to be seriously affected by large-scale Russian gas disruptions, the commission says.

It is therefore concentrating most of its efforts on power stations and industry, which use huge amounts of gas.

"Abrupt cuts could damage specific branches of those industries which have little room to switch to other fuels - because gas is being used as feedstock for industrial processes - or to reduce production without heavy damage," the commission warns.

"It would be significantly less costly to moderately reduce natural gas demand for a longer period of time, starting earlier, than

having to drastically curtail demand suddenly and without proper preparation," it explains.

By way of encouragement, Brussels urges EU governments to set up "auction systems", perhaps involving several countries, to compensate industrial consumers who agree to reduce their gas consumption.

If there is a total cut in Russian gas supply from July onwards, EU states might only be able to replenish 65-71 per cent of their gas reserves before winter, the commission said, quoting forecasts by European gas transmission system operators (ENTSOG).

The commission's energy saving proposals are due to be discussed by EU energy ministers at a meeting in Brussels on July 26.

AFP

Back To School with Marks & Spencer

Marks & Spencer, operated by the Al-Futtaim Group, is the perfect place to find quality back-to-school essentials to make great first day impressions. The latest range is full of well-designed pieces with brilliant innovations that will make getting ready for school easier than ever.

Perfect for those willing to explore, said a press statement from the Al-Futtaim Group. These Marks & Spencer pieces are cleverly armed with innovations such as the Ultimate Shirt with non-iron and stain resistant technology – so whether they have been painting or rolling in the mud, stains will wash out with ease.

The popular StayNEW polo tops reduce bobbling and colour loss, keeping clothes looking newer and brighter for longer. Furthermore, with a sustainable approach the Back-to-School range use responsibly sourced cotton, with recycled buttons, interlining and thread.

With its new design solutions, M&S is here to help make getting ready for school easy. Features such as the easy close Velcro, behind the top button of shirts



and Expandicuff which offers elastic cuffs ensures effortless dressing and comfort.

Meanwhile, trousers come in a variety of shapes, fits and lengths, with flexible waists and adjustable hems that can be unpicked for an extra 3cm, ensuring these last all year round.

Update little one's footwear

with cosy underfoot foam and Freshfeet technology for all day comfort. Accompanied with scruff resistant durable leathers, meaning kids can play to their hearts' content. Add some pops of colour and playful prints to school uniform dressing with fun backpacks and lunchboxes from unicorns and dinosaurs to

Minecraft.

Marks & Spencer, the press statement said is 'trusted to produce school apparel and accessories that can be washed time and time again without compromising on quality'. Ensure children enjoy work and play from breakfast till the last school bell rings, it added.

OPPO inspires users to create their own 'Omoji' as it celebrates World Emoji Day

OPPO is celebrating World Emoji Day by inspiring users to express themselves and their unique style with one of the features of ColorOS 12 - the OPPO 'Omoji'. The Omoji enables the bold and fun to get creative with a 3D animated emoji.

For those who would like to show the world how they are feeling in a more customised way, the OPPO Omoji offers them the perfect smooth, detailed version of themselves. Boosted by OPPO's industry-leading Face Capture algorithm, an OPPO Omoji is the ultimate avatar, suited for every generation of smartphone users.

Tarek Zaki, Senior Product Manager of OPPO MEA said, "In today's world, emojis offer a form of self-expression which caters to new generations' desire to be unique and channel their energy through their smartphones.

"As we celebrate World Emoji Day, we encourage OPPO users to embrace their individuality and interests, embodying their real identities through the miniature, animated character replicas we call Omojis," he added.

Both accurate and authentic,



the OPPO Omoji is easy to create, too. All users need to do is go to Account under Settings, create a profile and adjust the ten different parameters designed to help them customise their look such as Skin, Hair, Eyes, and Nose. Plus, there are over 200 stylistic accessories to choose from – so there is no mood that cannot be captured with an Omoji!

Users can set their Omoji as a profile picture and add it to their Always-On Display to make the most of the fantastic feature. With OPPO Omoji's advanced face algorithm, the most subtle movements are mimicked in full liveliness.

OPPO Omojis are available on all smartphone models with ColorOS 12 on board from December 2021 onwards.

AMF joins global alliance to promote digital payments

The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) will increase the use of responsible digital payments in its programmes and operations to boost financial inclusion, transparency and efficiency, the AMF said in a press release.

The AMF will continue to prioritise youth, women and small businesses in its efforts on payment digitisation, helping advance the Sustainable Development Goals, it added.

The AMF is a regional financial organisation, which joined the United Nations-Better Than Cash Alliance to accelerate financial inclusion in the region.

H E Dr Abdulrahman A al Hamidy, Director General Chairman of the Board of the Arab Monetary Fund, said: "Making responsible payment digitisation a reality across our member countries will help bring many more citizens, particularly youth, women and small businesses, in the financial system, in a way

that serves their needs. By doing that, Arab nations will foster sustainable growth, create employment opportunities, reduce inequality and maintain financial stability."

The AMF will join over 80 governments, global brands and international organisations, members of Better Than Cash Alliance, that committed to responsible digital payments, to help make progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

By joining the alliance, the AMF would demonstrate its leadership in responsible payment digitisation, sharing its remarkable achievements, it added.

Dr Ruth Goodwin-Groen, Managing Director of the Better Than Cash Alliance, said: "We're delighted to welcome our newest member, the Arab Monetary Fund, to our growing global movement shifting from cash to responsible digital payments to improve people's lives."

Saudi Esports Federation previews Gamers8 calendar

His Royal Highness Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan led the proceedings at an official press conference to celebrate the launch of Gamers8, the biggest Esports and gaming event worldwide.

At a press conference on July 13, Saudi Esports Federation executives welcomed key partners and the wider local media community as a milestone moment was marked in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's esports and gaming history.

Attendees enjoyed an interactive first-hand preview of what will follow from Boulevard Riyadh City over the next eight weeks, as well as opportunities to speak with some of the leading figures behind Gamers8, including Turki Alfawzan, CEO, Saudi Esports Federation.

Several keynote speeches and video presentations provided insights and information surrounding Gamers8, with pyrotechnics, confetti, music, lighting, and a fountain show all adding to the event's vibrant atmosphere and overall success.



The summer spectacle includes several professional Esports competitions involving the world's greatest teams and a total US\$15mn prize fund, as well as specially-built festival venues with various activities, live shows and performances starring local talent and international artists, and much more.

The season's first live show took place tonight as a star-studded line-up including J Balvin, Sebastian Ingrosso, Amr Diab, DJ El Fuego, and Salvatore Ganacci thrilled the Opening Concert audience.

All Gamers8 details are available on the event website (<https://gamers8.gg/>).

Bank Nizwa elects chairman, vice-chairman of Shari'ah Supervisory Board

Strengthening its leadership in the Islamic banking industry, Oman's leading and most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa, announced during its recent Shari'ah Supervisory Board (SSB) meeting the appointment of Dr Majid Mohamed al Kindi as Chairman of the SSB. Assisting Dr Majid as Vice Chairman is Dr Aznan bin Hassan. Furthermore, Sheikh Ali al Jahdami has joined the board as a new member, it said in a press statement.

Bank Nizwa is committed to promoting Shari'ah-compliant banking throughout the sultanate. The effectiveness of an Islamic banking model is dependent on strict adherence to Shari'ah standards.

The Islamic Bank is full of pride in its Shari'ah Supervisory Board (SSB), which constitutes highly trained, qualified, well-versed and internationally known Shari'ah consultants.

The existence of such a Shari'ah board also gives the

necessary oversight Shari'ah governance function as well as assurance to shareholders and depositors that all funds invested with the bank are deployed in a Shari'ah-compliant manner be it in any Shari'ah-compliant investment activities or financing transactions where the profit for the clients are assured to meet the highest degree of Shari'ah requirements.

This shows that Bank Nizwa is fully committed to adhering to and implementing a holistic Shari'ah Governance Framework in all its operations in letter and spirit as enshrined in the Islamic Banking Regulatory Framework issued by the Central Bank of Oman, the statement said.

Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa said, "The stability of the Islamic financial system is dependent on Shari'ah governance. It increases stakeholders' and the general public's trust in the activities and operations of Islamic financial institutions (IFIs).



Bank Nizwa's SSB Chairman Dr Majid Mohamed al Kindi

In general, Kayed said that the Shari'ah committee 'plays an important role in the Shari'ah governance of IFIs'.

"The Shari'ah committee's role is enhanced by its delivery of objective and high-quality Shari'ah counsel and verdicts. Bank Nizwa is acclaimed for delivering superior Shari'ah-compliant financial solutions," he asserted.

"Customers can be assured

that its commitment to providing Islamic banking benefits always adheres to the judgments and decisions of its Shari'ah Board, as well as to the Sultanate's regulations set by the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB)," the bank CEP said.

The appointment of Dr Majid al Kindi as a new Chairman of the Board comes within the framework of the bank's commitment

to implement the principles of Shari'ah by strengthening its Board with pioneering expertise.

Dr Kindi holds the position of Secretary of Fatwa in the Office of the General Mufti of Oman at the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs. He is also a researcher on Islamic affairs in the Ministry. He has delivered several papers and studies on Shari'ah supervision in Islamic financial institutions.

Dr Kindi holds a PhD in jurisprudence and its principles from the International Islamic University in Malaysia and another PhD in Islamic economics and banking from Yarmouk University in Jordan.

The SSB also includes Dr Aznan bin Hssan who joined the committee in December 2020. He is an Associate Professor in Shari'ah at the Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance (IIBF), IIUM. He is also the President of the Association of Shari'ah Advisors in Islamic Finance (ASAS),

the Deputy Chairman of the Shari'ah Advisory Council, Securities Commission and the Deputy Chairman of the Shari'ah Advisory Committee Employee Provident Fund (EPF).

Dr Aznan is also a member of the Shari'ah Advisory Council, AAOIFI, Bahrain and Hong Leong Islamic Bank. He is a registered Shari'ah Advisor for the Islamic Unit Trust Schemes and Islamic Securities (Sukuk) with the Securities Commission of Malaysia.

