

H M, Sharjah ruler review ties

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammad al Qasimi, Member of Supreme Council of United Arab Emirates and Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, and his accompanying delegation at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

During the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan and the Sharjah Ruler held cordial conversations and reviewed the march of the bilateral relations between the two countries based on shared historical bonds. They also discussed matters of common concern.

H M hosts luncheon

Later, His Majesty the Sultan hosted a luncheon in honour of Sheikh Dr Qasimi and the delegation accompanying him. The meeting and the luncheon were attended by Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court; and Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

From the UAE side, the meeting and the luncheon were attended by Sheikh Sultan bin Ahmed al Qasimi, Deputy Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, Chairman of Sharjah Petroleum Council and Deputy Chairman of Sharjah Executive Council; Mohammed bin Nakhira al Dhaheri, UAE Ambassador to Oman; and Abdullah bin Mohammed al Owais, Chairman of Department of Culture in Sharjah and Member of Sharjah Executive Council.

After lunch, His Majesty the Sultan bid farewell to Sheikh Dr Qasimi and his accompanying delegation, wishing them a pleasant stay in Oman.

On his turn, the Ruler of Sharjah expressed his deep gratitude for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to him, wishing His Majesty the Sultan good health, happiness and a long life. He also wished the Omani people further progress under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan.

In the evening, the UAE guests visited Royal Opera House Muscat and Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.



(ONA)

► NEWS BRIEF

SAF CHIEF MEETS GOVERNOR OF ARIZONA

Arizona, US - Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), and his accompanying delegation met Katie Hobbs, Governor of Arizona, United States of America, on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Maj Gen Kerry L Muehlenbeck, Commander of Arizona National Guard, and several senior officers from both sides.

Vice-Admiral Raisi also visited the Goldwater Air National Guard Base in Phoenix, Arizona, where he viewed military equipment.

Sailors claim Oman's first-ever Asian Games silver medal

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Sail's 49er team of Musab al Hadi and Walid al Kindi created history for the sultanate on Tuesday by winning Oman's first-ever silver medal at the Asian Games.

The pair sailed excellently throughout the week in Ningbo, China and kept their composure in the final intense races to take silver. This achievement means the team has secured automatic qualification to the Asian Qualification Regatta in Chon Buri, Thailand in December where they will look to confirm their place in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Speaking about the historic feat, Hashim bin Hamad al Rashidi, Head Coach of Oman Sail, said, "This achievement came as a result of the intense preparations and continuous training that preceded the tour-



(Supplied photo)

It was a tough test for the sailors against the most prominent professionals from across the Asian continent

HASHIM AL RASHIDI

nament. The team was able to maintain focus and perform well throughout the competition. It was a tough test for the sailors against the most prominent pro-

fessionals from across the Asian continent."

He added that the next step will be the quest to qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

After the race, Hadi said, "We are very happy to represent Oman in this major continental event, and we are delighted to win a silver medal for our nation. We dedicate this achievement to our dear homeland and to all those who supported us on this journey, the technical staff and our colleagues at Oman Sail."

An Omani delegation of 75, including 44 male and female athletes, is participating in the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, in seven sports - athletics, weightlifting, water sports, shooting, sailing, beach volleyball and hockey.

The Asian Games is considered the largest sporting event on the Asian continent and the second largest global event after the Summer Olympics. More than 12,000 male and female athletes are currently competing, representing 45 Asian countries in 40 sports.

1st millennium BC artefacts unearthed in Dhakhliyah

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), in cooperation with a Czech mission, has announced the discovery of ancient artefacts in Dhakhliyah dating back to the end of the 1st millennium BC.

This significant find occurred in the village of Faiha in the wilayat of Samail, MHT stated.

An archaeological team of the ministry conducted extensive excavations from September 17 to 27, focusing primarily on the tombs from the said era. The tombs, built underground, feature oval and rectangular rooms with inner walls lined and covered with flat stones.

These excavations have led to the discovery of a rich array of artefacts. The team uncovered various pottery items, including



jars, bowls and flasks, some of which are glazed, as well as utensils linked to the Parthian civilisation in Iran and from Sindh.

The site also yielded glass bottles, a stone vessel, iron arrowheads and an assortment of jewellery such as bracelets, earrings, rings and beads.

These discoveries provide crucial insights into the civilisations that inhabited the region thousands of years ago and Oman's history.



Hosts China win first-ever eSports gold of Asian Games



Isicathamiya - South African cultural heritage

First Saudi delegation visits West Bank in 3 decades

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Saudi Arabia on Tuesday sent its first delegation in three decades to the occupied West Bank to reassure Palestinians that it will defend their cause even as it forges closer ties with Israel.

In a sign of the thaw, Israel's Tourism Minister Haim Katz visited Riyadh on the same day, for the first such high-level public mission to the kingdom.

Washington has urged its Middle East allies Israel and Saudi Arabia to normalise diplomatic ties, following on from similar deals involving the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco.

The Palestinians have labelled those US-brokered agreements a



Saudi Ambassador to Palestine Nayef al Sudairi speaks to journalists at the Palestinian Foreign Ministry in Ramallah in occupied West Bank on Tuesday

betrayal of their plight and quest for statehood, but Nayef al Sudairi, who headed the Saudi delegation, sought to reassure them that Riyadh stands by their side.

"The Palestinian matter is a fundamental pillar," Sudairi, the

new ambassador to the Palestinians, said after meeting top Palestinian diplomat Riyad al Maliki in Ramallah for talks and to present his credentials.

"And it's certain that the Arab initiative, which was presented by

the kingdom in 2002, is a cornerstone of any upcoming deal."

The 2002 initiative proposed Arab relations with Israel in exchange for its withdrawal from the West Bank, east Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights, and a just resolution for the Palestinians.

Last week, Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas again stressed strong reservations to Arab countries building ties with Israel.

"Those who think that peace can prevail in the Middle East without the Palestinian people enjoying their full, legitimate national rights would be mistaken," Abbas told the UN General Assembly in New York.

Sudairi's delegation, which crossed overland from Jordan, was the first from Saudi Arabia to visit the West Bank since the 1993 Oslo Accords, which had aimed to pave the way for an end to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

When asked whether there will be a Saudi embassy in Jerusalem, Sudairi recalled that there used to be a one in the Jerusalem district of Sheikh Jarrah, and said that "hopefully there will be an embassy there" again.

Washington has been leading the talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia on a potential normalisation seen as a political game changer for the Middle East.

AFP

Oman condemns attack on Bahrain defence forces

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman has condemned an attack on the defence forces of the Kingdom of Bahrain stationed on the southern border of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman affirmed its solidarity with Bahrain. It also extended its sincere condolences and sympathies to families of the deceased, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

Saudi Arabia and the United Nations too condemned the attack that killed two Bahraini military personnel near the border with war-torn Yemen.

GULFCYBERTECH wins the Best Performing Omani Company at Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards



GULFCYBERTECH is honored to receive the prestigious recognition: The "Excellence in Digital Transformation Solutions" Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards for The Best Performing Omani Companies, which serves as a testament to the company's exceptional expertise and accomplishments. This distinguished accolade was presented under the esteemed patronage of His Highness Sayyid Malik bin Shihab bin Tariq Al Said at a glittering award ceremony that took place at the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

A senior management representative from GULFCYBERTECH remarked, "Over nearly two decades, GULFCYBERTECH has demonstrated unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional web application development and e-solutions. Receiving this prestigious accolade further underscores our steadfast dedication to excellence in Web Application Development, Website Development and e-solutions".

He further stated, "Attaining an accolade as

prestigious as the Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards serves as a profound source of motivation for our dedicated team at GULFCYBERTECH, spurring us to consistently innovate and provide essential, mission-critical solutions".

Established in 2003, GULFCYBERTECH E-Solutions is a distinguished Omani enterprise specializing in a broad spectrum of web-based solutions. The company distinguishes itself through its strategic approach, a highly skilled team of developers, competitive pricing, a results-driven ethos, and an unwavering commitment to exceeding customer expectations. Among its widely sought-after offerings are Web-based Application Development, Low Code Application Development, Mobile Application Development, E-Commerce Solutions, Domain Registration, Web Hosting, and an extensive portfolio of other web-based services. For in-depth insights into GULFCYBERTECH, please visit www.gulfcybertech.com.

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RO6.5mn Facility Building inaugurated in Al Rusayl

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn – celebrated the opening of the RO6.5mn Facility Building in Al Rusayl Industrial City on Tuesday.

Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, led the celebrations with officials, investors and business owners in attendance.

This facility underscores Madayn's commitment to bolstering Oman's industrial investment landscape through its investment arm, Shumookh Investment and Services.

Musallam bin Juma'a al Hudaifi, CEO of Shumookh, stressed the pivotal role of the industrial sector in enhancing economic development, job creation, national income and export growth.

"Al Rusayl Industrial City stands as a strategic investment hub in Muscat, distinguished by its exceptional infrastructure and advanced logistics," Hudaifi said.

Managed by Shumookh, the Facility Building offers a total constructed area of 19,000sqm, inclusive of 200 in-building



Al Rusayl Industrial City stands as a strategic investment hub in Muscat, distinguished by its exceptional infrastructure and advanced logistics

MUSALLAM BIN JUMA'A AL HUDAIFI



parking spaces and additional outdoor public parking. The ten-floor building provides diverse services including banking, money exchange, travel agencies, health clinics, dining

Municipality temporarily closes play area in Riyam Park

Muscat - Muscat Municipality has announced the temporary closure of the entertainment area in Riyam Park.

According to a statement, the investment contract with the investor for entertainment games, cafes and shops in the park has concluded. 'The investor is set to remove these attractions, reverting the site back to the municipality in the coming days.'

The municipality has outlined a robust vision for reinvesting in the site. This plan is dedicated to maximising the area's utility for recreation, tourism, economic and social benefits.

The civic body intends to comprehensively serve visitors and all social segments, ensuring the realisation of desired objectives and sustainability in service provision within the city.

While the entertainment area is temporarily closed, the rest of the park remains open and available for public enjoyment, the municipality stated.

Chery to launch Tiggo8 Pro Max in Oman in Nov



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Chery, one of China's leading automobile manufacturers, has announced the upcoming launch its Tiggo8 Pro Max model in Oman in November.

Saud Bahwan Group is the official distributor of Chery vehicles in Oman.

The announcement, the highlight of a virtual event held last week, marks the company's continued commitment to delivering advanced technology, innovative features and safety to its customers in Oman.

During the event, a senior company official highlighted

Chery's impressive production capacity of over 1.2mn cars annually. "The brand stands as a testament to China's significant advances in automotive engineering. Chery's consistent focus on design, innovation and safety has facilitated its successful expansion to international markets, exporting over 45,000 vehicles globally."

The Tiggo8 Pro Max is designed to offer an unparalleled driving experience in the Oman market. It boasts a wide array of advanced features including a 540 panoramic camera, Automatic Braking System, Adaptive Cruise Control, Lane Departure Warning and Blind Spot Moni-

toring. These features underscore Chery's dedication to ensure the safety and satisfaction of its customers.

Another senior company official emphasised the paramount importance of safety for Chery. "The company is not just committed to offering technologically advanced and stylish vehicles but also ensuring peace of mind for its customers on the road. The comprehensive safety features in the Tiggo8 Pro Max reflect the brand's unyielding commitment to customer protection, affirming its reputation as a trusted and innovative automobile manufacturer."

MHT exhibition showcases rare meteorites

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), in collaboration with the Office of the Governor of Dhakhliyah, opened a meteorites exhibition at Nizwa Gate on Tuesday.

The event was inaugurated by Sheikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Dhakhliyah. This is the second edition of the exhibition and displays a collection of rare and scientifically valuable meteorites.

Scheduled to run until the end of March 2024, the exhibition allows researchers, students and anyone keen to delve deeper into the world of meteorites.

Apart from showcasing meteorites, the event provides in-



sights into a meteorite monitoring project in Oman. This innovative project by MHT has successfully tracked and documented numerous meteorites, pinpointing their exact fall in the sultanate.

Riya Mohammed al Kindi, Di-

rector-General of Museums, said this annual event is expected to attract a large number of visitors eager to view the rare meteorite samples on display. "The exhibition's mobility, touring through the governorates annually, enhances its

accessibility and educational value."

Highlighting the event's broader context, Hussein bin Ali al Ghafri, Director of Department of Geological Heritage in MHT, said the exhibition is aligned with the ministry's ongoing efforts to highlight the sultanate's natural heritage. "Extensive research and meteorite studies have resulted in the documentation of over 7,000 meteorites, totalling more than 6,000kg in weight in Oman."