In addition, the SSB includes Sheikh Jahdami who has concrete experience in the field of Islamic banking and has obtained certifications in Islamic banking accredited by the Arab Academy

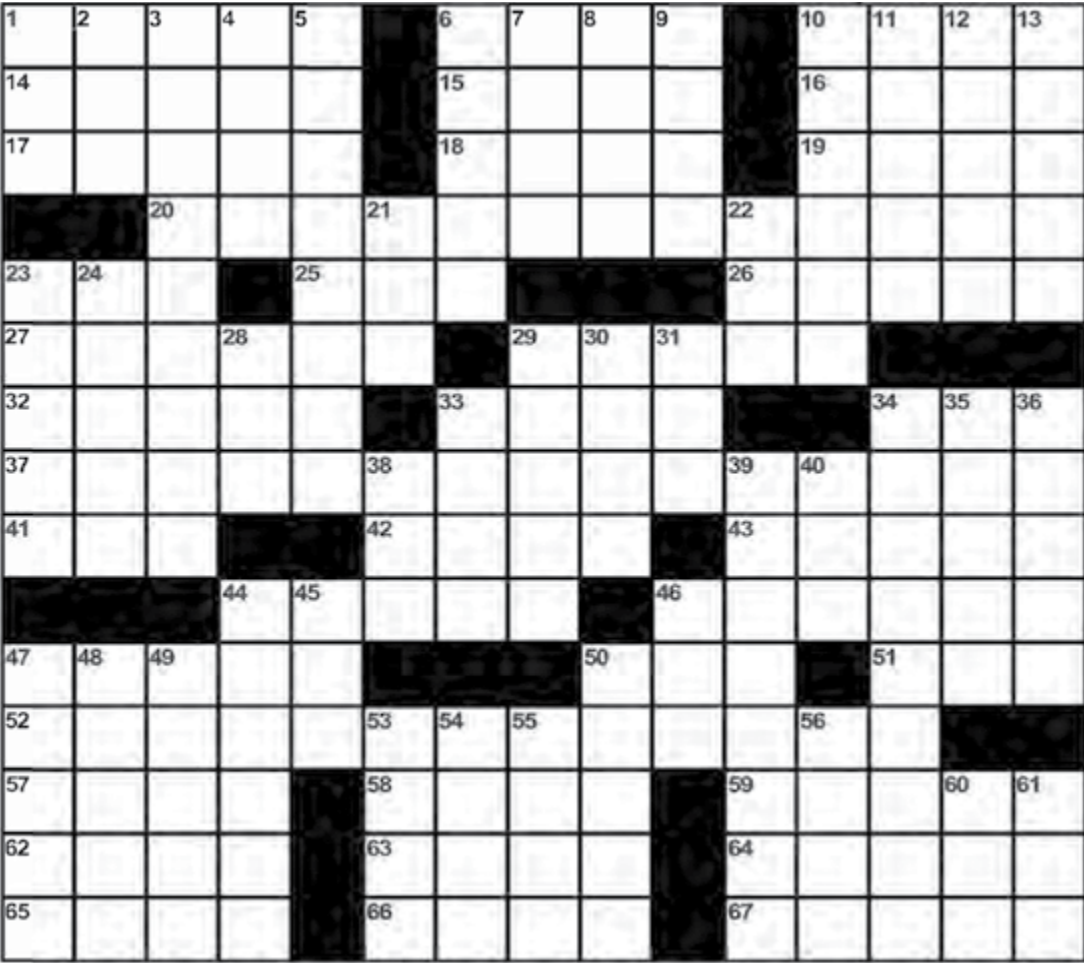
for Banking and Financial Sciences in Jordan and for professional Sharia audit in Islamic banks and financial institutions.

Jahdami has worked as a fatwa researcher in the Fatwa Department of the Office of the General Mufti of Oman since 2007. Furthermore, he has participated as a member of the Drafting and Description Committee on the development of jurisprudence sessions and as a member of the Committee for Reviewing and Approval of Books and Publications of the Research and Studies Department, both led by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

Shari'ah governance maintains the benefit of focusing on the interests of all stakeholders and providing justice to them.

As such, Shari'ah committees serve as IFIs' gatekeepers for Shari'ah governance and compliance. Ultimately, all stakeholders are benefitted and social obligations are met.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Ziti or cannelloni
6) Laborer
10) Many Monopoly props.
14) Have a home-cooked meal
15) Pro_ (in proportion)
16) Landlocked African country
17) Sweater letter
18) Cow-headed Egyptian goddess
19) Everyman
20) Required course for fathers-to-be?
23) Lawyers' org.
25) That fella
26) Aquamarine or emerald
27) Filmed a scene again
29) Waking up
32) More apt to deceive
33) "Wheel of Fortune" option
34) Words from the sponsors
37) Hemingway book, with "The"
41) Born as, for women
42) On the sheltered side
43) Character set for computers
44) Largest ray

46) Most fitting
47) Time's partner
50) European mountain
51) Degree in mathematics?
52) Spiderlike bug
57) Throughout the course of
58) Yachting to Hawaii, e.g.
59) Water nymph of Greek myth
62) Orange rind, e.g.
63) Czech, Serb or Croat
64) Run away and get married
65) Tried's partner
66) Tender to the touch
67) Supergiant in Cygnus

DOWN

1) Animal kept for companionship
2) "That feels g-O-O-O-di!"
3) Get out of the way
4) Michael Jackson backer, once
5) Poet's repetition for effect
6) Light reflector
7) Far from hard
8) "Narc" ending
9) Old Rambler manufacturer

10) Comparatively plenty
11) Courage under fire
12) Nostalgic work
13) Greek and Roman female oracle
21) "The_ and the Pendulum"
22) _-Wan Kenobi
23) Fire-setting crime
24) The beauty of "Beauty and the Beast"
28) Clothes line?
29) Certain sleep problem
30) "Them" or "us"
31) Dynamite stuff
33) Shaker's contents
34) A movement upward
35) Certain worshipper
36) Doth speak
38) A Bobbey twin
39) Came to pass
40) "To the max" suffix
44) Word with East or Ages
45) "... ideas?"
46) Nothing's opposite
47) Learn to fit in
48) Dungeons & Dragons player
49) Bye, in France
50) Spiny-leaved plant
53) Dundee miss

family name
60) Hairy copier
61) Society-page new-comer

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your passion for travel is rekindled. If you can't just grab your passport and take off for parts unknown, go ahead and explore your inner space. That could include watching a foreign film, enjoying a food festival, or even reading about a place that has interested you for ages. You could also strike up a conversation with someone from a place far away from your home base. You might be amazed by what you learn.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It might feel as if you have more problems than you should today. A recent streak of good fortune might bring a few hidden thorns that you weren't expecting. If you keep calm, you should be able to nip any incipient problems in the bud. If you think about it, these are just the essential complications that success usually brings. See it as a practical exercise for the next time you have this kind of fabulous luck.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your schedule is just a little overloaded! Old friends and new contacts are booking you left and right, because no social event is complete without your winning smile and fantastic presence. And it's not that you put on a big show wherever you go. Far from it. It's just that every person who sees and talks to you feels so much better afterward. Who wouldn't want someone like you at their party or meeting?

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Things will be totally black or white today. All the issues you're looking at will be clear and easy to figure out, without any confusing gray areas. This is one of those days when quick thinking will be easy, and any argument you get involved in will be over as soon as you bring up your one killer point! This lack of nuance and complexity will enable you to cut through all the noise people are making.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Making tough decisions has never been your idea of a good time, but it's much worse when you second-guess your instincts. While the number of possibilities over the horizon might feel overwhelming, the fact still remains that you have to just choose something and take your chances with the results. Your energy is pushing you to take a chance, and the greater the risk, the greater the reward!

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You need to strike a balance between your cravings and your fears, and it might not be easy. Wake up from your dream life and try to figure out what's actually necessary as opposed to what is merely desired. No amount of money can purchase inner security, so try to ensure that your purchases are more sensible. Any financial tidal wave should smooth out and become a mere ripple.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

You know that with a little luck, you can work it out. Some good fortune comes your way though you don't really need it, but don't think about it too hard. Pick it up and run with it instead. Looking for logical explanations would only frustrate you. For now, take it as a sign that the Universe thinks you're on the right track. These little encouragements are meant to keep up your spirits!

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Remember that haste makes waste now, especially if you're tempted to rush into something just to feel like you're making progress. You could actually cause delays and setbacks by jumping into a new project without thinking it through, especially at work or when taking care of home improvements. These matters need your full, patient attention. A happy ending might take longer than you'd like.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you're feeling somewhat pessimistic when it comes to love, you shouldn't. Things are just about to change. However, if you want to take advantage of these great new opportunities, you need to toss out all the junk that's been cluttering your heart and head. Stop obsessing about the past. Everything that happened was meant to bring you to this moment with your open and giving heart intact. Move forward.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You need to toss out anything that doesn't fit and hasn't in a while, including clothes, shoes, relationships, ideas. Keeping something around simply because it used to be a good fit just clutters up your house, closet, and mind. How can you introduce anything new and energizing into your life if your head or personal space is clogged with so many remnants of your past?

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're a seeker of knowledge of all kinds, from the physical to the emotional to the mental. You need to realize that you're still a student in many ways, no matter how much you might know or how old you (or your soul) might be. This humble attitude serves you well when it comes to facing a new challenge in your life. Allies should flock to help with what you need, and you could make friends for life.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If you just can't make your current situation work, don't try and force it, no matter how awesome it seems in principle. One crucial detail might be missing from a partnership or work situation, so no matter what you do, don't keep trying to make it work if you see a deal-breaking aspect that isn't going anywhere. Sometimes when you hold out for the best, that's exactly what you get.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What is the stage name of Londoner Susan Janet Ballion, who fronted the group "The Banshees" between 1976 and 1996?

A. Alison Apache
B. Siouxsie Sioux
C. Karen Komanche
D. Marjorie Mohawk

02. Which city in the Zou Department of The People's Republic of Benin was formerly the capital of the ancient kingdom of Dahomey?

A. Ouagadougou
B. Mogadishu
C. Abomey
D. Kampala

03. What was the medal count for the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) in the last Olympic Games in which it took part as a country, and before the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was formed and stepped up drug-testing at the Games?

A. 39 gold and 113 total medals
B. 55 gold and 132 total medals
C. 48 gold and 100 total medals
D. 46 gold and 121 total medals

Answers: 1.B 2.C 3.B

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

E	E	D	I
G	A	D	I
B	N	M	N
O	Y	O	D

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

Ukraine accuses Russia of shelling from Europe's largest nuclear plant

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine's atomic energy agency accused Russia of using Europe's largest nuclear power plant to store weapons and shell the surrounding regions of Nikopol and Dnipro that were hit on Saturday.

Petro Kotin, president of Ukrainian nuclear agency Energoatom, called the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant 'extremely tense' with up to 500 Russian soldiers controlling the plant. The plant in southeast Ukraine has been under Russian control since the early weeks of Moscow's invasion, though it is still operated by Ukrainian staff.

"The occupiers bring their machinery there, including missile systems, from which they already shell the other side of the river Dnipro and the territory of Nikopol," he said in a Ukrainian television interview broadcast on Friday. On Saturday, Russian missiles struck residential buildings in the city of Nikopol, killing two people, Dnipro regional governor Valentin Reznichenko said. In the northeast region around Ukraine's second city of Kharkiv, governor Oleg Syneghubov said an overnight Russian missile attack killed three people in the town of Chuguiu. In the central Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia, officials said the death toll rose to 24 from Russian strikes after a woman died of her injuries in hospital on Saturday. Ukraine says three children are



A woman rides a bicycle past a cloud of smoke from a fire in the background after a missile strike on a warehouse of an industrial and trading company in Odessa on Saturday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine (AFP)

among the dead. "Sixty-eight people continue treatment, including four children. Four people are still missing," said Vinnytsia district chief Sergiy Borzov.

Outpouring for four-year-old
President Volodymyr Zelensky accused the Russians of aiming to 'cause maximum damage to Ukrainian cities'. "I'm urging you, once again:

please don't ignore the air raid signals now," he said in his daily address on Friday. Russia claimed the strikes in Vinnytsia - hundreds of kilometres away from frontline fighting - had killed Ukrainian military officials and foreign arms suppliers. But Ukraine said the dead included four-year-old Liza Dmitrieva, who had Down's syndrome and whose death spurred an outpouring after footage of her final moments alive went

viral on social media. Officials initially believed Liza's mother was also killed, but have since confirmed she is in a 'critical' condition after surgery. The missile strikes on Vinnytsia were the latest attacks to carry a heavy civilian toll and came less than a week after strikes on Chasiv Yar in the Donetsk region left nearly 50 dead. "I have no words to describe the horror I experienced today," said Anastasiya, after rockets fell near her home in Kramatorsk, a major city and an administrative centre of the Donbas, on Friday. "It's good that it fell outside and did not fly into the house. That was lucky."

'Clearing' Donbas town
Moscow invaded Ukraine on February 24 and the conflict has killed thousands of people, destroyed cities and forced millions

to flee their homes. The heaviest fighting has recently focused on the industrial Donbas region in the east, where grinding trench battles and artillery duels are morphing into a war of attrition. Britain said on Friday that the Kremlin 'must bear the full responsibility' for the death of a British captive in east Ukraine. "I am shocked to hear reports of the death of British aid worker Paul Urey while in the custody of a Russian proxy in Ukraine," Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said. Moscow-backed separatists said on Friday they were closing in on their next target, Siversk, after wresting control of sister cities Lysychansk and Severodonetsk about 30km to its east. And Donetsk separatist official Daniil Versonov said rebel fighters were 'clearing' eastern districts of Siversk in small groups. Ukraine has repeatedly urged allies to supply it with advanced, long-range precision artillery systems that would allow it to target Russian forces deeper inside Ukrainian-held territory. Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said on Friday that Ukraine had taken delivery of its first batch of sophisticated M270 rocket systems, adding to a growing arsenal of Western-supplied artillery. Kyiv says is changing dynamics on the battlefield. AFP

31 killed in tribal clashes in Sudan

Khartoum, Sudan - At least 31 people have been killed in clashes this week between two tribes in Sudan's Blue Nile state bordering Ethiopia, the security services said on Saturday. They added that another 39 people had been wounded and 16 shops torched during the violence, which erupted on Monday over a land dispute between the Berti and Hawsa tribes. Clashes resumed close to the state capital Al-Damazin on Saturday, witnesses said. "We heard gun shots," resident Fatima Hamad told AFP from the city of Al-Roseires across the river from Al-Damazin, 'and saw smoke rising' from the south. Al-Damazin resident Ahmed Youssef said that 'dozens of families' crossed the bridge into the city to flee the unrest. Soldiers were deployed and a night curfew was imposed on Saturday, a day after Blue Nile governor Ahmed al-Omda issued an order prohibiting any gatherings or marches for one month. An urgent appeal for blood donations was launched by hospitals for the treatment of casualties from the unrest, according to medical sources. The violence broke out after the Berti tribe rejected a Hawsa request to create a 'civil authority to supervise access to land', a prominent Hawsa member told AFP on condition of anonymity. AFP



A Special Task Force cadet stands guard in front of Sri Lankan parliament building in Colombo on Saturday (AFP)

Ousted president Rajapaksa says he did 'utmost' for Sri Lanka

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's ousted president did his 'utmost' to avoid an economic catastrophe but the coronavirus pandemic derailed his efforts, he said in his resignation letter read out to parliament on Saturday. Gotabaya Rajapaksa's brief note, sent from the safety of a safe haven in Singapore, blamed COVID-19 for the financial meltdown that triggered months of protests, culminating in his humiliating escape abroad. "I have contributed my utmost for the country and in the future too, I will contribute for the country," Rajapaksa said in the letter, read to MPs by parliament's Secretary-General Dhammika Dasanayake. It was not clear whether he was signalling an intention to remain involved in politics from exile. "It is a matter of personal satisfaction for me that I was able to protect our people from the pandemic despite the economic crisis we were already facing," Rajapaksa insisted. The virus claimed more than 16,500 lives and infected over 660,000 in the nation of 22mn, where Rajapaksa refused to institute a lockdown in the initial wave and told doctors: "Don't panic." One of his cabinet minis-

ters said Sri Lanka did not require foreign vaccines and that local remedies from shamans were more than adequate. Rajapaksa claimed Sri Lanka's reserves were already low when he took office in November 2019 and the subsequent pandemic devastated the economy. But critics say the government's mismanagement was a crucial factor. Official figures show Sri Lanka had US\$7.5bn in foreign exchange reserves when he took over, dropping to just US\$1mn by the time he quit. The country is officially bankrupt. Rajapaksa, 73, came to power in 2019 as a strongman leader but was forced out of his official residence a week ago when it was stormed by thousands of protesters. Parliament is due to elect his permanent successor on Wednesday, after Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe - also an object of the protesters' scorn - was sworn in as an interim replacement. There was no debate on Rajapaksa's letter and the formal session ended after just 13 minutes, but political sources say horse-trading is already underway with no candidate having a guaranteed power bloc. AFP

Ten shot dead in ambush in Indonesia's Papua: Police

Jayapura, Indonesia - Ten people were shot dead in Indonesia's restive eastern province Papua on Saturday in an ambush police attributed to rebels. Two others were also seriously injured in the shooting, which police said took place in a remote highland area when about 20 people - three armed with guns and others with sharp weapons - attacked a truck full of civilians. Some of the victims were traders transporting their goods to another village, police said. Papua's ongoing insurgency aims to gain independence from Indonesia, which took control of



Family members console each other as victim's bodies arrive via helicopter in Timika on Saturday (AFP)

the former Dutch colony in the 1960s. Saturday's attack was the deadliest since March when eight telecommunications workers were shot dead. "When the truck was stop-

ping the KKB opened fire towards the vehicle from 50 metres away," Papua police spokesman Ahmad Mustofa Kamal said in a statement, using an acronym to describe the area's separatist groups. "Ten people were killed and two others are severely injured," he added. The motive behind the attack remains unclear but police and the army are now investigating exactly which separatists are responsible for the incident, Kamal said. The spokesman for The West Papua National Liberation Army, the military wing of Papua's main separatist group, did not immediately respond to a

request for comment. Authorities evacuated the victims, some of whom had suffered stab wounds, by helicopter after the attack. Indonesia has also faced protests in the underdeveloped but mineral-rich province against the creation of three new provinces. Despite the demonstrations, parliament passed a law in late June approving the division of Papua into five administrative regions, up from two. Many in the region claim the court's decision did not involve local Papuans and believe it was a bid to strengthen Jakarta's rule. AFP

Forest fires rage in scorching southwest Europe

Lisbon, Portugal - Southwest Europe entered a sixth day of a summer heatwave on Saturday that has triggered devastating forest fires as parts of the continent braced for new temperature records early next week. Firefighters in France, Portugal and Spain, as well as Greece, battled forest blazes that have ravaged thousands of hectares of land and killed several firefighters since the start of the week. "The fire is still not under control," said Ronan Leaustic, an official in Arcachon in southwest France's Gironde region where firefighters battled to put out two forest blazes that have devoured 22,200 acres since Tuesday. Meteo France said temperatures will range between 35 degrees Celsius and 40C in the south of France on Saturday, with new heat records expected on Monday. Authorities in the French Alps have urged climbers seeking to ascend Mont Blanc, Europe's highest mountain, to postpone their trip due to repeated rock falls caused by 'exceptional climatic conditions' and 'drought'. The call comes after a section



Firefighters tackle a forest fire around the village of Eiriz in Baiao, north of Portugal, on Friday (AFP)

of Italy's biggest Alpine glacier gave way at the start of the month, sending ice and rock hurtling down the mountain and killing 11 people, in a disaster officials blamed on climate change. In Portugal, the meteorological institute forecast temperatures of up to 42C and thermometer readings were not expected to drop below 40C until next week. 'Extreme vigilance' The civil defence, however, took

advantage of a slight drop in temperatures after a July record of 47C on Thursday to try to stamp out one last major fire in the north of the country. "The risk of fires remains very high," civil defence chief Andre Fernandes warned during a mid-day briefing. "This is a weekend of extreme vigilance." He spoke after an air tanker that had been fighting fires in northern Portugal crashed on Friday, killing its pilot. A day earlier, two people were

killed when a firefighting helicopter plummeted into the sea off Greece. In Spain, the national meteorological agency maintained various levels of alert across the nation, warning of up to 44C in some regions. Dozens of forest fires continued to rage in different parts of the country. **UK crisis meeting** One blaze in the south caused the authorities to cordon off a section of a key highway connecting Madrid to the Portuguese capital Lisbon. The fires have scorched thousands of hectares in the Spanish region of Extremadura. In Greece, the civil defence rushed to douse flames raging on the Mediterranean island of Crete. Further north, people were also bracing for more unusually warm weather. In the United Kingdom, a crisis committee of government ministers was meeting later on Saturday after the state meteorological agency issued a first-ever 'red' warning for extreme heat, cautioning there is a 'risk to life'. The Met Office said that in southern England, temperatures could exceed 40C for the first time on Monday or Tuesday. Mayor Sadiq Khan advised Londoners only to use public transport on those days if 'absolutely necessary'. National train operators also warned passengers to avoid travel. Some schools in southern England told parents they would stay closed during the heatwave early next week. AFP

Israel strikes Gaza Strip after rocket fire: Army

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Israel hit the Gaza Strip before dawn on Saturday in what it said was a retaliatory strike for rocket fire from the Palestinian territory controlled by the Islamist movement Hamas.