Ghafri assured MHT's commitment to the preservation and sustainable management of meteorites, adhering to the highest scientific principles and international practices, further enriching the nation's educational and cultural landscape.

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

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
(PRE/23/204) 2023/MM/HQ-57	Supply of Smart Mosquito Traps	15/10/2023	05/11/2023	Specialist
(PRE/23/201) 2023/MM/HQ-58	Maintenance of Expressway Sign Boards	15/10/2023	05/11/2023	Specialist
(PRE/23/203) 2023/MM/QS-66	Supply & Installation of Interlock	15/10/2023	05/11/2023	Fourth
(PRE/23/071) 2023/MM/HQ-59	Design and Construction of Drainage Solution Works in Madinat Sultan Qaboos, Bawasher	15/10/2023	05/11/2023	Excellent
(PRE/23/102) 2023/MM/HQ-60	Design & Construction of Storm Water Channel in Bowsher	15/10/2023	05/11/2023	First
(PRE/23/211) 2023/MM/HQ-61	Supply of Pesticides	15/10/2023	05/11/2023	Specialist
(PRE/23/212) 2023/MM/HQ-62	Renewal of Adobe SoftWare	15/10/2023	05/11/2023	Excellent
(PRE/23/199) 2023/MM/QS-67	Design , Supply , Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Solar Bench	15/10/2023	05/11/2023	Specialist

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.
- Clarification and Support:
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40 leaders of tomorrow pass out of RAM module

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Forty young leaders graduated from Royal Academy of Management's (RAM) National Collaborative Leadership Programme on Monday.

The programme - under the patronage of H E Sayyid Khalid Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of RAM - for leaders from the government and private sectors, aims to equip them with modern leadership skills aligned with Oman's evolving business landscape.

During the graduation ceremony, which was attended by several dignitaries, H E Dr Said bin Mohammad al Saqri, Minister of Economy and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of RAM, emphasised the significance of the programme in fostering government and private sector collaboration in planning



(Supplied photo)

The programme includes diverse educational methods and field visits, and is committed to providing essential leadership skills for participants' professional advancement

DR ALI AL LAWATI

and implementation. "This partnership, aligned with global trends, aims to achieve sustainable economic development impact."

H E Saqri addressed the need of applying the knowledge gained from the programme to realise Oman Vision 2040. He stressed the continuous collaboration between government and private sectors as a united team, working towards improving the business environment and achieving na-

tional goals.

On the occasion, Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, President of RAM, highlighted the partnership with international institutions such as Said Business School at the University of Oxford and the International Institute for Management Development in the programme's implementation. "The National Collaborative Leadership Programme, which includes diverse educational methods and field visits, is com-

mitted to providing essential leadership skills for participants' professional advancement."

Eleanor Murray, Associate Dean for Executive Education at Said Business School, thanked RAM for its collaboration and noted that the programme stands as a testament to the collaborative potential in driving real transformation in both government and private sectors.

On behalf of the graduates, Dr Al Fadhil bin Abbas al Hinai, CEO of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, stated that the programme aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and the government's initiatives towards a flexible and sustainable economy. He emphasised the graduates' commitment to utilising the knowledge, leadership skills and innovative work tools gained from the programme to enhance collaboration and innovation, ultimately positioning Oman among developed countries.



(Supplied photo)

Winners of Health Promoting Schools Initiative honoured

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with World Health Organization, honoured winning schools of the Health Promoting Schools Initiative for the academic year 2022/2023 on Tuesday.

H E Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education in the Ministry of Education, Dr Jean Yaquob Jabour, WHO Representative in Oman, and Dina al Khalili, Director-General of Al Jisr Foundation for Charitable Work, presided over the prize distribution ceremony, which was attended by school principals, department directors and nurses.

In his address, Dr Jabour underscored the objectives of WHO's Global School Health Initiative to increase the number of 'health-promoting schools'. He outlined the launch of an electronic platform this academic year, highlighting it as a step in global technological advancement and digitisation.

He added that although definitions will vary depending on

need and circumstances, "a health-promoting school can be described as a school that is constantly working to enhance its capacity as a healthy environment to live, learn and work".

Detailing the initiative, Dr Said bin al Mukhaini, from the School and University Health Department in the Ministry of Education, listed its seven pivotal components - strategies and policies, knowledge and skills development, healthcare services and adoption of health-promoting behaviours, school environment enhancement, mental health, nutrition promotion with food safety, and physical activity promotion.

Relaying Al Jisr Foundation's commitment to the initiative, Dina emphasised the inseparable link between education and health.

Concluding the event, the top honours were announced. Hamasa School for Basic Education from Buraimi won the first place. Laila bint Hakeem School for Basic Education in Dhahirah and Hafsa bint Sirin Basic Education School in Buraimi secured the second and third places respectively.

Royal Hospital performs surgery for weight loss in 8-year-old

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A specialist team at The Royal Hospital performed a weight-loss surgery - the first of its kind in the sultanate - on an eight-year-old child who was suffering from Prader-Willi Syndrome.

Dr Mohammed Said al Abri, Consultant in Obesity and Upper Gastrointestinal Surgery at The Royal Hospital, informed that the decision to perform the operation was taken after several meetings by a multidisciplinary team to reach an optimal treatment to tackle the child's condition. The team comprised representatives from the departments of surgery, anaesthesia, endocrinology, pulmonology, mental health, nutrition and intensive care. He informed that the operation was a success and that the patient is



in good health.

Dr Abri added that reports show the rates of overweight and obesity among males and females in the sultanate have increased significantly. In 1975, only 7.2% of males and 7.4% of females were obese; 4% of the population in the 5-19 age category were obese. The situation has now changed dramatically in the age group, with 34.2% males and 30.2% females being overweight, while 16.1% males and

13.3% females are obese.

In Oman, the obesity rate among children is high in the early stages of education, with the maximum recorded among children in Grade 1 to 7. This requires special attention from all health and social sectors.

Dr Abri emphasised that children should engage in moderate-intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes on most days of the week, such as brisk walking, skipping, swimming and playing soccer.

Offering further insights, Dr Hussein Murtada al Lawati, Consultant in Pediatric Respiratory Diseases at The Royal Hospital, described the team's decision for surgical intervention as a crucial measure to aid the child's weight loss journey and to ensuring enhanced long-term health prospects.

NCCHT meeting reviews efforts to combat human trafficking

Muscat - The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT) held a meeting under the auspices of H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthi, Undersecretary for Political Affairs in Foreign Ministry and Chairman of the committee, on Tuesday. The meeting reviewed the efforts made by all departments

entrusted with combating human trafficking, as well as the progress made in the National Action Plan (2021-2023) in combating human trafficking.

The committee discussed topics of relevance to boosting the sultanate's efforts in addressing all aspects of human trafficking.

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No م.	Tender Ref الرقم المرجعي	Tender Title عنوان المناقصة	Tender Fee OMR الرسوم
1	SIPC 2023-012	Cleaning and Waste Management Services for SOHAR Port and Freezone.	105,000
2	SIPC 2023-099	Consultancy Services for Muscat Office Design (Re-tender).	26,250

- The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%.
- Tenderers for tender **SIPC 2023-012** can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Wednesday 27/09/2023 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 12/10/2023.
- Tenderers for tender **SIPC 2023-099** can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Wednesday 27/09/2023 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 05/10/2023.
- Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

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Sri Lanka	841.69

*Rates as on September 26

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

ECB chief recognises 'pain' of rate hikes

European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde said she recognised the "pain" that aggressive interest rate hikes were heaping on households but they were the only way to tame inflation. The ECB this month lifted borrowing costs for the 10th straight time as it battles runaway consumer prices, despite growing signs the hikes are causing a sharp deterioration in the eurozone economy.

However, policymakers also signalled the hiking campaign, which began in July 2022 and has seen the key deposit rate lifted to a record high, was likely now at an end.

At a hearing at the European Parliament in Brussels, Lagarde was asked about the potential for higher borrowing costs to hit households in the 20-nation single currency area.

Oman bank credit jumps 8.7% to reach RO30bn mark in July

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a sign of robust economic growth and growing demand for bank loans, bank credit growth in Oman jumped to 8.7% in the first seven months of 2023, compared to the below five per cent credit growth recorded in 2022, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) data.

Total outstanding credit extended by the banking sector (both conventional and Islamic banks) reached RO30.3bn at the end of July 2023, compared to the same month in the previous year, as reported in the CBO's monthly statistical bulletin.

Of the total outstanding credit, bank credit to the private sector demonstrated more robust growth of 9.3% year-on-year, reaching RO25.5bn in July. Non-financial corporations received the highest share of the total private sector credit, at approximately 45.9% as of end-July 2023, followed by the household sector at 44.5%. The share of financial corporations was 5.9%, while other sectors received the remaining 3.7% of total private sector credit.

Conventional banks' total



outstanding credit grew by 5.3% year-on-year in July this year. Conventional banks' credit to the private sector increased by 5.2% to RO20.2bn, while their overall investments in securities dropped by 4.6% to RO4.4bn, according to CBO data.

Banks' investment in government development bonds decreased by 10.4% year-on-year to RO1.9bn in July, while their investments in foreign securities dramatically rose by 89.5% to RO1.2bn.

Deposits grow 7%

Total banking sector deposits in Oman grew by 7.0% to RO27.6bn at the end of July 2023 compared to the same period a year ago.

Total private sector deposits increased by 6.5% to RO18.2bn. In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the largest contribution came from household deposits at 51.1%, followed by non-financial corporations at 30.4%, financial corporations at 15.6%, and other sectors at 2.9%.

Aggregate deposits held with conventional banks increased by 3.4% year-on-year to RO22.2bn at end-July 2023. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 67% of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 4.2% as of July 2023, reaching RO14.9bn.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase of 7.0% to RO5.3bn, while deposits of public enterprises decreased by 9.7% to RO1.6bn.

Meanwhile, total assets of Islamic

Bank credit to private sector surged 9.3% year-on-year, reaching RO25.5bn in July. Non-financial corporations received highest 45.9% share of total private sector credit, followed by household sector at 44.5% share

lamic banks and windows in Oman increased by 13% on a year-on-year basis, reaching RO7bn at the end of July 2023. Islamic assets now constitute about 17.2% of the total banking system assets in Oman as of the end-July 2023.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO5.8bn at the end of July 2023, recording a growth of 12.3% over that of a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 12.9% to RO5.3bn.

Interest rates rise

The weighted average interest rate on local currency deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase from 1.867%

in July 2022 to 2.295% in July 2023. However, the weighted average lending rate slightly decreased from 5.442% in July 2022 to 5.396% in July 2023.

Meanwhile, the overnight Omani rial domestic inter-bank lending rate rose to 5.54% in July 2023 from 1.951% a year ago. The CBO said that the sharp increase in the inter-bank lending rate is an outcome of the increase in the average repo rate for liquidity injection by the CBO to 5.79% in July from 2.347% a year ago, moving in line with the US Federal Reserve rate.

Oman's central bank has largely followed each rate hike by the US Fed over the last year and a half as the US central bank fought to curb inflation with the most aggressive tightening cycle since the 1980s.

In line with the US Fed's rate hike campaign, Oman raised its key policy rate to 6.00% in 11 successive rate revisions since March 2022.

However, following the Fed's announcement last week to keep the key interest rates unchanged, the CBO also decided to maintain its repo rate for local banks at 6.00%.

U Capital recommends 'subscribe' to OQGN IPO, sees up to 29% upside

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's largest brokerage firm, Ubhar Capital (U Capital), has recommended 'subscribe' to the initial public offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) and estimates an upside of 19% to the upper range of the offer price.

"We recommend 'SUBSCRIBE' to the IPO of OQGN. According to our estimate, the fair value of the company is 167bz per share, implying an upside of 19% to the upper band of Category I IPO offer price of 140bz per share (29% upside on Category II offer price)," U Capital said in a research note.

According to the brokerage firm, OQGN's strong founding shareholders, new anchor IPO investors, attractive and stable dividend yield, along with the stable demand for the natural gas pipeline network in Oman (with no dependence on oil and gas price and volume fluctuations), make the proposed OQGN offering attractive.

"OQGN is a value/dividend stock, in the medium term, with stable pre-determined returns on its regulated asset base, with earnings capped both on the upside and downside, and a telegraphed dividend policy for the next three years," U Capital noted.

OQGN is the exclusive owner, developer, and operator of Oman's critical gas transportation



OQGN shares are expected to list on MSX on or around October 24

Asset Base (RAB) model in place, which ensures long-term predictability of cash flows with no exposure to hydrocarbon volume or price."

Calling OQGN's operating and financial performance 'robust,' U Capital said the company has a good track record of delivering encouraging profitability.