The exchange of fire came hours after US President Joe Biden visited Israel and the occupied West Bank.

"A short while ago, IDF fighter jets struck a military site in the central Gaza Strip belonging to the Hamas organisation," a statement from the Israel Defense Forces said.

"The military site consists of an underground complex containing raw materials used for the manufacturing of rockets," it said, describing the facility as 'one of the most significant' of its kind in the territory.

"The strike on this site will significantly impede and undermine Hamas' force-building capabilities," it said, adding that Israel was responding to 'attacks from the Gaza Strip on Israeli territory'.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem denounced the strikes, which the official Palestinian news agency WAFA said caused no injuries.



Fires are seen following an Israeli airstrike in Gaza city on Saturday (AFP)

WAFA said Israeli missiles were fired at two locations, one 'near a tourist resort' where nearby houses were severely damaged.

Balls of fire lit up the night sky over Gaza City after the strikes, which at one location left a hole in the earth beneath dislodged paving stones in front of a low-rise building.

A man later swept up shattered glass in front of what appeared to be an office.

During the night there had been two separate launches,

each of two rockets, towards Israeli territory, the military said.

Warning sirens alerting residents to the rocket fire had sounded during the night in the city of Ashkelon and elsewhere in Israel's south. Israel's military said one of the rockets had been intercepted while the other three fell on empty land.

Impoverished Gaza, home to 2.3mn Palestinians, has been under Israeli blockade since 2007 when Hamas seized power from the secular Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

Biden visit

Before flying to Saudi Arabia on Friday, Biden visited the Israeli-occupied West Bank where he reiterated his administration's commitment to a two-state solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There 'must be a political horizon that the Palestinian people can actually see', Biden said.

"I know that the goal of the two states seems so far away," he said in Bethlehem, alongside the Palestinian leader Abbas.

Abbas said 'recognising the state of Palestine' is the key to peace.

With Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations moribund since 2014, the US delegation has been focusing on economic measures. Biden announced an additional US\$200mn for the United Nations agency serving Palestinian refugees, which saw funding cut by the previous US president Donald Trump.

During a visit earlier Friday to a hospital in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, Biden pledged a US\$100mn aid package for medical institutions in the area.

He also announced plans to roll out infrastructure for 4G internet across the Gaza Strip and the West Bank by the end of next year, fulfilling a longstanding aspiration among Palestinians.

Biden earlier held talks in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid, during which a focal point was Iran's nuclear programme and that country's support for Hamas and other Islamist groups.

Israel occupied both the Gaza Strip and West Bank in the 1967 Six-Day War.

It withdrew from Gaza in 2005 but has maintained a blockade of the coastal territory since the Hamas takeover.

AFP

UN Security Council asks member states to stop arming gangs in Haiti

United Nations, US - The United Nations Security Council agreed on Friday to ask member states to ban the transfer of small arms to Haiti, rocked by deadly gang violence, but stopped short of a full embargo requested by China.

Bloodshed in the Caribbean nation has been soaring - alongside fuel shortages and rising food prices - with at least 89 people killed in the Port-au-Prince capital region alone this week. Aid agencies have said many areas are dangerous to access. The Security Council resolution, put forward by the United States and Mexico, was adopted unanimously. The text calls on UN members to prohibit the transfer of small arms, light weapons and ammunition to non-state actors in Haiti.

It also provides for the Council to impose individual sanctions against gang leaders within 90 days of the resolution's adoption.

China's ambassador to the UN, Zhang Jun, called the reso-



Haitian police collect fuel as they patrol in Port-au-Prince on Friday (AFP)

lution a 'warning' to gangs in Haiti and a 'step in the right direction'. The Security Council resolution did not mention another Chinese request, that the UN examine the possibility of sending a regional police force to support beleaguered Haitian security forces.

Instead, it asks the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to join with regional countries to study options to strengthen security in Haiti, with a report to be submitted on October 15.

It also extended the mandate of the UN's special political mission in Haiti, Binuh, until 2023.

The resolution came after Haiti announced on Thursday night a rare seizure of weapons in cargo containers: 18 military grade weapons, four 9mm handguns, 14,646 rounds of ammunition

and US\$50,000 in counterfeit money. Haitian prosecutors said arrest warrants have been issued against people suspected of being linked to the cache.

Beijing has taken an increasingly prominent role in issues relating to Haiti at the UN in recent years - primarily over Haiti's recognition of self-ruled Taiwan, which China views as its own territory. Beijing denies any link between its stance at the United Nations and the Taiwan issue, however.

Crushing poverty and widespread violence is causing many Haitians to flee to the Dominican Republic, with which Haiti shares a border, or to the United States.

Haitians appeared pessimistic that the UN could do anything to change the situation. "Gangs are multiplying, insecurity is increasing and so is arms trafficking. Binuh has failed in its mission," Fleurant Duceppe, a law student in Port-au-Prince, told AFP.

AFP

Ivana Trump died of accidental 'blunt impact' to torso: Official

New York, US - Ivana Trump, the first wife of the former US president, died of 'blunt impact injuries' to the torso in an accident, New York's chief medical examiner said on Friday.

The statement did not specify the circumstances, but US media reported that police had been investigating whether the 73-year-old died falling down the stairs at her Manhattan home.

A spokesperson for the New York Police Department told AFP in an emailed statement on Thursday that officers responded to a call at Ivana Trump's address on the Upper East Side, and found her 'unconscious and unresponsive'. She was pronounced dead at the scene, and the statement added that 'there does not appear to be any criminality'. Donald Trump announced her death on Thursday, calling her a 'wonderful, beautiful, and amazing woman, who led a great and inspirational life'. He said her 'pride and joy'



Ivana Trump (AFP)

were the couple's three children, Donald Jr, Ivanka and Eric Trump.

Ivana Trump, a model who grew up under communist rule in the former Czechoslovakia, married Donald Trump, then a budding real estate developer, in 1977. Their first child, Donald Jr, was born later that year. Ivanka was born in 1981 and Eric followed in 1984.

Throughout the '80s, the Trumps were one of New York's highest-profile couples, their extravagant lifestyle exemplifying the flashy excesses of the decade. Their power and celebrity grew as Donald Trump's property business soared, with Ivana Trump taking on number of key roles in the business.

Their high-profile split, rumoured to have been caused in part by Donald Trump's affair with actress Marla Maples, provided juicy content for New York's tabloids. Donald Trump and Ivana Trump divorced in the early '90s and in 1993 the future president married Maples.

Ivana Trump went on to enjoy a successful business career of her own, developing clothing, jewelry and beauty products and penning a number of books.

She was married four times in her life, once before her marriage to Donald Trump and twice after.

AFP

China rereports highest COVID cases since May

Beijing, China - China on Saturday reported its highest number of coronavirus cases since May, with millions in lockdown this weekend as authorities persist with their zero-COVID policy.

Using snap lockdowns, long quarantines and mass testing, China is the last major economy still pursuing the goal of eliminating outbreaks, even as the strategy takes a heavy toll on the economy.

China reported 450 local infections on Saturday, up from 432 a day earlier. Most cases were asymptomatic.

The rising wave of cases led to fresh restrictions this week in some parts of the country.

Lanzhou, the capital of northwestern Gansu province, ordered its 4.4mn residents to stay home starting on Wednesday, and a county in Anhui province went into lockdown from Friday.

Beihai in the southern Guangxi region on Saturday

also announced lockdowns in parts of two districts that are home to more than 800,000 people.

"Currently, the epidemic prevention and control situation in Beihai city is severe and complicated, and the risk of hidden transmission in the community is relatively high," said a government notice announcing the restrictions.

Earlier in the week, the steelmaking hub of Wugang in central Henan province announced a three-day lockdown over a single COVID case. The fast-spreading Omicron variant of the virus has been a major challenge for Chinese authorities, as they try to limit the economic damage caused by COVID restrictions.

China logged its slowest second-quarter growth rate since the initial COVID outbreak, with GDP expanding just 0.4 per cent on-year.

AFP

Mexico captures FBI's most-wanted drug kingpin

Mexico City, Mexico - Mexico on Friday captured a notorious drug kingpin on the FBI's list of 10 most-wanted fugitives for the murder of a US undercover agent that strained the countries' diplomatic relations.

Rafael Caro Quintero, 69, is accused by the United States of ordering the kidnap, torture and murder of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) special agent Enrique 'Kiki' Camarena in 1985.

He was detained by Mexican marines in the town of Choix in the northwestern state of Sinaloa, for 'the purpose of extradition', the navy said in a statement. Caro Quintero had already been arrested in 1985, tried in Mexico and sentenced to 40 years in prison for Camarena's murder.

But in 2013, a Mexican court ordered his release on a legal technicality after he served 28 years, a move that angered US authorities.

By the time Mexico's Supreme Court overturned the decision, Caro Quintero had already gone into hiding.



This file photo shows members of the Mexican Federal Preventive Police (PFP) escort drug trafficker Rafael Caro Quintero, at the Puente Grande prison in Guadalajara, Jalisco State, Mexico on January 29, 2005 (AFP)

The case plunged US-Mexican relations into a crisis, and it took decades for anti-drug agencies on both sides of the border to rebuild trust.

Caro Quintero, alias 'Rafa', has a US\$20mn bounty on his head and is described by the FBI as 'extremely dangerous'.

He is accused of co-founding the now-defunct Guadalajara drug cartel and currently runs an

arm of the infamous Sinaloa cartel, according to US authorities.

The US Department of Justice expressed gratitude on Friday to Mexican authorities over Caro Quintero's arrest, confirming the US plans to seek his extradition.

"There is no hiding place for anyone who kidnaps, tortures, and murders American law enforcement," Attorney General Merrick Garland said.

Denial of guilt

In 2016, in an interview published by news magazine Proceso, Caro Quintero denied killing Camarena, whose story was depicted in the Netflix show *Narcos: Mexico*.