OQGN aims to have a robust dividend policy in 2023, 2024, and 2025 (a minimum of 90% payout of the year's net profit or a 5% increase in the dividends paid in the previous year). The company intends to pay RO44mn in dividends in 2024 (for 2023) in two tranches in January 2024 (RO33m) and April 2024 (RO11m).

"We also believe that OQGN is well placed to maintain the dividend payouts beyond 2025, at least until the end of our forecast period. This makes the offering attractive for income investors from a medium-term perspective," U Capital said.

Oil prices drop on demand concerns

Muscat - Oil prices declined on Tuesday amid concerns that global central banks would keep interest rates at high levels for an extended period, leading to a decrease in global oil demand.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$90.81 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 2.66% loss from the closing price of \$93.29 a barrel in the previous trading session on Monday. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at \$88.62 per barrel, down 1.18% from Monday's close of \$89.68 per barrel.

Oil prices have come under pressure due to concerns that banks will maintain high interest rates. The US Federal Reserve officials signaled that interest rates will remain at high levels for longer than expected.

"If the economy is fundamentally much stronger than we realised, on the margin, that would tell me rates probably have to go a little bit higher, and then be



held higher for longer to cool things off," Minneapolis Fed President Neel Kashkari said Monday.

Last week, the European Central Bank (ECB) revealed its interest rate decisions, emphasizing that banks would maintain high interest rates for a longer period of time.

ECB President Christine Lagarde said the ECB will keep interest rates at current levels as long as necessary.

Agencies

Moody's withdraws Majan ratings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Moody's Investors Service (Moody's) on Tuesday withdrew the 'Ba2' corporate family rating (CFR) and the 'ba3' Baseline Credit Assessment (BCA) of Majan Electricity Company (MJEC).

The outlook at the time of the withdrawal of ratings was positive on Majan Electricity, Moody's said in a statement. Majan Electricity currently has no rated debt.

Moody's said it has decided to withdraw the ratings of MJEC for its own business reasons.

The primary activities of Majan Electricity Company encompass electricity distribution and supply in four Governorates of Oman. MJEC is 100% indirectly owned by the Omani government, primarily through Nama Holding which owns 99.99% of MJEC. Nama Holding is 100% owned by the Oman Investment Authority.

Russian fuel export ban could deepen global energy supply concerns

Moscow, Russia - Russia's recent decision to ban the export of gasoline and diesel fuel could exacerbate supply concerns, leading to an increase in global energy prices.

Russia, one of the largest global oil producers, exports nearly 900,000 barrels per day (bpd) of diesel fuel and 100,000 bpd of gasoline. Last year, the country's diesel exports totaled 35mn tonnes and gasoline exports amounted to 4.8mn tonnes.

Both gasoline and diesel account for a sizable portion of Russia's transportation and are heavily used in the agricultural and industrial sectors.

Although Russia ships less gasoline and diesel than it does crude oil, the export embargo be-

fore the winter and ongoing supply concerns have heightened market jitters.

Brent oil was trading at \$92.70 a barrel on Thursday before Russia announced its decision to restrict the export of gasoline and diesel fuel to balance the domestic market. Following the release of news regarding the Russian export ban, Brent climbed more than two per cent to \$95 a barrel.

In the Russian market, however, the decision saw gasoline and diesel prices drop 5%.

Due to the fact that practically all of the major Russian oil corporations, including Gazprom Neft, Tatneft, and Surgutneftegaz, export diesel and gasoline, the temporary decision will have a detrimental effect on these busi-



nesses.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) said in a report earlier in September that refineries were having difficulty meeting increasing demand, especially for distillates.

The OPEC+ group's ongoing oil supply restrictions, international sanctions against Russian oil, and the lower production in European and Asian refineries, which remained significantly below previous years, were all identified in the report as additional concerns associated with inadequate supplies.

Additionally, it is projected that the supply gap will expand further on the worldwide market, particularly before the winter season, as a result of the decision by Russia, one of the main ex-

porters of diesel fuel in the world, to impose an export embargo.

Russia is a net exporter, which means that it produces more gasoline and diesel than it consumes; nonetheless, it is anticipated that the constraints would swiftly lead to a surplus on the domestic market, necessitating the decision to be temporary.

The First Deputy Minister of Energy of Russia, Pavel Sorokin, said that although the restriction is currently indefinite, it is expected to have an immediate effect on the market.

Sorokin argued that by taking these steps, the nation will be able to fully meet the needs of its farmers, who represent one of the greatest consumers of gasoline and diesel in the country.

Anadolu Agency

Rich nations and China must accelerate race to net zero emissions: IEA

Paris, France – Rich and developing nations alike must sharply improve their net-zero targets, the International Energy Agency said Tuesday, warning that a clean energy surge was the main reason the world's climate goals are still within reach.

Wealthy countries must now reach carbon neutrality in around 2045, five years early, and China should speed up by a decade to 2050 to keep to the Paris goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the IEA said.

"The world has already delayed too long to avoid hard choices," the global energy watchdog said.

The report, which comes ahead of crunch UN climate talks, updates the IEA's landmark 2021 "Net Zero Roadmap", which said new fossil fuel development was incompatible with global decarbonisation by mid-century and the 1.5C target.

Two years later the IEA has seen progress in the form of record growth in solar power capacity and electric car sales.

These are in line with the IEA's pathway to net-zero emissions, as are the plans put in place by industry to roll out new manufacturing for them.

The energy sector is "changing faster than many people think", the IEA said, adding that together these clean energy technologies are projected to deliver a third of the emissions reductions needed by 2030.

But it warned of the negative impact of increased fossil fuel investments and "stubbornly high emissions" during the same period, which saw a post-pandemic economic rebound and the energy crisis driven by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The pathway to 1.5C has nar-



IEA executive director, Fatih Birol, poses in his office in Paris on September 14 (AFP)

Wealthy countries must now reach net zero in around 2045 and China should speed up by a decade to 2050 to keep to the Paris goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, IEA said

rowed in the past two years, but clean energy technologies are keeping it open," said IEA chief Fatih Birol.

Fossil focus

The IEA this month forecast that world demand for oil, gas and coal would peak this decade

thanks to the "spectacular" growth of cleaner energy technologies and electric cars.

But far from resting on that success, Birol said countries need to work together to substantially speed up climate action.

Even a small delay in ramping up emissions cuts beyond the current pledges "would cause global temperature to exceed 1.5C for almost 50 years", the report warned.

It laid out a potential pathway for the energy sector – the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions – to achieve net-zero emissions and contribute towards curbing warming to 1.5C.

The IEA said staying on track "means almost all countries must move forward their targeted net zero dates", with its pathway based on an "equitable" redistribution of targets, pulling forward China and richer countries to allow developing nations more breathing space to decarbonise

after 2050.

The report also calls for a "huge policy-driven ramping up of clean energy capacity" driving fossil fuel demand 25% lower by 2030.

And it warned that if the world's current oil and gas fields and coal plants operate to the end of their lifespans, the world would significantly overshoot its CO2 budget to stay within 1.5C.

Singling out China, the IEA said the country is projected to account for 45% of emissions from existing fossil fuel assets between 2023 and 2050.

At just under 1.2C of warming so far, the world has already seen a crescendo of deadly and destructive extreme weather and the most vulnerable populations are hit hardest.

A recent UN progress report on the Paris goals warned the world was not on track to limit warming to 1.5C.

AFP

US shutdown would put rating at risk: Moody's

Washington, US – The Moody's ratings agency has warned that a US government shutdown this weekend, amid political deadlock in Congress, would have negative implications for the country's top tier credit rating.

Just four months after barely avoiding a credit default, the world's largest economy is facing a government shutdown at the end of the month due to a concerted campaign for deep spending cuts by hardline Republicans in the House of Representatives.

With less than a week to go, the measures have yet to pass the Republican-controlled House, and have little chance of passing the Democratic-controlled Senate.

"A shutdown would be credit



negative for the US sovereign," Moody's Investors Service wrote in a note to clients on Monday.

The warning from Moody's – the only major agency to maintain its rating for US sovereign debt at its highest level – underscores the potential economic danger to the United States of

failing to reach an agreement to keep the government funded before the end of the month.

Fitch and S&P have both downgraded US debt in recent years, raising the risk associated with the debt – and the cost of government borrowing.

AFP

Tender Announcement



Al Morooj Dairy company seeks tenders for the following services from a reputed vendors which specialized in providing Consultancy Engineering Services.

Tender Number	Description of Service	Tender Fee (R.O)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date of Submission of Tender
AMDC/2023/09-002	Consultancy Engineering Services (Design and Supervision) for the construction of 3 Milk Collection Centers.	50 OMR Non-Refundable	10/10/2023	31/10/2023

- Interested vendors may obtain the tender documents from the Head Office of the company located in **Salalahon** any working day between 8 am to 2 pm after the payment of the non-refundable tender fee.
- The tender enclosed in a sealed envelop to be addressed to **the chairman** and should be submitted to the reception on 4th floor.

Al Morooj Dairy Company reserve all the rights to accept, reject any or all of the offers, extend the tender closing date, modify tender document(s) or cancel the tender without assigning any reason(s)

Email: Tender@almoroojdairy.om

AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) announcement the following Auction:

Auction No.	Description	Location/ Inspection	Last Date for Obtaining Auction Documents	Deadline for submission of Offers	Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)	Deposit Amount (RO)
02/2023	Sale of Used IT Equipment's.	OETC Warehouse Muscat (Mawaleh)	11/10/2023	07/11/2023	26/250	1,000/-

- The interested company should provide Copy of Valid CR & Be'ah Registration Showing activity in the same field
- Interested companies may participate and obtain the tender document by send a request for the participation to the below mentioned email & attach all required documents. Transfer the payments into OETC bank account against the non-refundable payment as mentioned.
- The interested Company should deposit the above mentioned amount for each Auction OETC Bank account and enclose the receipt along with the auction documents. Failing to do so the offer will be rejected.
- The Offers should be submitted in a separate sealed envelope addressed to Chairman of the Minor Tender Committee mentioning Auction Number and subject on the top of the envelope. No other writing or any reference should be mentioned on the envelope. The offer shall be valid for 90 days from the date of submission.
- The deposit amount will be returned to the unsuccessful bidders after awards announcement and to the successful bidders after receiving full payment and removal of Equipment within time limit as mentioned below.
- The Winning Bidder shall pay for the value of the Scrap materials by transfer to OETC bank account within One Week of the date of notification to him.
- The Winning Bidder is bound to transfer the materials no later than **One Week** from the date of sale notification and payment. In case of its failure to transfer the materials in the period specified the bidder company is not entitled to claim compensation and the bank deposited amount will be forfeited.
- OETC is not responsible for the sold materials after the payment and expiration of the deadline for delivery.
- OETC is not bound to sell the entire materials to a single buyer.
- The Winning Bidder shall be responsible for all risks during transfer or reuse of the materials.
- The Auction area shall be cleaned after transfer the materials.
- The Offer should be deposited in the Tender Box (1) of the Tenders, Procurement and Contracts Department at the Company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission.

Company Address: Muscat - Al Mawaleh
Way No : 2153 - Building No. 4230 Block No: 321 GSM: 93268155
Email: tenders@omangrid.com
Website: https://www.omangrid.com/en/pages/home.aspx



Oman Electricity Transmission Company S.A.O.C.
P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2428 3000 I Fax: +968 2230 9046
www.omangrid.com



إعلان مزايمة

تعن الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المزايمة التالية :

رقم المزايمة	الوصف	الموقع	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المزايمة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	ثمن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة) (ع.م.)	تأمين دخول المزايد (ع.م.)
٢٠٢٣/٠٢	بيع أدوات وأجهزة مستعملة بتقنية المعلومات	مخازن الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء مسقط - الوالج	٢٠٢٣/١٠/١١	٢٠٢٣/١١/٠٧	٢٦/٢٥٠	١,٠٠٠/=

- على الشركات والمؤسسات الراغبة في الإشتراك في المزايمة تقديم نسخة سارية المفعول من السجل التجاري وتسجيل شركة بيئة توضحان نفس النشاط.
- يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات الإشتراك والحصول على مستندات المزايمة عن طريق تقديم طلب المشاركة في المزايد للبريد الإلكتروني الموضح أدناه مع إرفاق جميع المستندات المطلوبة ، مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد - عن طريق الإيداع البنكي.
- تقدم العروض في مظاريه مختومة بالشمع الأحمر معونة بإسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات الصغرى ومكتوباً عليها من الخارج رقم وعنوان المزايمة ، على ألا يكتب على المظروف إسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه ، وأن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء.
- يجب على الشركات والمؤسسات التي ترغب في الإشتراك في هذه المزايمة ، إيداع مبلغ نقدي حسب المبلغ المحدد أعلاه مع ضرورة إرفاق نسخة من الإيصال داخل العطاء وكل عطاء لا يستوفي المطلوب لن ينظر فيه .
- سيتم إرجاع مبلغ التأمين إلى المتزايدين غير الفائزين بعد الإعلان عن النتيجة وأما الفائزين سيتم إرجاع مبلغ التأمين بعد دفع قيمة المواد وتنظيف ساحة المزايد.
- يلتزم من يرسو عليه البيع بسداد القيمة عبر التحويل البنكي لحساب الشركة خلال اسبوع من تاريخ إخطاره برسو المزايد عليه.
- يلتزم المشتري بنقل المواد التي تم دفع قيمتها في موعد أقصاه اسبوع من تاريخ البيع و سداد قيمة المواد وفي حالة عدم قيامه بنقل المواد حسب الفترة المحددة تتم مصادرتها لصالح الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ولا يحق له المطالبة بالتعويض عنها ويتم مصادرة الضمان.
- الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مسؤولة عن المواد بعد البيع و إنقضاء المهلة المحددة للتسليم.
- الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير ملزمة ببيع كامل المواد لمشتري واحد.
- على المشتري تحمل جميع المخاطر المترتبة عن نقل المواد أو إعادة إستخدامها.
- لا يسمح بتفكيك المواد وتقطيعها في المخزن وعلى المشتري تنظيف ساحة المزايمة بعد نقل المواد المتباعدة.
- يجب وضع العروض في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) لدائرة المناقصات والمشتريات والعقود بمبنى الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء الفرع الرئيسي بالمواقع قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات .

عنوان الشركة: مسقط - الوالج

رقم السكة ٢١٥٣- ميني رقم ٤٢٣٠ المربع رقم ٣٢١ هاتف: ٩٣٢٦٨١٥٥

Email: tenders@omangrid.com

https://www.omangrid.com/en/pages/home.aspx



الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش. م. ع. م.
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O & G specialists participate in OQ HSSE Symposium



Ashraf al Mamari

H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, patronised the opening ceremony of the OQ Occupational Health, Safety, Security and Environment (HSSE) Symposium, organised by OQ, the global integrated energy group, on September 25.

Held under the theme of 'Human Reliability' at Grand Millennium Muscat hotel, the symposium was part of the efforts exerted by OQ to enhance the occupational health and safety aspects in workplaces. It also aimed to boost OQ's contribution to the occupational health, safety and environmental fields in society, in collaboration with the public and private sectors, to



build an integrated occupational health, safety and environment ecosystem in the sultanate and achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The symposium was convened to promote communication and joint cooperation with

partners and contractors to spread the culture of occupational health, safety and environment. It provided an opportunity for international experts in this field to showcase the latest developments in the field of occupational health, safety and

environment and to present specialised workshops for the persons interested in this field, a press release said.

Ashraf al Mamari, chief executive for People, Technology and Culture of OQ Group, emphasised that the symposium aims

to enhance the aspects of prevention of accidents and work dangers to embody the application of national and international occupational health and safety principles. He stressed that OQ seeks to raise public awareness about these principles.

Dr Krishna presents overview on cosmetic surgery

Dr Krishna Kumar, senior consultant - Plastic, Cosmetic & Reconstructive Surgery, Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Al Khoud, explains that the term 'Plastic Surgery', which originated from the Greek term 'plastikos', means to mould.

The modern version of plastic surgery originated in the early 1900's in England and that Sir Harold Gillies, a New Zealand surgeon who immigrated to England is considered the 'father of modern plastic surgery'. Also, Sushruta - an ancient Indian surgeon who lived around 600BC - formulated various techniques of plastic surgery, some of which are practiced even today.

Plastic surgery does not equate to cosmetic surgery. It encompasses various sub-specialties like hand surgery, microsurgery, head and neck, cancers, burns, cleft lip and palate, etc. Of course cosmetic surgery is a very important subspecialty of plastic surgery, he asserted.

The quest for incomparable beauty and eternal youth is as old as man itself. This is much more relevant today with the embracement of western standards and culture. Thus, the aim of cosmetic surgery is two-fold - to regain youthful features lost by ravages of time and to restore features lost by trauma, malignancy or congenital problems, he said.

The problem is, surgery of any kind will leave residual scars. The only issue is how fine the resultant scar is going to be. It goes without saying that scars created by a plastic surgeon will be finer than those produced by other surgical specialties.

Obviously the surgical correc-



Dr Krishna Kumar

tion has to be achieved without leaving behind noticeable scars. Also the trick is to achieve the desired result without leaving behind an operated or unnatural look. So the basic principle of cosmetic surgery is to achieve maximum surgical correction employing - no scars, minimal scars, aesthetically placed scars, and scars placed in hidden sites.

The commonly done procedures include those for face, breast, abdomen and liposuction all over the body.

Facelift is a procedure to correct wrinkled, lax and sagging skin on the face caused by old age, rhinoplasty is for increasing/decreasing the size of bones and cartilages which constitute facial features, otoplasty is done for reshaping large ears, commonly known as 'bat ears or elephant ears', gynaecomastia, is done for reshaping oversized male breasts, breast augmentation is for reducing/enhancing female breast size without affecting lactation/breast feeding, while mastectomy (removal of breast) is one of the treatment options for breast cancer.

Other procedures undertaken include abdominoplasty (tummy tuck), liposuction for managing areas of excess fat deposits, hair restoration procedures, brow lift, and many others.

Phone (2) evolves the smartphone experience

Nothing tech has announced the launch of Phone (2) in the region. Thanks to its newest with Adhwa Al Billa Technology, users in Oman will get a chance to get their hands on the highly anticipated second-generation flagship smartphone from September 26.

Engineered to make smartphone usage more mindful, Phone (2) introduces the new Glyph Interface at the back, enabling users to minimise screen interactions by accessing key information at a glance. It also features a revamped Nothing OS 2.0, rooted in utility and de-

signed to reduce distractions, while delivering a fast and smooth experience that embodies Nothing's unique aesthetics, a press release said.

Powered by the top-of-the-line Snapdragon 8+ Gen 1 Mobile Platform, Phone (2) delivers Nothing's most premium

smartphone experience to date, boasting a powerful 50MP dual rear camera with advanced algorithms for true-to-life photography, and a stunning 6.7-inch OLED display with LTPO.

Rishi Kishor Gupta, business lead for Middle East and Africa

at Nothing, said, "We have seen a lot of excitement for our products in the region and we feel confident that Phone (2) along with other Nothing products range will resonate strongly with Omani consumers. We are thrilled to work with Adhwa Al Billa Technology."

RUWI CUP FOOTBALL 2023



Al Ansari FC emerged winners in the Ruwi Cup 2023 football tournament organised by Kairali Ruwi last weekend. Nesto Senna FC was the runner-up while FC Kerala finished third

NBO facilitates QQGN IPO subscriptions

National Bank of Oman (NBO), a trusted cornerstone of Oman's banking sector, is at the forefront of facilitating the highly anticipated OQ Gas Networks (QQGN) Initial Public Offering (IPO).

With a legacy of financial excellence, NBO is proud to announce its role as the leading Collection Bank for the QQGN IPO, providing prospective investors with a seamless and advantageous subscription experience, a press release said.

"The QQGN IPO represents an exceptional opportunity for investors to be part of Oman's thriving energy infrastructure sector. NBO's involvement as a Collection Bank and commit-

ment to providing financing options add tremendous value to this offering. We understand the importance of making investment opportunities accessible to a broad spectrum of investors and our aim is to empower both, individuals and institutions, to participate in the growth of Oman's energy landscape," Maha Saud al Raisi, assistant general manager and head of Retail Products, NBO, said.

"NBO's reputation for trust and excellence, coupled with our digital banking solutions, ensures that investors can navigate the subscription process seamlessly. We look forward to serving as a reliable partner on this exciting jour-

ney, fostering economic development and prosperity in Oman," she added.

Maha further said, "Our dedication to fostering economic growth in Oman is exemplified through our partnership with QQGN in this significant IPO. We provide diverse investment opportunities for individuals and institutions, empowering them to access this promising sector. Our mission extends beyond banking - we aim to be a catalyst for financial inclusion and sustainable development. Together with QQGN, we aim to create enduring value, promote economic diversification and strengthen Oman's global position."

OIA organises Finance Forum for CFOs of its companies

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has pursued a wide-ranging agenda focused on developing financial capabilities, enhancing cooperation, sharing expertise, and discussing issues that contribute to the realisation of financial excellence.

In this context, OIA organised a Finance Forum to host chief financial officers (CFOs) of its companies, which saw the presence of financial leaders, experts, and industry pioneers who shaped the financial scene whether from OIA Companies or private sector enterprises, including several local and interna-



tional banks, a press release said.

The forum is a great opportunity for OIA companies to expand their networks and relationships and consolidate cooperation with leading businesses in the financial sector. The forum featured rich discussion panels with the participation of prominent speakers and experts from the Sultanate of Oman and beyond.

Issues of concern included global growth and its impact locally, the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and its contribution to the development

of the financial sector, green finance and its positive impact on sustainability, payment systems in Oman which are considered the backbone of the economy, digital innovation, and the future of artificial intelligence (AI) in the area of finance.

The panels also covered issues such as divestment and its importance in the diversification of the Omani economy and to what extent it serves as a vehicle to attract foreign investments to the Sultanate of Oman, localisation of modern technologies, and the development of the economic sectors.

Niger regime wants ‘negotiated framework’ for French pullout

Niamey, Niger - Niger’s coup leaders are demanding a ‘negotiated framework’ for former colonial ruler France to withdraw its troops, which Paris says will be completed by the end of the year.

The new military regime said in a statement read out on national TV late on Monday that the timeframe for the pullout ‘must be set out in a negotiated framework and by mutual agreement’. It came almost two months to the day after the overthrow of Niger’s democratically elected president Mohamed Bazoum on July 26.

On Sunday, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that Paris would withdraw its ambassador from Niger, followed by the French military contingent in the coming months - both demands of the post-coup regime in Niamey.

Macron, who had sought to make a special ally of Niger, said military cooperation was ‘over’ and French troops would withdraw in ‘the months and weeks to come’ with a full pullout ‘by the end of the year’.

France keeps about 1,500 soldiers in its former West African colony as part of an anti-militant deployment in the Sahel.

The coup against Bazoum was the third such putsch in the region in as many years, following similar actions in Mali and Burkina Faso in 2021 and 2022.

They too forced the pullouts of French troops.

Macron said on Sunday that Niger’s post-coup authorities ‘no



A French airforce plane is seen at the French airbase in Niamey in Niger on September 22 (AFP)

The new military regime said in a statement read out on national TV late on Monday that the timeframe for the pullout ‘must be set out in a negotiated framework and by mutual agreement’

longer wanted to fight against terrorism’.

Niger’s rulers, who have welcomed the announcement by France, said they were waiting for it to be followed up by official

actions from the French authorities.

There has been no apparent signs of movement around France’s embassy in Niamey since late Sunday indicating the

departure of its ambassador Sylvain Ilte.

‘Will of Nigerien people’

France has not recognised the authority of the military leaders and is still demanding Bazoum’s restoration.

On August 3, the coup leaders renounced several military cooperation agreements with France, before qualifying as ‘illegal’ the presence of French troops on its soil.

Later that month, they ordered France’s ambassador to leave the country. Paris responded that only Bazoum’s deposed government could order him out.

Niger has welcomed Macron’s announcement on Sunday as ‘a new step towards sovereignty’.

“This is a historic moment, which speaks to the determination and will of the Nigerien people,” the country’s military rulers said in a statement, read out on national television.

AFP

Saudi Arabia slams attack that killed two Bahrain soldiers

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia on Tuesday condemned an attack on its territory that killed two Bahraini military personnel near the border with war-torn Yemen.

Bahrain’s military said late on Monday that one officer and one enlisted soldier had been killed in what it described as a drone attack perpetrated by Yemen’s Huthis.

The Saudi foreign ministry voiced its ‘condemnation and denunciation’ of a ‘treacherous attack on the defence force of the sister Kingdom of Bahrain stationed on the southern border of the kingdom, which resulted in the martyrdom of a number of its brave soldiers and the injury of others’, the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

Bahrain has participated in a Saudi-led coalition mobilised in 2015 to topple the Huthis and restore the internationally backed government of Yemen, which the Huthis drove out of the capital Sanaa in 2014.