"I did not kidnap, did not torture and did not kill him," Caro Quintero said, adding that he wanted to 'live in peace' and work as a cattle rancher.

"I apologise to the society of Mexico for the mistakes I made, to the Camarena family, the DEA, the US government. I apologise," he added.

Camarena's murder was considered a vendetta for investigations by the DEA agent that led to the seizure of a massive marijuana field in Chihuahua.

Last year a Mexican court ruled that Caro Quintero could be extradited to the United States if caught, rejecting an appeal from his lawyers who argued that he had already been tried in his home country.

The Guadalajara drug cartel, powerful in the 1980s, is considered the forefather of modern Mexican drug cartels.

It was one of the first to establish contacts with Colombian drug lords to transport cocaine from the South American country to the United States.

The cartel's other founders, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo and Ernesto Fonseca Carillo, were also handed long prison sentences in Mexico for Camarena's murder.

AFP

‘Russia visited Iran to assess combat drones’

Washington, US - Russian officials have recently visited Iran twice to assess combat drones, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Saturday, as Moscow looks to bolster its arsenal for the war in Ukraine.

Iran’s military hosted two showcases for Russian delegations at the Kashan airfield, on June 8 and again on July 5, Sullivan said in a statement.

Satellite imagery released by the White House shows Shahed-191 and Shahed-129 drones at or flying near the site.

The White House said earlier this week that it believes Moscow is looking to acquire hundreds of the drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) - and that Tehran is set to train Russian forces to use them as soon as this month.

“We assess an official Russian delegation recently received a showcase of Iranian attack-capable UAVs,” Sullivan said on Saturday.

“We are releasing these images captured in June showing Iranian UAVs that the Russian government delegation saw that day. This suggests ongoing Russian interest in acquiring Iranian attack-capable UAVs.

“To our knowledge, this is the first time a Russian delegation has visited this airfield for such a showcase,” Sullivan added. John Kirby, a spokesman for the national security council, told CNN this week that the drones can be used both for reconnaissance and to deliver munitions.

“It was important to make it clear to the world that we know that Russia needs these additional capabilities,” Kirby said on Tuesday. “They are expanding their resources at an accelerated rate.”



Iran’s military hosted two showcases for Russian delegations at the Kashan airfield, on June 8 and again on July 5

JAKE SULLIVAN

The United States and allies have recently provided longer-range precision weapons to Ukrainian forces, like the HIMARS precision-guided missiles, boosting their capability to strike Russian targets and repel Moscow’s intensifying attacks in the east.

Iran said on Tuesday that ‘no special development’ had taken place in technological cooperation with Russia following the invasion of Ukraine in February.

Drones have played a crucial role on both sides of the war in Ukraine, for everything from firing missiles from a distance, to dropping small bombs on targets, to conducting reconnaissance.

Ukraine’s forces have had particular success in using Turkish-made Bayraktar armed combat UAVs, and the United States and other allies have supplied Kyiv with many types of smaller drones.

AFP

US to remain fully engaged in Middle East, says Joe Biden

US president Joe Biden wrapped up his first tour of the region since taking office

Jeddah, KSA - President Joe Biden assured Arab leaders the United States would remain fully engaged in the Middle East on Saturday, as he wrapped up his first tour of the region since taking office.

“We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia or Iran,” Biden said during a summit in Jeddah, on the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia. US ties to Gulf powers in particular have been roiled by multiple issues in recent years, notably Washington’s push for a deal to curb Iran’s suspect nuclear programme and its tepid response to attacks on Saudi oil facilities in 2019 claimed by Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthis rebels.

The summit, the final stop of Biden’s Middle East tour, brought together the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as Egypt, Jordan and Iraq.

Biden had been looking to use the trip to discuss volatile oil prices and outline his vision for Washington’s role in the region.

On Friday he met Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom’s de facto ruler who US intelligence agencies assess ‘approved’ the 2018 operation that killed journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

After a fist-bump with Prince Mohammed, Biden said he raised the Khashoggi case and warned against future attacks on



US President Joe Biden and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman arrive for the family photo during the Jeddah Security and Development Summit (GCC+3) at a hotel in Saudi Arabia’s Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah on Saturday (AFP)

dissidents. Prince Mohammed, who chaired the opening of Saturday’s summit, has denied any role in the death of Khashoggi, who was dismembered in the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate and whose remains have never been found.

Biden told the assembled Arab leaders that ‘the future will be won by countries that unleash the full potential of their populations... where citizens can question and criticise leaders without fear of reprisal’. Air Force One took off from Jeddah at around 5pm (1400 GMT) on Saturday, bringing Biden’s four-day stay in the region to a close.

Ukraine tensions

Biden said the United States

would commit US\$1bn in food aid to the Middle East and North Africa amid rising food insecurity induced by the war in Ukraine.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has exposed a once unthinkable divergence between Washington and key Middle East allies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the oil giants that are increasingly independent on the international stage.

The wealthy Gulf nations, which host US forces and have dependably backed Washington for decades, have notably refrained from supporting the Biden administration as it tries to choke Moscow’s lifelines, from energy to diplomacy.

Analysts say the new position reveals a turning point in

Gulf relations with the US, long the region’s protector against neighbour Iran. But Saturday brought some conciliatory gestures, with Biden inviting his Emirati counterpart, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, to visit the White House before the year is up.

And in his remarks at the summit, Saudi Prince Mohammed said he hoped it would ‘establish a new era of joint co-operation to deepen the strategic partnership between our countries and the United States of America, to serve our common interests and enhance security and development in this vital region for the whole world’.

Riyadh and Washington on Friday signed 18 agreements on

areas including energy, space, health and investment, including developing 5G and 6G technology, said a Saudi statement.

A separate joint statement said the two countries noted ‘the importance of their strategic economic and investment cooperation, especially in light of the current crisis in Ukraine and its repercussions, reiterating their commitment to the stability of global energy markets’.

Saudi Arabia agreed to link the electricity networks of the Gulf Cooperation Council to Iraq, which relies heavily on energy from Iran, ‘in order to provide Iraq and its people with new and diversified electricity sources’, the White House said.

AFP

Voters head to the polls in southwest Nigerian state

Osogbo, Nigeria - Voting began to elect a new governor for Nigeria’s southwest Osun state on Saturday, in a final test for next year’s presidential elections.

The Osun election frontrunners are incumbent governor Gboyega Oyetola of the All Progressives Congress, the main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) senator Ademola Adeleke, Akin Ogunbiyi of the Accord Party and Labour’s Yusuf Lasun.

Analysts expect the contest to become a two-horse race between old political foes Oyetola, who is seeking re-election, and Adeleke - who lost by less than 500 votes after a re-run four years ago.

The ballot is seen as a battle-

ground for the leading parties to test support for their presidential hopefuls ahead of the February 2023 election as President Muhammadu Buhari steps down following eight years in office.

The APC has chosen former Lagos state governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu as its presidential flagbearer.

Tinubu, a Muslim from the southwest, faces a tough challenge from PDP candidate Atiku Abubakar, a northern Muslim.

Another frontrunner is the Labour Party’s Peter Obi, who has been enjoying growing support among the younger generation in a bid to break the dominance of the APC and PDP.

Oyetola, who enjoys the power of incumbency to boost



An official of the Independent National Electoral Commission registers a voter at a polling station during the gubernatorial election at Ede in Osun State, southwest Nigeria, on Saturday (AFP)

his chances, has been leveraging on Tinubu’s regional popularity to retain the seat for another four years.

Last month, the APC won a governorship vote in nearby Ekiti state with a landslide that confirmed and reinforced Tinubu’s strength in the southwest.

Osun is among eight of Nigeria’s 36 states where governorship elections are not being held at the same time as the rest of the country because of legal challenges to previous results.

Voting was expected to start at 8:30am (0730 GMT) and end at 2pm on Saturday, but long lines were formed in many polling stations in Osogbo, the state capital, as early as 6am.

AFP

Six killed in rare attack near Mali capital

Bamako, Mali - Six people were killed in Mali, including two gendarmes and a police officer, in a rare attack near its capital Bamako, the Ministry of Security said on Friday evening.

The landlocked country in the heart of the Sahel is facing an ongoing political and security crisis, particularly in its volatile northern and central regions, where a militant insurgency has raged since 2012. But the violence rarely reaches Bamako, in Mali’s southwest.

On Thursday night, about 70km from the capital, an attack took place ‘at the checkpoint of Zantiguila, on the road to the central city of Segou’, the security ministry said. The attack was carried out ‘by as yet unidentified armed individuals’, leaving three civilians and three law enforcement officers dead, and wounding two others, it said.

A police station on the same road was ambushed by ‘unidentified armed individuals’ on June 24, killing one officer, authorities had said.

The impoverished country - one of the most politically unstable in Africa - has seen two military coups since 2020.

AFP

Smuggling of animal skin purses: Colombian designer falls from grace

Bogota, Colombia - Colombian celebrity designer Nancy Gonzalez’s fall from grace was sudden and spectacular: taken in handcuffs from her luxury home in Cali last week to a Bogota jail cell, accused of smuggling protected animal skin purses into the United States.

The 77-year-old is now awaiting a ruling by a Colombian judge on whether she should be extradited to the United States, where she risks a 25-year jail sentence.

Gonzalez’s purses, clutches and wallets sell for thousands of US dollars apiece, have appeared on catwalks and TV shows and grace the shelves of high-end shops around the globe.

But according to an indictment



Nancy Gonzalez (AFP)

The 77-year old Nancy Gonzalez is now awaiting a ruling by a Colombian judge on whether she should be extradited to the United States, where she risks a 25-year jail sentence

from prosecutors in the Southern District of Florida, dated April 26, more than 200 of the caiman- and python-skin products sold in the United States were imported illegally.

Gonzalez and two employees of her Gzuniga company, the charge sheet states, conspired to smuggle bags made of protected animal skins between February 2016 and April 2019 without the

permit required under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

The goods were brought to the Gzuniga showroom in New York City by the accused for the purpose of ‘enriching themselves upon the sale of the contraband products in the United States’, said the indictment.

Individuals were allegedly paid to bring the bags from Colombia

to New York on commercial flights, and coached to lie about the provenance of the goods if asked.

Gonzalez and her co-accused face one charge of conspiracy and two counts of smuggling.

According to her website, Gonzalez’s bags are handcrafted in her native Cali by a team of artisans. The site says her bags are sold at over 300 luxury retailers, including Bergdorf Goodman, Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Harrod’s and Tsum.