The ensuing war has left hundreds of thousands dead through direct and indirect causes and displaced millions in what the United Nations calls one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises.

The Saudi statement did not explicitly blame the Iran-backed Huthis for the attack, but it renewed the kingdom’s call for a halt to weapons exports to them.

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, based in Jeddah, did blame a ‘Huthi drone attack’ in a statement on Tuesday, and said: “Such provocative actions are not consistent with the positive efforts made to end the crisis in Yemen.”

The Huthis have not commented on the attack.

On Monday, the Huthis’ Al-Masirah TV channel reported separately that ‘four citizens’

Bahrain’s military said that one officer and one enlisted soldier had been killed

were wounded in Saudi attacks on Yemeni territory near the border on Monday.

The attack that killed the Bahraini soldiers came as Saudi Arabia is pushing for a lasting ceasefire nearly a year and a half after agreeing to a truce with the Huthis that has largely held despite officially expiring last October.

Hopes for peace were boosted in March when Saudi Arabia struck a surprise rapprochement deal with Iran, which has backed the Huthis.

AFP



Refugees queue in vehicles near the border town of Kornidzor, arriving from Nagorno-Karabakh, on Tuesday (AFP)

Thousands more flee Karabakh as fuel depot explosion kills 20 people

Goris, Armenia - Thousands more refugees fled Nagorno-Karabakh on Tuesday as officials in the self-proclaimed republic said a fuel depot explosion the previous day had killed 20 people.

The Armenian government has warned of possible ‘ethnic cleansing’ by Azerbaijan following its lightning offensive against the breakaway region last week.

Armenia said on Tuesday that more than 13,000 refugees had fled since a first group ar-

rived in the country on Sunday.

The influx overwhelmed the border town of Goris, where many refugees are staying.

Many slept in their cars laden with luggage, emerging on Tuesday with red-rimmed eyes and forming long queues outside phone shops to buy sim cards.

Azerbaijan has pledged equal treatment for residents of the majority ethnic Armenian enclave and has sent aid. Adding to humanitarian concerns, the separatist government on Tuesday

said 13 bodies were found at the scene of a fuel depot blast on Monday and seven more people had died of their injuries.

It said in a statement that 290 people had been hospitalised and ‘dozens of patients remain in critical condition’.

Armenia’s health ministry said it had sent a team of doctors to the rebel stronghold of Stepanakert by helicopter.

The Azerbaijani presidency said Baku had also sent medicine to help the wounded. Meanwhile

in Brussels, envoys from Baku and Yerevan prepared to meet in the first such encounter since Azerbaijan’s swift defeat of separatist forces last week.

Simon Mordue, chief diplomatic adviser to European Council president Charles Michel, will chair the talks, Michel’s spokeswoman said. Azerbaijan and Armenia, along with EU heavyweights France and Germany, will be represented by their national security advisers.

AFP

Thailand: Top protest leader jailed on royal insult charges

Bangkok, Thailand - A Thai court on Tuesday jailed one of the leading figures in the kingdom’s youth-led pro-democracy protest movement for four years on royal insult charges.

Thailand has some of the world’s strictest royal defamation laws, which shield King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his close family from criticism and which critics say have been weaponised to silence dissent.

Anon Numpa, a 39-year-old human rights lawyer and activist, was convicted on Tuesday at Bangkok Criminal Court over a speech he made during the protests in 2020.

At their peak the demonstrations drew tens of thousands to the streets, with some making unprecedented calls for reforms to the monarchy, and for changes to the lese-majeste law, which carries a 15-year prison sentence.

Tuesday’s case was first of 14 lese-majeste charges against Anon. “Loss of personal freedom is a sacrifice I’m willing to make,” Anon told reporters as



Thai lawyer and political activist Anon Numpa gestures outside the Criminal Court in Bangkok on Tuesday (AFP)

he entered the court with his partner and their baby, ahead of the sentence.

He raised a three-finger salute as he walked in - a symbol adapted from the *Hunger Games* films that became synonymous with the demonstrations. “We’ve come a long way and we’ve seen lots of changes in the Thai political scene since the movement back in 2020,” he said.

“If I get sentenced to prison today, it might be many years but

it will be worth it.”

The court also fined him 20,000 baht (US\$550) for violating an emergency decree in effect at the time. Following the verdict, his lawyer Krisadang Nutcharas described Anon as an ‘innocent man’ and said they would probably appeal.

“The family and friends are trying to submit bail for a temporary release,” he told reporters outside court.

AFP

Kingdom of Eswatini, Africa’s last absolute monarchy, holds elections

Johannesburg, South Africa - The last absolute monarchy in Africa, the Kingdom of Eswatini, holds parliamentary elections on Friday, with political parties banned from contesting.

The constitution emphasises ‘individual merit’ as the basis for selecting lawmakers, who cannot be affiliated with any political group.

Being in the good graces of King Mswati III, who wields absolute power, also carries much weight.

Democracy? ‘Not that much’

About 585,000 registered voters will be called to choose 59 members of the lower house of parliament, which plays only an advisory role to the monarch.

Mswati, who can veto any legislation, directly appoints another 10 lawmakers.

With most candidates loyal to the king, the election is unlikely to change the political scenery.

Only about a dozen of those



People walk past Eswatini parliamentary election billboards in Lobamba on September 19 (AFP)

nominated during primaries last month are known to have ties to the opposition.

Many do not say which side they are on, fearing repression.

“Democracy is not that much practiced around here,” Thantaza Silolo, spokesperson

for the largest opposition group, the Swaziland Liberation Movement (Swalimo), told AFP.

Political parties have unclear status and cannot directly take part in the vote.

They were effectively banned in 1973, but a new constitution in

2005 provided an opening allowing for freedom of association.

Still, in practice there is no legal avenue for them to register, according to democracy watchdog Freedom House. Swalimo is incorporated as a non-profit.

AFP

China, South Korea, Japan leaders to hold first summit since 2019

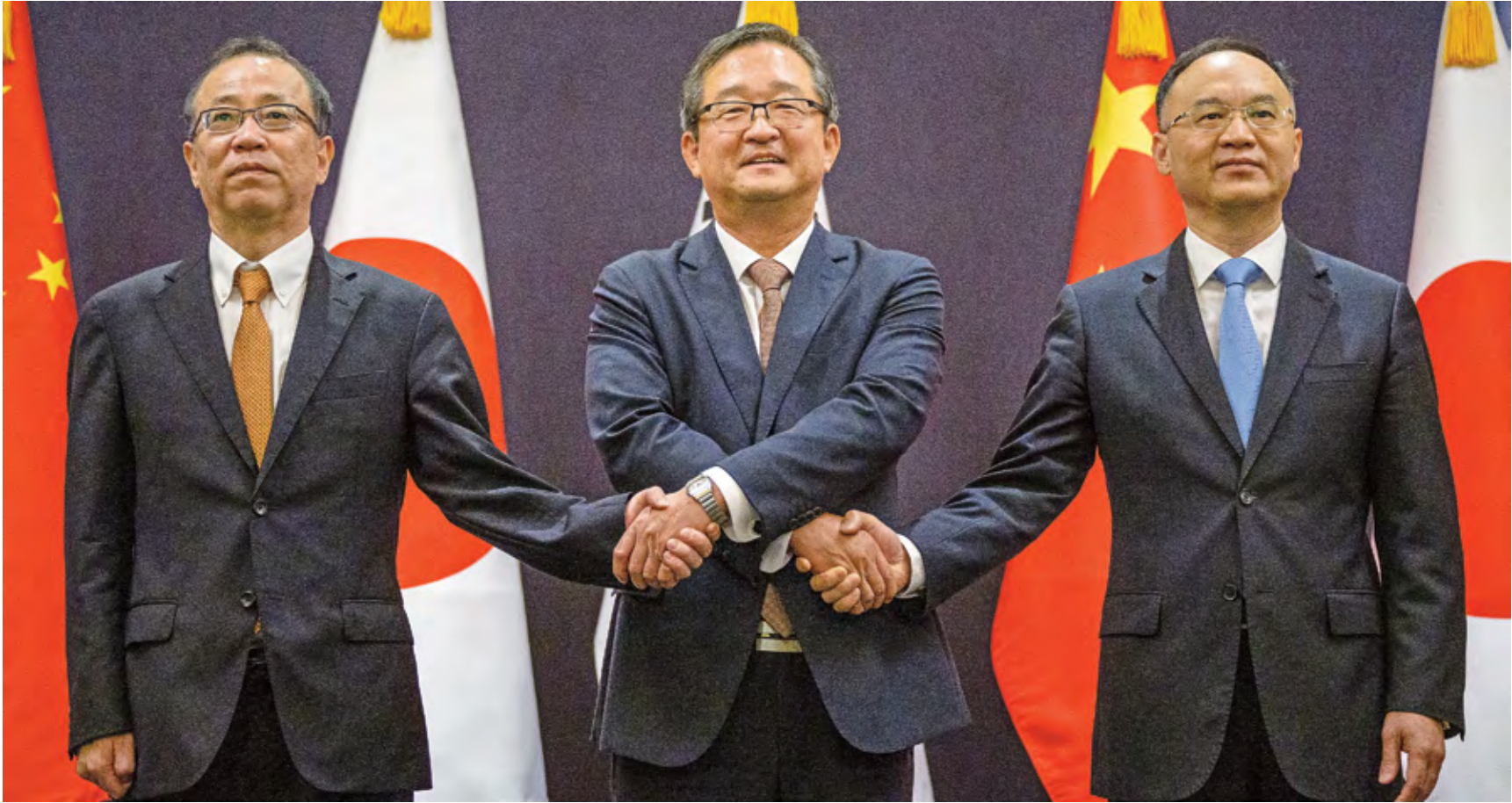
The initial talks were seen as an attempt to ease Beijing’s concerns over Washington’s deepening security ties with Tokyo and Seoul

Beijing, China - China said on Tuesday it had agreed with Japan and South Korea to hold a summit between the three countries’ leaders ‘as early as possible’, after a rare meeting between senior diplomats in Seoul.

The three-way talks - attended by deputy and assistant ministers from the three countries - were seen as an attempt to ease Beijing’s concerns over Washington’s deepening security ties with Tokyo and Seoul.

Beijing described them as a ‘in-depth discussion on promoting the stable restarting of cooperation’. “It was agreed that carrying out cooperation between China, Japan and South Korea is in the common interests of the three parties,” foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said. The three countries agreed to hold a meeting of their foreign ministers ‘in the next few months’, Wang said, and to promote ‘the holding of a leaders’ meeting as early as possible at a time convenient to all three countries’.

South Korea’s foreign ministry



Deputy foreign ministers of Japan, South Korea and China shake hands ahead of their trilateral high-level meeting in Seoul on Tuesday (AFP)

The three countries agreed to hold a meeting of their foreign ministers in the next few months, and to promote the holding of a leaders’ meeting as early as possible at a convenient time

also said the diplomats had ‘agreed to hold the trilateral summit meeting at the earliest time possible and host a trilateral ministerial meeting in preparation’.

The last such summit took place in 2019. No other leaders’ summit has since been held be-

cause of diplomatic and historical disputes between Seoul and Tokyo, in part linked to Japan’s colonial rule over the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945.

South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin stressed that cooperation among the three countries

‘plays a significant role not only in Northeast Asia but also in the peace, stability, and prosperity of the world’, his ministry said in a statement before the meeting.

Park further highlighted that together, the three nations ‘account for 20 per cent of the world’s population and 25 per cent of the global GDP’, it added.

As the threat from nuclear-armed North Korea grows, South Korea’s President Yoon Suk Yeol has pulled Seoul closer to long-standing ally Washington.

He has meanwhile sought to

bury the hatchet with Japan, also a close US ally.

In August they said a ‘new chapter’ of close three-way security cooperation was beginning after a historic summit at Camp David in the United States.

Beijing had lodged complaints over a statement released at the Camp David summit, in which the three allies criticised China’s ‘aggressive behaviour’ in the South China Sea.

Beijing, Seoul’s biggest trading partner, is also North Korea’s most important ally and eco-

nomic benefactor.

While Tokyo, Seoul and Washington have held joint military exercises against the growing North Korean threats, Beijing has recently sent senior officials to attend Pyongyang’s military parades.

China also claims self-ruled Taiwan as its territory, vowing to seize it one day, and officials in Washington - a key ally of Taipei, Seoul and Tokyo - have cited 2027 as a possible timeline for an invasion.

AFP

US slams attack on Cuban embassy

Washington, US - The United States on Monday condemned the latest attack on Cuba’s embassy in Washington, in which a man allegedly threw two Molotov cocktails at the mission.