Her designs were also featured in an exhibition by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Among Gonzalez’s famous clients are Salma Hayek, Britney Spears and Victoria Beckham, ac-

cording to specialised portals.

According to the Florida indictment, the animals that provided the skins were not on the CITES endangered list but fell under a category of species ‘that had to be controlled in order to avoid utilisation incompatible with survival’. This means that trade in products obtained from such an animal required a permit, which Gonzalez allegedly failed to obtain.

Elmer Montana, a lawyer for one of Gonzalez’s employees, told AFP that the skins used to make the bags were ‘obtained by Nancy Gonzalez... from certified farms which are supervised by the Ministry of the Environment’.

AFP

THEFT OF ALBANIA'S HERITAGE

HUNT FOR ANTIQUES

Illicit treasure hunters operate with near impunity in the country, stirring outrage among archaeologists over the theft of priceless national heritage that feeds a global black market



Archaeologist, Skender Mucaj shows a shell that he found in a hole dug by illegal treasure hunters at the ruins of the Church of St Mary in Brrar, near the city of Tirana (AFP)

Skender Mucaj at the ruins of the Church of St Mary - an archeological site of an 11th-century monument heavily damaged by illegal digs (AFP)

Shards of ceramics litter the fields of an ancient city in southeastern Albania, where looters have raided the area's highlands in search of antiquities to sell to international traffickers.

Illicit treasure hunters operate with near impunity in the country, stirring outrage among archaeologists over the theft of priceless national heritage that feeds a global black market.

The government says it is working on measures to protect and preserve the sites looters prey on, but so far to little avail - even though removing archaeological artifacts is a crime, as in most countries.

Now covered in wild vegetation, the region near present-day Korce was once home to the city of Hija e Korbit, or the 'Shadow of the Raven'.

The site, nestled against a hillside, has been ravaged in recent years by looters armed with shovels and backhoes searching for rare metals and artefacts.

"There are people from all regions who rush to these places," says Axhem Lageshtari (60), a local resident.

"Everywhere they dig. They search in the hope of finding gold, silver or other valuables."



Silver coins, found in 1982 at 'Hija-e-Korbit' near the city of Korce, exhibited at the Bank of Albania Museum in Tirana (AFP)

Hija-e-Korbit

The area gained notoriety after the 1980s discovery of more than 600 silver coins - including some dating back centuries to the rule of Alexander the Great.

Experts tell AFP that illegal excavations have been detected at almost every important archaeological site in the region, which is home to historic necropolises, forts and other remains dating from the Bronze Age to the early Middle Ages.

"The problem is particularly worrying in

Hija-e-Korbit, an important archaeological city that has not yet been explored by archaeologists," laments Rovena Kurti, the head of the department of prehistory at the Tirana Institute of Archaeology. "They damage the site and plunder the heritage," adds Kurti.

The scavengers often destroy scientific data and remove objects from their environmental context which is needed for experts to understand the site's history, explains Cecile Oberweiler, the former director of the



Franco-Albanian mission in Korce.

Northeast of the capital Tirana, the remains of a church from the 11th or 12th century have been disfigured with gaping holes left by looters.

The church of the Holy Virgin Mary was supposed to be protected as a recognised cultural monument, but that failed to stop the trespassers from ransacking the area.

"We can give it any name but in truth, it is currently a ruin preyed upon by looters," says archaeologist Skender Mucaj.

The pillaging of the site has been particularly painful for local resident Nora Braia.

Experts say not enough is being done legally to stop the looting.

Albania's ministry of culture told AFP that efforts are under way to fight the 'illicit trafficking of cultural property', including a national action plan unveiled in 2018 along with initiatives to improve coordination with international organisations.

There are no official estimates of the market value of the objects taken from Albania. But researchers are certain that some of the artefacts have fallen into the hands of international traffickers and then been sold in auctions to museums and private collections abroad.

"It is a fight that Albania cannot lead alone, the responsibility also falls on the authorities of other countries who turn a blind eye when these objects are displayed in their museums," said Neritan Ceka, an archaeologist and art historian. The recent indictment of Jean-Luc Martinez - the former head of the Louvre in Paris who was charged with conspiring to hide the origin of archaeological treasures - highlighted the extent of the illegal trade in antiquities.

AFP

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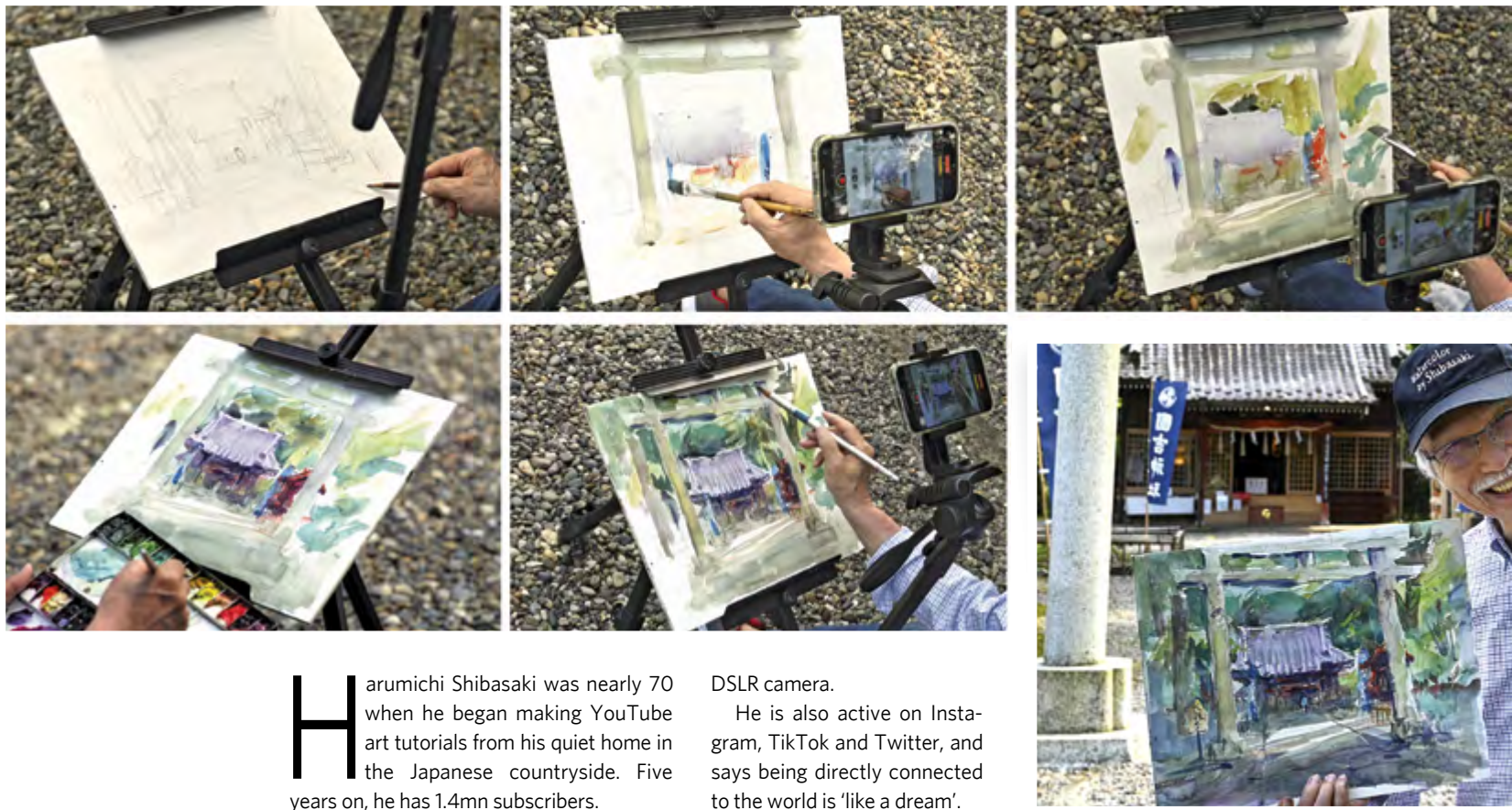
GRANDPA'S YOUTUBE TUTORIALS

UNLIKE THE ATTENTION-GRABBING ANTICS OF MOST TOP YOUTUBERS, JAPAN'S **HARUMICHI SHIBASAKI** HAS WON HEARTS WITH HIS CALM, SOOTHING MANNER. FIVE YEARS ON, HE HAS 1.4MN SUBSCRIBERS.



WATERCOLOR

by Shibasaki



Harumichi Shibasaki was nearly 70 when he began making YouTube art tutorials from his quiet home in the Japanese countryside. Five years on, he has 1.4mn subscribers. Unlike the attention-grabbing antics of most top YouTubers, the grandfather has won hearts with his calm, soothing manner, which fans say makes them feel 'warm and peaceful'. He has also built a global following thanks to the English subtitles on his videos demonstrating painting and sketch techniques, which sometimes feature his grandchildren and two cats. "Hello. Shibasaki here. How's everyone doing?" the grey-haired art instructor with glasses and a moustache says in Japanese, pausing to smile and wave. The 74-year-old films everything himself for his channel 'Watercolor by Shibasaki' using tripods, lighting and a smartphone or