Cuba’s communist government, which is despised by many exiles in the United States, described the incident on Sunday night as a ‘terrorist attack’. No one was injured and there was no significant damage.

“All attacks and threats against diplomatic facilities are unacceptable,” State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters. “We are in contact with Cuban embassy officials and, consistent with our obligations under the Vienna Convention, the department is committed to the safety and security of diplomatic facilities and the diplomats who work in them,” he said.

He said the State Department was coordinating with Washington police in the investigation.

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel demanded ‘action from the American authorities’. “Hatred once again last night caused a terrorist attack against our embassy in Washington, an act of violence and weakness that could have cost precious lives,” he said.

AFP

China to fight ‘wanton expansion’ of alliances

Beijing, China - Beijing will oppose the ‘wanton expansion of military alliances’, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Tuesday, the latest in a string of warnings as rival Washington deepens security ties in the Asia-Pacific.

China has long warned that any effort to establish a NATO-like military alliance in the Asia-Pacific would only provoke conflict. It has also suggested that the bloc’s rapid expansion in eastern Europe is partly to blame for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which it refuses to condemn.

Speaking at a press conference in the capital on Tuesday, Wang said China would ‘oppose the wanton expansion of military alliances and the squeezing of the



Chinese FM Wang Yi (AFP)

security space of other countries’. He said Beijing would seek to ‘resolve differences and disputes among countries through dialogue and consultation’, without specifying the nations in question in either case. Wang also declined to confirm whether President Xi Jinping would travel to

the United States for a meeting with US counterpart Joe Biden.

The two leaders are expected to meet at an APEC summit in San Francisco on November 14-16. “Regarding your question about the arrangements for attending APEC, we are in communication with all parties and will make an official announcement in due course,” Wang said.

Wang’s remarks came as he unveiled a broad programme laying out Beijing’s foreign policy goals for the coming years.

“Building a global community of shared future is the way forward for all the world’s peoples,” the policy paper, released by Chinese news agency Xinhua, reads.

AFP

Singapore blows up 100kg WWII-era bomb after evacuating thousands

Singapore - Singapore army specialists on Tuesday detonated a 100kg (220-pound) World War II-era bomb found at a construction site, causing a thunderous boom in the city-state after authorities had evacuated thousands of residents.

More than 4,000 people were evacuated from nearby residences for the controlled detonation, which local media reported was the largest-ever exercise involving a WWII relic in Singapore.

The unexploded aerial bomb was discovered last week where a condominium was being built in the city’s northeastern suburb of Bukit Timah, police said on Sunday.

A mushroom cloud rose in the



Smoke rises after a 100kg World War II-era aerial bomb is detonated at a construction site in Singapore on Tuesday (AFP)

distance on Tuesday morning as bomb disposal experts carried out the first of a series of explosions. Before the detonation mil-

itary officers were seen setting up sandbags around the area where it would be detonated to contain the blast, an AFP journal-

ist said.

Soldiers carried the bomb on a net from where it was found into the sandbagged area, where charges had been laid.

Surrounding streets were empty of cars and a 200-metre cordon set up around the site kept locals at bay as the blast was triggered.

Police had warned residents not to be alarmed by the loud explosion and to avoid the area.

The device likely contained around 47kg of explosives, strong enough to destroy an apartment block, local media reported. Japanese planes first bombed Singapore, then a British colony, on December 8, 1941.

AFP

South Korea stages military parade, showcases advanced arsenal

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea staged its first military parade in a decade on Tuesday, showcasing its advanced arsenal in the face of plummeting ties with nuclear-armed North Korea.

Pyeongyang regularly puts on huge military parades but such events in Seoul are traditionally arranged every five years to mark South Korea’s Armed Forces Day.

The last parade was in 2013. Five years later, then-president Moon Jae-in chose to hold a celebratory ceremony instead of a military event, in line with his conciliatory approach to North Korea.

Around 4,000 troops marched through central Seoul on a rain-soaked afternoon, cheered by umbrella-bearing crowds who waved South Korean flags. They were accompa-



Soldiers take part in a military parade to celebrate South Korea’s 75th Armed Forces Day in Seoul on Tuesday (AFP)

Around 4,000 troops marched through central Seoul on a rain-soaked afternoon, cheered by crowds who waved South Korean flags

nied by 170 pieces of military equipment, including air and sea drones, tanks and missiles.

The number of troops and pieces of equipment taking part were revised down by officials from those originally planned.

A flight display by South Korean warplanes, including US-made F-35 stealth fighters, was

also cancelled because of the poor weather.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol watched the parade from a platform, applauding troops as they marched past.

‘To demonstrate the strong foundation’ of Seoul’s alliance with Washington, around 300 US military personnel also participated in the parade.

Yoon, who was elected last year, has pulled South Korea closer to the United States and the longstanding allies have ramped up defence cooperation, including large-scale drills, to counter growing threats from North Korea. During an Armed Forces Day ceremony earlier at an air base south of Seoul, Yoon hailed the expansion of US-South Korea defence ties.

AFP

US army chief and allies discuss Asia-Pacific region in India

New Delhi, India - Army chiefs and senior officers from 30 countries including the United States met in India on Tuesday to discuss threats facing the Asia-Pacific region, in the face of concern at an increasingly assertive China.

US Army chief Randy George said the region was 'critically important', speaking to reporters alongside his Indian counterpart Manoj Pande, and vowed to boost cooperation to 'maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific'.

Generals from Japan and Australia, which make up the 'Quad' defence cooperation forum alongside Washington and New Delhi, also took part, as did Britain and France. As the generals met, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that Beijing would oppose the 'wanton expansion of military alliances', the latest in a string of warnings as Washington deepens security ties in the Asia-Pacific.

Nations present at the two-day conference in New Delhi in-



India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh poses with army officials from 30 countries, in New Delhi on Tuesday

cluded Vietnam and the Philippines, both of which have long-standing pending territorial disputes with China.

The conference, which launched in 1999, brings together army chiefs and top officers from 30 countries. India's Pande said the region faced challenges on both land and at sea.

"These range from territorial disputes over land masses, or in some cases, even over artificially expanded islands to acquire real estate and establish military

bases," Pande added, in an indirect reference to China.

India has also had to balance its traditional alliance with Russia - the provider of most of its arms imports, and now a source of cut-price oil - with growing ties to Washington.

"The partnership between India and the US armies is vital for stability in the region, and the relationship between our armies is strong and growing stronger," George said.

AFP

Don't tell women what to wear, says UN after France bans hijab at Olympics

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN stressed on Tuesday it was opposed to most dress codes for women, after France barred its Olympic athletes from wearing the Muslim hijab during the 2024 Paris Games.

"No-one should impose on a woman what she needs to wear or not wear," United Nations rights office spokeswoman Marta Hurtado told reporters in Geneva.

Hurtado's comment came after the French sports minister said the country's athletes would be barred from wearing headscarves during the Games, in line with the country's strict rules on secularism. French Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera repeated on Sunday that the government was opposed to any display of religious symbols during sporting events.

"What does that mean? That means a ban on any type of proselytising. That means absolute neutrality in public services," she told France 3 television. "The France team will not wear the headscarf."

Hurtado did not address France's stance directly.

But she stressed that the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ruled out discriminatory practices.

"Any state party to the convention - in this case France - has an obligation to ... modify social or cultural patterns which are based on the idea of

the inferiority or superiority of either sexes," Hurtado said.

"Discriminatory practices against a group can have harmful consequences," she pointed out.

"That is why ... restrictions on expressions of religions or beliefs, such as attire choices, are only acceptable under really specific circumstances,"

Restrictions on expressions of religions or beliefs are only acceptable under really specific circumstances

MARTA HURTADO

she explained. That, she said, meant circumstances 'that address legitimate concerns of public safety, public order, or public health or morals in a necessary and proportionate fashion'.

In France, the issue of religious dress goes to the heart of the country's strict rules on secularism. These are intended to keep the state neutral in religious matters, while guaranteeing citizens the right to freely practice their religion.

France's laws prohibit the wearing of 'ostentatious' religious symbols in some contexts, such as in state schools and by civil servants.

AFP

Spain's Feijoo faces key vote without support to be PM

Madrid, Spain - Alberto Nunez-Feijoo began defending his bid to become Spain's next prime minister in parliament on Tuesday, a day before an inauguration vote the right-wing opposition leader is almost certain to lose.

Despite winning the most votes in July's inconclusive election, the Popular Party (PP) leader has no majority to form a government and, barring surprises, will face defeat. Taking the podium at midday (1000 GMT), Feijoo launched a blistering attack on outgoing Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez over his plans to retain the premiership through obtaining the support of a hard-line Catalan separatist party cast in the role of kingmaker.

In exchange, JxCat wants an amnesty for those facing legal action over the failed 2017 Catalan separatist bid - a demand that has outraged the right.

"No end, not even becoming prime minister, justifies the means," Feijoo thundered, repeatedly insisting he himself would never pay such a price.

"I have within my reach the votes needed to become prime minister but I will not pay the price they are asking to do so," he said in seeking to justify his imminent defeat. What Feijoo failed to mention was that if he had sought to court JxCat for its decisive seven votes, it would have cost him the support of key ally Vox, a far-right faction which is implacably opposed to any separatist agenda.

'Blackmail'

Acutely aware of his lack of sup-



People's Party (PP) President Alberto Nunez Feijoo delivers a speech during a demonstration called by right-wing opposition parties in Madrid on Sunday (AFP)

I have within my reach the votes needed to become prime minister but I will not pay the price they are asking to do so

ALBERTO NUNEZ FEJOO

port, Feijoo has for weeks been attacking Sanchez's plan to seek support from JxCat, whose leader Carles Puigdemont fled Spain to avoid prosecution over the 2017 separatist crisis.

For the Spanish right, Puigdemont is public enemy number one and on Sunday, around

40,000 flag-waving protesters hit the streets of Madrid to denounce his amnesty demand which Feijoo blasted as tantamount to 'blackmail'.

"What the pro-independence movement is proposing... is a direct attack on the essential democratic values of our country' and

if it gets the amnesty, it would only serve the interests of 'just one person', Feijoo said in remarks aimed directly at Sanchez.

To be sworn in, Feijoo needs an absolute majority of 176 votes in the 350-seat parliament, but he can only count on 172, largely thanks to Vox, whose extreme positions have left the PP almost totally alienated.

If he fails Wednesday's test, he will face a second vote on Friday when he will need a simple majority of more votes in favour than against. But there too, he has little to no chance of winning

sufficient support.

The PP leader's expected defeat will set in motion a new two-month countdown, paving the way for Sanchez to try his hand at an inauguration vote.

If he doesn't succeed within that time frame, Spain will face new elections, most likely in January. Approving an amnesty to stay in power would be dangerous for Sanchez as it would benefit Puigdemont, making it a red line not only for the right but also for elements within Sanchez's own Socialist Party.

AFP

Six people dead, 13 missing after river sweeps away homes in Guatemala City

Guatemala City, Guatemala - Two children and four adults were found dead on Monday after a river swollen by heavy rains swept away shacks built on its banks in the Guatemalan capital, authorities said.

Thirteen people, including eight children, were still missing after the river tore through the Dios es Fiel (God is Faithful) informal settlement in the early morning hours, according to the Conred disaster relief agency.

Hundreds of firemen, police, soldiers, and volunteers were taking part in the rescue efforts.

The Naranjo river washed away six homes, built mainly of zinc sheets, under a bridge in the centre of Guatemala City, Conred spokesman Rodolfo Garcia told reporters. Hundreds of needy residents of the capital constructed their homes on the banks of the river despite a municipal prohibition due to it containing residential wastewater from the capital's sewage system.

Water bearing stones, soil and



Rescuers work in the place where several houses were swept away, in Guatemala City, on Monday (AFP)

human waste gushed through the settlement following heavy rains on Sunday, leaving mainly just debris in its wake, an AFP reporter observed.

Resident Esau Gonzalez, a 42-year-old day worker, recalled how 'the river... took homes, neighbours' belongings. Neighbours disappeared'.

Gonzalez told AFP the people of the community had nowhere

else to go. "Rent is very high. Salaries are not enough to pay rent with," he said.

"The river took entire families," added Marvin Cabrera, 36, a motorcycle food delivery worker.

"We knew the risk, (but) we are here out of necessity," he added.

Iris Lopez, 27, said she hoped the government would move the community to a safer place,

adding 'nothing remained' of the rickety house of her sister, who was away visiting their mother.

"If she was here, she would have been taken by the river," said Lopez. Tens of thousands of Guatemala's 17.7mn inhabitants depend on precarious housing in often hazardous environments such as this one in a country with a 59 per cent poverty rate.

AFP

Hundreds of Sikh Canadians rally outside Indian missions

Toronto, Canada - Hundreds of Sikh protesters rallied outside Indian diplomatic missions in Canada on Monday, trampling pictures of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and burning flags a week after Ottawa said New Delhi had played a role in the killing of a prominent Sikh activist.

"We are not safe back home in Punjab, we are not safe in Canada," said Joe Hotha, a member of the Sikh community in Toronto, referring to the murder in June of Canadian citizen Hardeep Singh Nijjar near Vancouver.

Last Monday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told parliament that New Delhi was possibly involved in the assassination of the Sikh leader, triggering a major diplomatic crisis between the two nations. "Now our prime minister tells everything in the parliament, so there is no excuse," said another Sikh protester, Harpar Gosal of Toronto.

"The Indians, they are terrorists, they killed our brother in



People hold flags during a Sikh rally outside the Indian consulate in Toronto on Monday (AFP)

Vancouver, so that's why we are protesting here," said the Canadian outside of the Indian consulate. Like other protesters, he carried the yellow flag of Khalistan - an independent state that some Sikhs hope to create in the Indian region of Punjab.

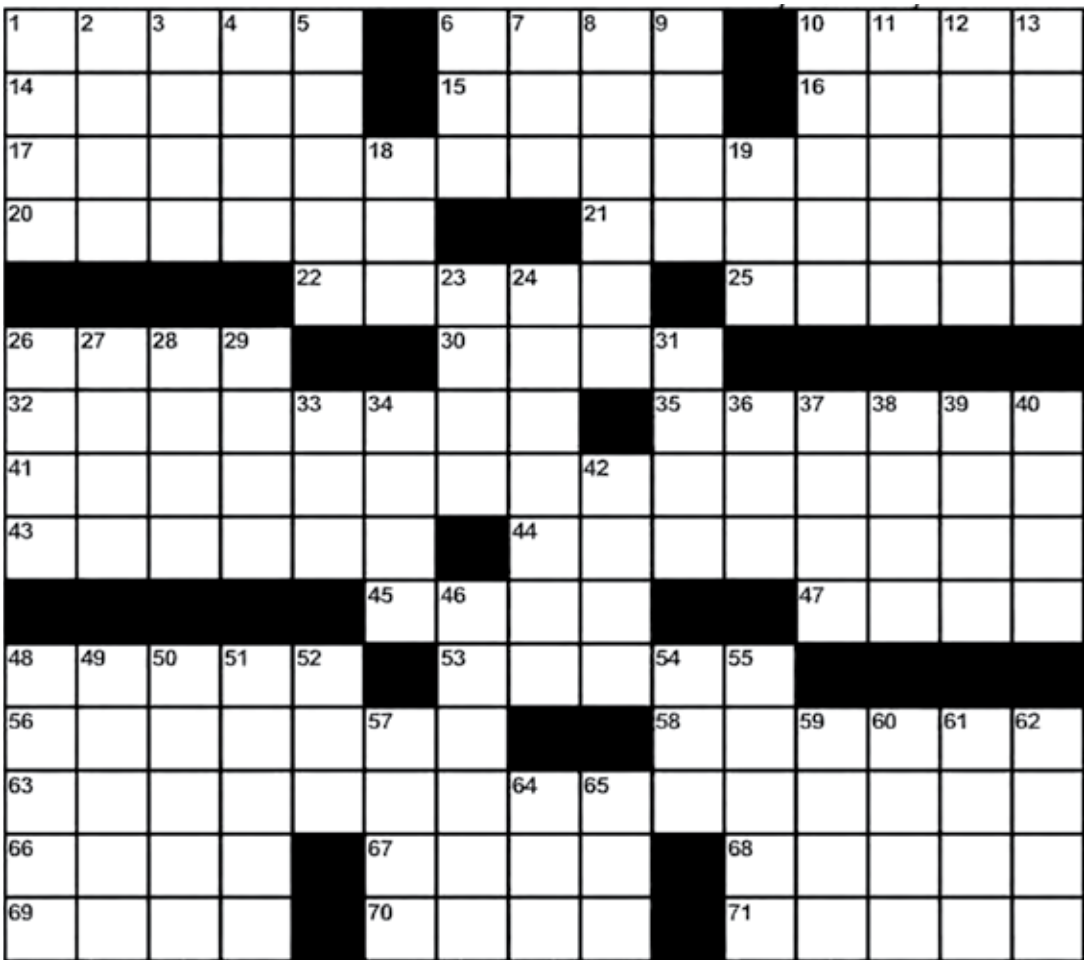
Several hundred people gathered in Toronto but also in Ottawa and Vancouver to denounce

Modi's government.

Canada is home to the largest Sikh community in the world outside of India, with 770,000 Canadians professing Sikhism in 2021, or two per cent of the country's population. The Indian government called the Canadian accusations 'absurd' and vehemently denied them.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Just plain terrible
- 6) Object of finger-pointing?
- 10) Extras in a Tarzan movie
- 14) Tibet's Forbidden City
- 15) Thus
- 16) Change homes
- 17) Three big things
- 20) Two-dimensional sound
- 21) Throwing into confusion
- 22) Ancient Greek instruments
- 25) Sight or taste, e.g.
- 26) Snakes in hieroglyphs
- 30) Prefix for "freeze"
- 32) Best
- 35) Pick
- 41) Three big things
- 43) Bathing suit brand
- 44) Convention freebies
- 45) Paving stone
- 47) Parking-meter opening
- 48) Greenhouse pest
- 53) Necessary things
- 56) The late Mr. Nimoy
- 58) Convicted one's hope

- 63) Three big things
- 66) Eye layer containing the iris
- 67) Babies' needs, thankfully
- 68) Accepted practices
- 69) Untidy situation
- 70) Catch using trickery
- 71) "The_ of Kilimanjaro"
- 26) Some are unspeakable
- 27) Do more than browse
- 28) Vatican leader
- 29) Builder's workplace
- 31) Weapon of modern warfare
- 33) Spanish hero El _
- 34) Grand-scale poetry
- 36) Unharden earth, in a way
- 37) Selects
- 38) Aussie gem
- 39) UtahA's lily
- 40) Prefix for "while"
- 42) Put on a scale
- 46) Make lovable
- 48) Photograph book
- 49) Pet _ (grievance)
- 50) Makes perfect
- 51) Ancient Peruvians
- 52) "Well, lah-di-..."
- 54) Divided U.S. terr.
- 55) Bombards with junk email
- 57) Get a lease on
- 59) Unit measuring loudness
- 60) Continental dollar
- 61) Once more

- 62) Highland girl
- 64) Resort feature

- 65) Clairvoyant's claim, briefly

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Charming people could be keeping you busy and delighted. They have some big plans, and they want you to get in on the ground floor of making them happen. You have valuable planning skills that they need, plus a list of the people they want to involve. Today's going to be a very active and interesting day for you, and your life is going to be transformed soon because of what you do today. Add your unique flair to everything you do now!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You could get some honest feedback that might be a little too honest for your ego. The cold, hard truth could hit you pretty hard, but before you run off to lick your wounds, take a moment to realize how valuable this feedback is. It holds clues to what you need to do to make things better in your life or your job. So be grateful for it, and start making the revisions you need to make. Now isn't the time to take feedback personally.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're happy to have extra responsibilities right now. After all, they're just opportunities to show the world what you can do! But this higher profile can be a double-edged sword, helping you get positive acclaim but also forcing you to act while everyone is looking. The good news is that you have supreme confidence now and can do very well under pressure. It's time for you to prove yourself and overcome any past missteps. Show folks that you can't be judged by one mistake.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. At which UK General Election was Helen Grant elected, the Conservative Party's first black female MP?

- A. 1951
- B. 1983
- C. 2010
- D. 1979

02. In the 2002 film "The Ring", what common household electrical appliance is the most malevolent?

- A. Toaster
- B. Television set
- C. Refrigerator
- D. Hot water cylinder

03. What is typically used to grind a telescope mirror to the surface wanted?

- A. Sand and pumice in water
- B. Shark skin
- C. Purbeck clay
- D. Loess

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. A



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There's certainly no shortage of energy inside you right now, but you're feeling surprisingly shy about showing it to the rest of the world. Right now, it's going to take a bit of encouragement to get you to come out of your shell and do all that you could be doing. The big question is why are you holding back so much? Take some time to think through why you're unable to work at 100 percent of your capacity. You'll get answers by the end of the day.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Give credit where credit is due today. You have to communicate to other people how impressed you are with their behavior or accomplishments. Because when you do, you set up a reciprocal relationship. This person will be the first person to cheer you on when your time in the spotlight arrives! Giving to others feels good, but it's also a great way to ensure that others give to you some day in the future. Build more bridges.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There could be a lot of erratic energy buzzing around your circle of friends today, but you can't let it get in the way of your plans! Unless one of your friends asks you point blank for help, don't get involved in their drama. They know you care, and they know that you'll be there if they need you. But they also want you to be happy and not cancel or change your life just because theirs is going through some upheaval. They won't give you grief for not rescuing them.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

A health concern you had recently will turn out to be nothing, but that doesn't mean you should go back to living your life the same way you've always lived it. Getting more active is easier than you think. Start walking more, playing more of the sports you enjoy, and working more movement into every part of your life. It's also important to get your emotional health in check. You feel happy, but once you start sharing your affection with others, your happiness will grow exponentially.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Whatever you do today shouldn't be all about money. Make sure you have the right motivations. It can be easy to assume that as long as you're doing something that make get you richer it's the right thing to do. That isn't true, especially today. Do something because it's the right thing to do, not because it's profitable. If you only think about financial gain, you'll ultimately sell yourself short. Acting selflessly today could create greater gains down the road.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your positive attitude has always helped you out in life, but right now it will enable you to satisfy your growing need to be socially useful. By being able to take things as they come and adapt to any group situation you're unaccustomed to, you show other people how to do the same. People look to you for clues about how to behave more often than you think, so always try to set a good example, especially for children.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today is a good day to initiate anything that you've been contemplating, from starting a new book to starting a new relationship. The stars are shining favorably on new initiatives right now. And once all the key elements are in place, you should start to feel the momentum take over. Some of your ideas could leak out All you need to do is give things a big shove in the right direction and they'll go along well!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

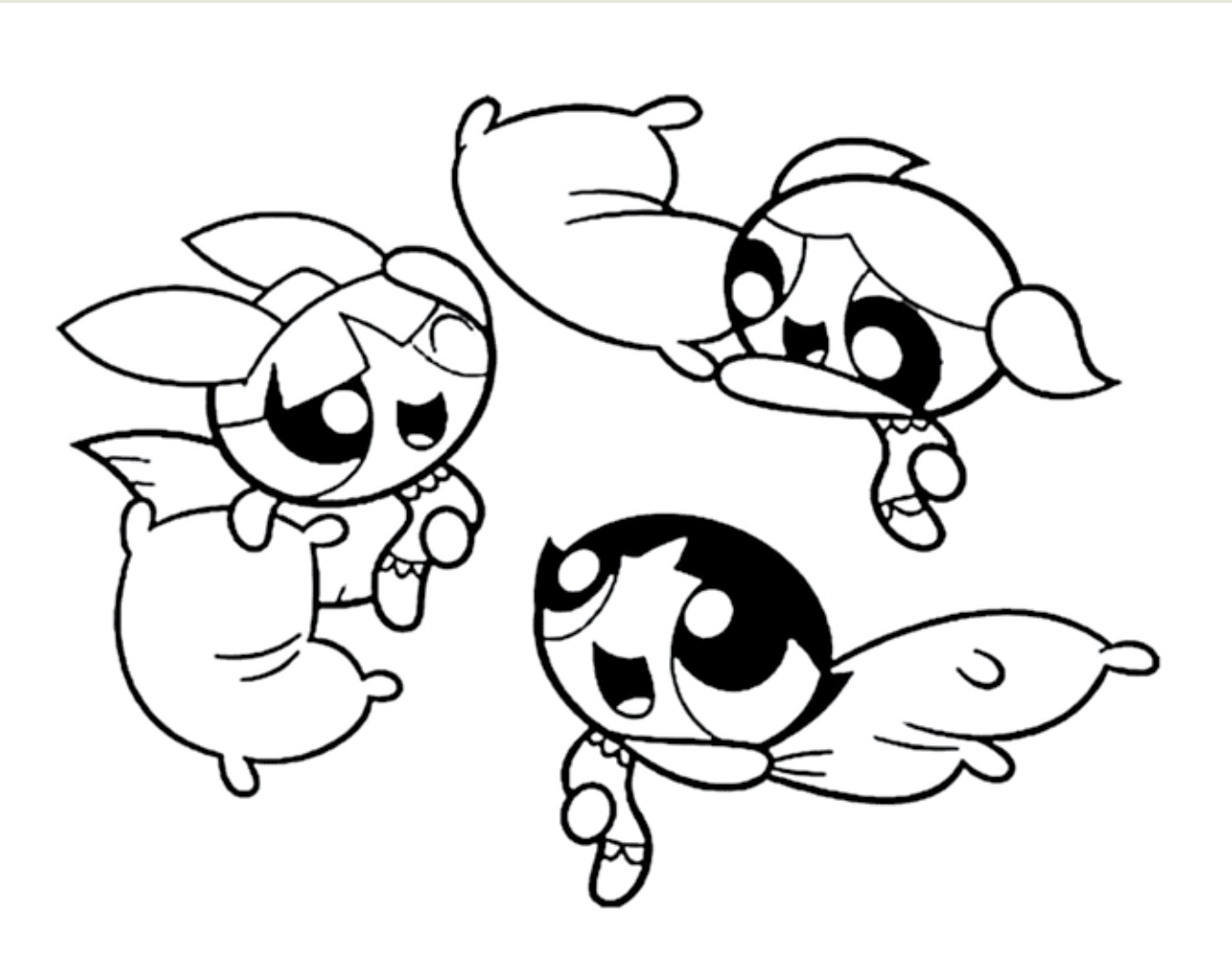
Are you too shy to say what you really want to say to that person you've been crushing on? Saying something out loud that reveals your inner hopes and wishes might feel like an invitation for rejection, but in reality it's a very empowering act. State your truth, stand by your statement, and be ready for whatever consequences come. It's better to try and miss than to not try at all and let a chance pass you by. Own your feelings by giving them the respect they deserve.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today, you should only start something new if you have all the evidence you need to feel confident about it. Don't get involved with stuff you're unsure of, no matter how tantalizing or exciting it might seem. Taking risks isn't advised right now. Load up on the skepticism and apply it liberally to any "great" new opportunity that comes your way. And remember that the harder someone pushes you to join in, the more likely it is that they have an ulterior motive.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