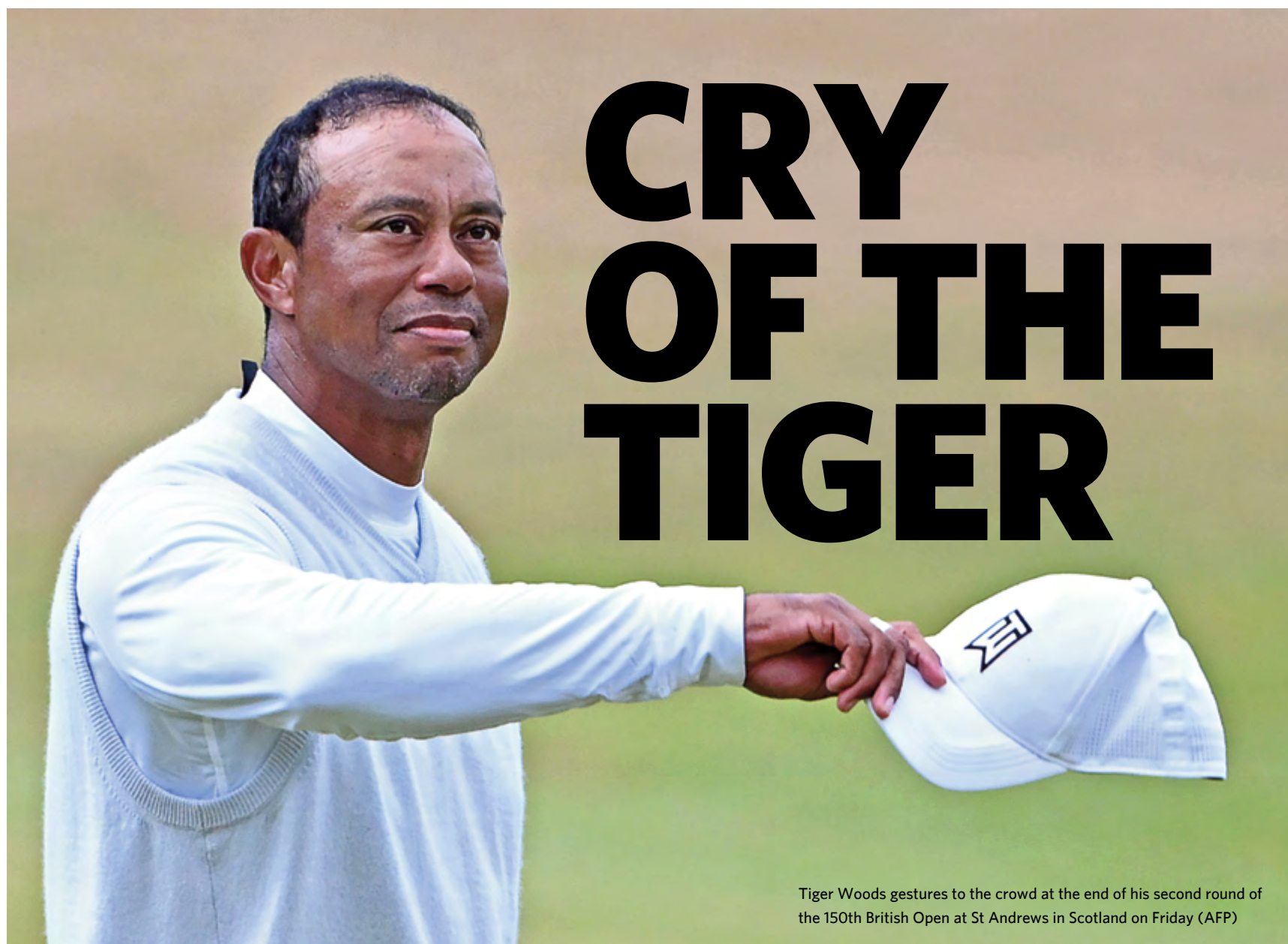
DSLR camera. He is also active on Instagram, TikTok and Twitter, and says being directly connected to the world is 'like a dream'. "We didn't even have a TV at home when I was a child," Shibasaki told AFP near his home in a rural part of Chiba, outside Tokyo, where birdsong fills the air. "As someone from my generation, I didn't expect there would ever be a time like this." His videos range from how to paint cherry blossoms to snapshots of daily life, such as cooking bamboo shoots dug up from his garden. Like many successful YouTubers, his clips are peppered with banner and video ads, while big fans can send cash during livestreams or pay to access members-only footage. It was Shibasaki's son who first encouraged him to post on the site - a chance for

the instructor with decades of experience to reach a global audience. "I like teaching. I like chatting with everyone. I can talk for five, six hours!" Shibasaki said. **'Kind' voice** During the darkest days of the pandemic, Shibasaki's subscriber count soared. In one April 2020 video he showed viewers how to sketch a smudgy, fluffy cat, saying he hoped drawing together would help them feel better while stuck at home. A flood of comments in different languages called the video 'calm and relaxing' and said Shibasaki's 'kind' voice had left a

'warm and peaceful' impression. "Viewers say I have a really good voice, but I have no idea why," he laughed. People tell him that his slow, relaxed delivery reassures them, and some even see Shibasaki - who has undergone heart surgery six times - as an agony uncle. Because of his health scares, 'death has become a concrete mental image', he said, meaning he can 'truly understand' the problems people confide in him. Shibasaki loved painting from a young age, but as the only son of a farming family in Chiba, he expected his parents to ask him to take over their land. However, overcome with the desire to move to Tokyo and study art aged 18, he rushed to ask his parents' permission while they were hard at work. "They looked back at me in the rice field and said I should go. I'm so grateful for that."

I like teaching, I like chatting with everyone. I can talk for five, six hours!

HARUMICHI SHIBASAKI



Tiger Woods gestures to the crowd at the end of his second round of the 150th British Open at St Andrews in Scotland on Friday (AFP)

CRY OF THE TIGER

Aussie Smith leads British Open at halfway stage as emotional Woods bows out

St Andrews, United Kingdom – Tiger Woods missed the cut and made an emotional departure from the British Open, possibly for the last time at St. Andrews while Australia's Cameron Smith took the lead at the halfway stage after a superb second round of 64 on Friday left him on 13 under par for the 150th edition of the tournament.

Cameron Young and Rory McIlroy were lurking just behind. Smith, the world number six with the trademark mullet, followed an opening 67 with an eight-under-par second round to lead by two strokes from Young, the 25-year-old New Yorker.

Brisbane-native Smith's round on Friday featured six birdies - including at each of the first three holes - an eagle at the par-five

I've been lucky enough and fortunate enough to have won this twice here, and it felt very emotional, just because I just don't know what my health is going to be like

TIGER WOODS

14th, and no dropped shots.

His halfway total of 131 is the lowest ever 36-hole score in an Open at St Andrews.

There is a sense in St Andrews that the main threat to Smith may come from McIlroy, who built on his opening round of 66 with a 68 and is on 10-under.

The favourite coming into the week, McIlroy produced six birdies after going out in fine conditions on Friday afternoon,

with three in successive holes at the start of his inward nine.

He will feel he now has a platform to go on and claim a second Claret Jug following his 2014 victory at Hoylake.

Norway's Viktor Hovland also sits at 10-under, while former world number one Dustin Johnson, the two-time major winner who quit the PGA Tour last month to join the controversial Saudi-backed LIV series, shot a

67 and is nine-under.

World number one Scottie Scheffler and England's Tyrrell Hatton, who played together, both moved onto eight-under at the halfway stage.

Masters champion Scheffler recorded a second consecutive 68 while Hatton enjoyed a bogey-free 66 on Friday.

The last player to win the Masters and British Open in the same year was Woods in 2005.

That was the year of his second Open triumph in St Andrews and the 46-year-old was determined to be present this week after recovering from severe leg injuries in a car crash last year.

However, he shot a six-over-par 78 in a grim first round that began with him going into the Swilcan Burn at the first hole.

A 75 on Friday, featuring a double-bogey at 16, represented an improvement, but at nine-over he will not be returning for the weekend, and possibly not to another Open here.

The emotion got to Woods, who appeared to wipe away tears as he saluted adoring crowds on his walk up the 18th fairway.

"I've been lucky enough and fortunate enough to have won this twice here, and it felt very emotional, just because I just don't know what my health is going to be like," Woods said.

"I feel like I will be able to play future British Opens, but I don't know if I'll be able to play that long enough (until) it comes back around here."

AFP



Ons Jabeur is greeted by fans during a celebration at Municipal Theatre in the Avenue Habib Bourguiba, Tunis, on Friday (AFP)

Fans turn out to celebrate Tunisian trailblazer Jabeur

Tunis, Tunisia - Ons Jabeur may have missed out on the Wimbledon title but the trail-blazing Tunisian was accorded a champion's reception on Friday as a crowd of hundreds celebrated the country's sporting pioneer.

While she ultimately succumbed in three sets to Elena Rybakina, her achievement at becoming the first Arab and African woman to reach a Grand Slam final has seen her popularity soar. The 27-year-old is visibly enjoying the affection she is getting from her fellow Tunisians.

"Tunisians' love is more important than no matter which title. I hope this is the start of lots more wins. I'm proud to be a Tunisian," she said as women and children carried the national flag, with music played at maximum volume on loud speakers adorned with photos of Jabeur and tennis racquets.

After spotting a banner in favour of a 'yes' vote on the upcoming referendum on the constitution she nodded:

"Yes, everything is possible".

And from a big grandstand in front of the capital's national theatre she spelled out her next career objective "to be world number one and win (the French Open) at Roland Garros".

Autographed tennis balls were being thrown into the crowd for those fans lucky enough to get their hands on them.

One of those in the happy throng was Mongia Zaag, who told AFP: "We've come here to experience the joy with Ons Jabeur".

"She's made us happy. I'm very emotional, with everything that's going on (in the country), the morale of the Tunisian people is not at its highest," Zaag added, alluding to the political crisis in the country and global economic difficulties.

Friday's reception followed Thursday's presentation to Jabeur by President Kais Saied of the prestigious Grand Medal of the National Order of Merit.

AFP

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Sri Lanka hit back after Shaheen takes four wickets in first Test

Galle, Sri Lanka- Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi led an inspired attack to bowl out Sri Lanka for 222 but the hosts hit back with two wickets before stumps on the opening day of the first Test on Saturday.

The tourists reached 24 for two at the close of play in Galle after losing their openers Imam-ul-Haq and Abdullah Shafique.

Azhar Ali, on three, and skipper Babar Azam, on one, were batting at close of play with Pakistan still trailing by 198 runs.

Fast bowler Kasun Rajitha trapped Imam leg before wicket for two and Prabath Jayasuriya took down Shafique for 13 with his left-arm spin on a day dominated by the bowlers.

Left-arm fast bowler Shaheen stood out with figures of 4-58 but Dinesh Chandimal's attacking 76 and a late cameo of 36 by Maheesh Theekshana gave the hosts a fighting total on a pitch expected to aid spinners.

"That's the beauty of Test cricket, sometimes tailenders and sometimes lower-order batsmen look like proper batsmen," Shaheen told reporters. "We to get them out under 150-160, but the last few batsmen played well. Chandimal played well."

The hosts were tottering at 133-8 but added 89 runs for the final two wickets including a 44-run stand by Theekshana and Chandimal, who hit 10 fours and



Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi celebrates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Niroshan Dickwella (AFP)

one six.

Shaheen wrapped up the innings with the wicket of Theekshana in the final session of play.

"They bowled really well," said Chandimal. "What we need to do is to get the positives from this innings and take it to the next innings."

Chandimal, a former captain, said early wickets will decide the course of the match on Sunday and a lead of about 40 can make the hosts gain more ground.

Shaheen struck in the third over of the day to send back skipper Dimuth Karunaratne for one, and leg-spinner Yasir Shah soon

combined with the quick bowlers to have Sri Lanka in trouble after they elected to bat.

Oshada Fernando and Kusal Mendis attempted to rebuild the innings in a 49-run partnership but Yasir, who is making a comeback to the team after a thumb injury that kept him out since August last year, broke through.

Yasir got Kusal caught behind for 21 and Oshada soon followed his partner back to the pavilion in the next over when pace bowler Hasan Ali cut short the opener's stay on 35.

Angelo Mathews then fell for a 15-ball duck as Yasir got the for-

mer captain caught at mid-on.

Shaheen struck twice after lunch and fellow quick Naseem Shah and left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz took a wicket each.

Chandimal smashed 19-year-old Naseem for three straight boundaries to bring up his fifty and offer some cheer to the weekend crowd.

Chandimal, who made an unbeaten 206 in Sri Lanka's series-leveilling Test win over Australia earlier this week, finally fell to a good catch by Yasir at cover with Ali taking his second wicket.

AFP

BARCA ON TARGET

Bayern Munich agree Robert Lewandowski sale to the Spanish giants



Robert Lewandowski reportedly agreed a four-year deal worth 50 million euros (AFP)

Berlin, Germany - Bayern Munich confirmed on Saturday they have agreed a deal with Barcelona for the sale of Poland star Robert Lewandowski to the Spanish club.

"We have a verbal agreement from Barcelona. It's good for both sides that we have clarity," Bayern president Herbert Hainer said on the club's Twitter account.

"Robert is a very deserving player, he has won everything with us. We are incredibly grateful to him."

Bayern did not give details but Spanish and German media re-

ported the two-time FIFA men's player of the year had agreed a four-year deal worth 50 million euros (\$50.4m), including five million in potential add-ons.

Forward Lewandowski told German television he would be joining the Barcelona squad on their tour of the United States from July 18-31.

Media reported he would undergo his medical in Miami.

The agreement between the two teams closes the standoff with the 33-year-old who said at the end of May "it is certain that my story with Bayern has come to an end."

We have a verbal agreement from Barcelona. It's good for both sides that we have clarity. Robert is a very deserving player, he has won everything with us

HERBERT HAINER



Bayern had only offered Lewandowski a one-year extension to his contract, which expires in the summer of 2023.

He was also unhappy with the salary offered and had clashed with the Bavarian club's coach Julian Nagelsmann over tactical choices.

Although he resumed training with Bayern a few days ago, Lewandowski arrived late each time, except this Saturday, when he took the opportunity to bid farewell to his teammates.

The official presentation of the

Bayern squad then took place at 1500 local time (1300GMT) without him.

With his imminent arrival, Barcelona continue to strengthen with the ambition of returning to the forefront of the European scene.

He is the club's fourth summer transfer after Ivory Coast midfielder Franck Kessie from AC Milan and Chelsea defender Andreas Christensen on a free transfer, and Brazil winger Raphinha, recruited for 70 million euro from Leeds.

A very generous transfer window for a club which suffered



Xavi

Barcelona head to US, but Xavi delayed because of Iran visits

Barcelona, Spain - Coach Xavi was not allowed to board Barcelona's flight to the United States on Saturday because of his history of visits to Iran.

Sports daily El Mundo Deportivo reported Xavi went to Iran three times while he was playing for Qatari club Al Sadd, and so needed to apply for special permission to visit the United States.

Xavi played the last game of his career in Tehran.

Barca only realised they had a problem on Friday. They

thought they had found a solution, but when they arrived at the airport, Xavi was not allowed on the plane and the team had to travel without him.

Reports said Xavi should be able to fly on Monday and arrive in Miami in time to lead the final training session before the friendly against Inter Miami on Tuesday evening.

Barcelona's recent signings Raphinha, Andreas Christensen and Franck Kessie all travelled with the squad.

AFP

Norway crash to shock exit from Euro 2022

London, United Kingdom - Norway suffered a shock exit from Euro 2022 as the pre-tournament title contenders crashed to a 1-0 defeat against Austria on Friday.

Despite the presence of Lyon star Ada Hegerberg in their line-up, former European champions Norway paid the price for another lacklustre display in Brighton.

Norway failed to advance from Group A after a second successive loss, while Austria progressed to the quarter-finals as runners-up behind England.

England, already assured of topping the group, crushed Northern Ireland 5-0 in their last game to move into the last eight with three successive wins and without conceding a single goal.

Needing a victory to move above Austria in their final group match, Norway were pushed towards elimination after 37 minutes when Nicole Billa headed in Verena Hanshaw's cross.

The Norwegians were unable to muster a comeback and it was Austria who could have won by a bigger margin with more clinical finishing.

Norway goalkeeper Guro Pet-



Austria players celebrate after their goal against Norway in the UEFA Women's Euro 2022 on Friday (AFP)

tersen made several fine saves to give her side a chance, but Austria's Manuela Zinsberger thwarted Celin Bizet and Hegerberg in the closing stages.

Thrashed 8-0 by England in their previous game, Norway's tournament had quickly turned sour after the initial optimism fuelled by a 4-1 victory over North-

ern Ireland in their first group match.

As Norway head home, Austria can look forward to playing eight-time European champions Germany in the quarter-finals at Brentford on Thursday.

Alessia Russo struck twice as England maintained their flawless

run against hapless Northern Ireland in Southampton.

England were without boss Sarina Wiegman after she tested positive for the coronavirus on Friday.

But Wiegman's absence couldn't halt in-form England's momentum.

AFP



Kalidou Koulibaly

Chelsea sign Napoli defender Koulibaly on four-year deal

London, United Kingdom - Senegal international defender Kalidou Koulibaly has signed a four-year deal with Chelsea from Serie A club Napoli, the Premier League club said on Saturday.

The 31-year-old Senegal captain becomes the second signing after Manchester City striker Raheem Sterling since Todd Boehly's consortium bought the club.

"I'm very happy to be here with this team at Chelsea," said Koulibaly.

"It's a big team in the world and my dream was always to play in the Premier League."

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USA's Allyson Felix is all smiles after the mixed 4x400m relay final at the World Athletics Championships in Eugene, Oregon, on Friday (AFP)

A SPRINT ODYSSEY

Allyson Felix’s stunning 19-year journey ends with another medal

Eugene, United States - Allyson Felix's 19-year journey through major track and field championships finished in familiar fashion on Friday - with the trailblazing veteran basking in the glow of yet another medal.

Nineteen years after first competing at her first World Athletics Championships in 2003 as a skinny teenage prodigy, the 36-year-old signed off with the 19th world championship medal of her career as the United States claimed bronze in the 4x400m mixed relay at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon.

It was not quite the perfectly scripted finale US fans had hoped for - US anchor leg runner Kennedy Simon was agonizingly

reeled in down the home straight as the Dominican Republic's quartet took gold and the Netherlands silver - but Felix

this year, hanging up her spikes after a career that has straddled three different decades and yielded a jaw-dropping 30 World

dividual events in Oregon, dug deep on her second leg but was unable to preserve the narrow lead handed to her by first leg runner Elija Godwin.

But Friday's bronze cements her status as the most decorated athlete - male or female - in the history of the World Championships.

Her 19 medals include seven from individual events and 12 from relays.

Felix said before Friday's race she had been determined to "take it all in and have fun, leave it all out there."

"It's been an incredible journey," she said. "I've really enjoyed my time over the years. There have been a lot of ups and

downs. I love the sport so much, it's broken my heart many times but I've also had many really joyous moments.

'Fierce competitor'

"It's completely full circle to be able to come here and end at home, it's going to be very, very special.

"I'm going to miss it so much but I can't think of a better way to go out than just with a heart full of gratitude and thankful for all the people who've supported me and the teams I've been on over the years."

Felix now plans to turn her attention to her advocacy for gender equality.

AFP

There have been a lot of ups and downs. I love the sport so much, it's broken my heart many times but I've also had many really joyous moments

ALLYSON FELIX



herself was nevertheless all smiles as rivals lined up for photos with her after her final race in a major championships.

The grande dame of American track and field is retiring later

and Olympic medals including 20 golds.

Felix, who was handed the chance for a golden farewell in the US mixed relay squad after failing to qualify for any of the in-

Oh baby: Maria Sharapova welcomes son Theodore

New York, United States - Maria Sharapova, a five-time Grand Slam champion and former world number one, announced Friday she has given birth to a baby boy named Theodore.

He is the first child for the 35-year-old Russian tennis star and British businessman Alexander Gilkes, 42, who announced their engagement in December 2020.

"The most beautiful, challenging, and rewarding gift our little family could ask for," Sharapova posted Friday on Instagram, indicating in Roman numerals that Theodore was born on July 1.

Sharapova, who had revealed in April that she was pregnant, is among only 10 women to complete the career Grand Slam by capturing all four major singles crowns at least once.

In 2004, Sharapova won her first major title at Wimbledon at age 17 and followed by capturing the 2006 US Open, 2008 Australian Open and the 2012 and 2014 French Open crowns.

She also captured a silver medal at the 2012 London Olympics, losing to American Serena Williams in the final.

AFP



Maria Shaapova and Alexander Gilkes with their baby Theodore

Andy Murray ousted by Alexander Bublik at ATP Hall of Fame Open

Newport, United States - Britain's former world number one Andy Murray was knocked out of the ATP Hall of Fame Open, falling to Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik 7-5, 6-4 in a Friday quarter-final.

World number 42 Bublik fired 12 aces against five double faults and won 80% of his first serve points to eliminate the 35-year-old Scotsman in the grass-court event and line up a semi-final clash with Australian Jason Kubler.

"It's great to be in the semi-finals again," Bublik said. "I don't have any tournaments the next two or three weeks so I'm engaged. I want to get as many matches as I can."



Alexander Bublik hits a return against Andy Murray

Kubler, ranked 102nd in the world, beat fellow Australian James Duckworth 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) to reach his first ATP semi-final.

The victory ended Kubler's four-match losing streak to Duckworth, a day after Kubler notched his first win over a top-10 player with an upset of top-seeded Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime.

Americans John Isner and Maxime Cressy meet in Saturday's other semi-final.

Former world number one Murray is a three-time Grand Slam champion, winning the 2012 US Open and 2013 and 2016 Wimbledon titles as well as Olympic gold in 2012 and 2016.

AFP

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