P	O	A	T
M	P	L	C
L	U	T	A
S	K	P	A

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

'I'VE PLAYED A LOT OF CRICKET ALREADY'

Maverick De Kock set for international farewell at World Cup

Johannesburg, South Africa - Quinton de Kock is a cricketing maverick who enjoys nothing more than his time away from the game by going fishing and playing golf, and at the age of 30 reckons he has served his time in the international arena.

"I've played a lot of cricket already," says the stroke-playing batsman-wicketkeeper.

He retired from Test cricket in 2022, and the Cricket World Cup will bring down the curtain on his one-day international career at an age when many players are reaching maturity.

He will remain available for Twenty20 internationals - but, it seems, only when they don't clash with more lucrative franchise opportunities.

De Kock is expected to miss a T20 series against India in December because he has signed a contract to play in Australia's Big Bash League.

Cricket South Africa has seemingly bowed to the reality that they will have to be flexible if they want star players to be avail-



Quinton de Kock

able for major tournaments such as next year's T20 World Cup in the West Indies and United States.

De Kock first played for the Gauteng provincial team as a 15-year-old schoolboy in an unoffi-

cial match against a touring team from Durham.

He made his List A debut at 16, played first-class cricket at 17 and appeared for South Africa in a T20 international just four days after his 20th birthday.

Far from overawed at his rapid ascent to cricketing stardom, the talented left-hander has resolutely done things his own way.

The story is told that the 15-year-old De Kock didn't bother to put on a thigh pad when he went

Quinton de Kock retired from Test cricket in 2022, and the Cricket World Cup will bring down the curtain on his one-day international career at an age when many players are reaching maturity

out to face a Durham attack which included England fast bowlers Steve Harmison, Liam Plunkett and Graham Onions.

"I honestly can't remember,

but it is probably true," he says.

He had almost immediate success at every level and reeled off three successive one-day international centuries against

India before he turned 21.

Going into the World Cup, he has taken his tally of one-day hundreds to 17, opening the batting and invariably scoring at a rapid rate. He has scored six Test centuries and one in a T20 international.

He missed a match in the T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates in 2021 when he refused to obey a last-minute edict by CSA to "take the knee" in sympathy with the Black Lives Matter movement - not out of opposition to the cause but because of the way it was handled.

That incident came after he had captained South Africa in all three formats. He never looked entirely comfortable in the leadership role and freely admits, "I don't mind captaining but I was pretty happy to hand it over. It's not really in my character."

In an age of relentless reference to video analysis, De Kock said early in his career that he didn't study potential opponents.

That remains his philosophy.

"I basically play what's in front of me. You can look at videos, but it's not the same as being in the middle."

Nor does he think about cricket or practice when he's away from the game.

He lives in Knysna, a popular tourist town on a large lagoon some five hours drive from Cape Town, where cricket can easily be forgotten.

Miller holds record he would prefer not to have

Johannesburg, South Africa - David Miller holds an international cricket record he would prefer not to have.

No one has played more international cricket without playing in a Test match than Miller.

The hard-hitting left-hander has played in 274 white-ball internationals. The nearest contender for the non-Test record is retired West Indian Keiron Pollard on 224.

"I would have loved to play a Test, but it is what it is," says Miller, 34.

"I've achieved quite a lot in my white-ball stuff and I'm grateful to have played so many games."

Miller has built a solid first-class record, averaging 36.32 in 63 matches, with six centuries, which he backed up with electrifying fielding.

But it was a time of plenty in a South African Test batting line-up which included Jacques Kallis, Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers and Faf du Plessis, while white-ball cricket was becoming ever more prevalent - and lucrative.

In 2018, nearing his 30th birth-



David Miller

day, he retired from first-class cricket.

"I wasn't being picked, even for the South Africa A side. There were guys ahead of me so I decided to concentrate on the white-ball stuff."

He is in demand from franchises around the world - playing

for 22 different representative teams - and a crowd favourite in South Africa where supporters wave banners proclaiming 'Killer Miller' and 'It's Miller Time'.

He is one of only four players who has scored more than 3,000 runs in one-day internationals with an average above 40 and a

strike rate above 100. The others are De Villiers and England's Jos Buttler and Jonny Bairstow.

He is renowned for hitting big sixes and has cleared all three grandstands on different sides of his home ground at Kingsmead in Durban. Recently he hit a ball out of the ground against Australia at

the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg.

An off-the-cuff comment he made after an Indian Premier League game is quoted regularly: "If it's in the arc it's out (of) the park, if it's in the vee it's in the tree." "That came from my dad," he says.

Andrew Miller was a good club cricketer who played for Natal Country Districts.

It's not all big hitting, though.

Batting at number six in a side without established all-rounders, Miller will likely be in situations at the World Cup where he will have to take responsibility for rebuilding an innings.

"It's about summing up the situation. Sometimes you are batting with the lower order and you have to decide with your partner at the time how you are going to go about it.

"It's like a chess game at times. You are thinking about moves and what's important and what's not. It's about making clear decisions. It helps your execution when you are fully committed."

AFF



Kane Williamson

New Zealand skipper Williamson targets World Cup return

Wellington, New Zealand - Less than six months after knee surgery threatened to rule him out of next month's ODI World Cup, the goal of captaining New Zealand in India has been the key driver in getting Kane Williamson through his recovery.

The 33-year-old tore the cruciate ligament in his right knee playing for Indian Premier League side Gujarat Titans in April, which looked to have scuppered his chances of making the showcase tournament.

However, intense rehab work has meant a speedy recovery.

Williamson hopes to be ready for the Black Caps opening game against defending champions England on October 5, a repeat of the 2019 final his side narrowly lost.

"It would be great. Naturally, you want to be back playing when you are fit and ready, sooner rather than later," he said.

AFF

"You hope that ends up being around that World Cup time, but I'm still being very focused on the rehab day-to-day and not wanting those targets to stretch it to a point where you take a backward step."

Williamson is already battling in the nets again, which the injured knee can handle.

"For running, it's not quite 100 percent, but making good progress," he added.

Black Caps coach Gary Stead said there was no fixed date for when Williamson will play again.

But his return will be a big boost. He was player of the 2019 tournament with centuries against South Africa and the West Indies in leading New Zealand to the cusp of lifting the trophy.

Williamson, who has chalked up over 6,500 runs in ODI cricket, is desperate to appear in a fourth World Cup, admitting the prospect "keeps you in the gym every day and working hard".

AFF

Kiwi veteran Boult looking for 'one more run' at World Cup title

Wellington, New Zealand - After 12 months out of one-day international cricket, New Zealand seamer Trent Boult is relishing a third crack at the 50-overs World Cup after bitter defeats in the last two finals.

The 34-year-old is one of the world's best ODI bowlers, but spent the last year sidelined from the Black Caps after turning down a New Zealand Cricket contract to play for lucrative Twenty20 teams in Australia, the United States and India.

Putting his international career on hold to spend more time with his young family was a risk, but Boult is back in the frame for



Trent Boult

October's ODI World Cup after signing a casual-playing agreement with New Zealand cricket chiefs.

"I fully appreciated the fact that in giving my contract back, you open the door for other players," he said. "The decision was solely made around just being away from home a lot."

"Selection for the World Cup was never guaranteed. I had to work for it, so I am very happy to be here."

New Zealand are bidding to reach a third straight final, and Boult hopes the Black Caps can go far in India, "like we have in the last couple of attempts".

He has been on fire since his return to international cricket in early September, taking eight wickets in two ODI defeats to England.

"It was a good feeling chucking back on the black ODI kit," he said. "I can't wait for more."

Boult was a key part of New Zealand's run to the last two finals when they lost to Australia in 2015 at Melbourne, then England four years later at Lords.

"I've been very fortunate to play in a couple of World Cup finals and been on the wrong side of all of them," he said with a wry smile.

AFF

Morocco, Algeria set to host Cup of Nations tournaments

Johannesburg, South Africa - Morocco and Algeria are favoured to be named hosts of the 2025 and 2027 Africa Cup of Nations tournaments respectively, with an announcement to be made in Cairo on Wednesday.

Both are seeking to stage the 2025 edition of the premier African sport event, along with Zambia and a joint Nigeria-Benin bid.

Algeria also entered the 2027 contest, as did Botswana, Egypt, Senegal and a combined Kenya-Tanzania-Uganda challenge.

After a number of deadlines passed without the hosts being revealed, a senior African Football Confederation (CAF) official told AFP "the two hosts will definitely be named on September 27".

Executive committee members will vote after studying independent appraisals of each 2025 and 2027 candidate, but politics and a promise of regional rotation have complicated matters.

North African neighbours Algeria and Morocco have an adversarial political relationship, which entered the football arena this year.

A ban on Moroccan aircraft flying over Algeria led to the withdrawal of the team representing the kingdom from the 2022/2023 African Nations Championship (CHAN) for home-based players.

Morocco had won the previ-



Sadio Mane's Senegal won the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations, held in Cameroon. Ivory Coast will host the 2023 edition

ous two editions and when their request to fly directly to Algeria was denied, they boycotted the tournament, robbing it of one of the title favourites.

Both countries boast superb stadia and infrastructure and football-loving populations, and are capable of delivering world-

class Cup of Nations tournaments.

But both would like to be the 2025 hosts with leading Moroccan and CAF official Fouzi Lekjaa causing a mid-year stir when he told local politicians that the kingdom would be chosen.

Domestic media quoted him

saying "the Fes stadium will have the honour of hosting CAN (Cup of Nations) 2025 matches when Morocco wins the organisation".

Political rivalry

CAF president and South African billionaire Patrice Motsepe is acutely aware of the political ri-

valry between the neighbours.

"We must not get involved in what is happening between Algeria and Morocco. CAF should never intervene in politics," he said during the CHAN tournament.

Motsepe has hailed the organisational abilities of both

Morocco and Algeria boast superb stadia and infrastructure and football-loving populations, and are capable of delivering world-class Cup of Nations tournaments

countries, who have each staged the Cup of Nations once with Morocco doing so in 1988 and Algeria two years later.

"Morocco has often flawlessly hosted major competitions while the CHAN in Algeria this year was the best ever," he said.

During the CHAN, Motsepe

said he wanted each region to host the Cup of Nations: "We cannot assign the organisation of the CAN successively to the same region."

However, several months later, CAF secretary general Veron Mosengo-Omba said regional rotation may not always be possible.

"Today, only five or six countries out of the 54 CAF members are able to apply to host the African Cup. Consequently, it will not be possible to make this al-

ternation," he said.

What began in 1957 as a three-team tournament is now a 24-nation event featuring stars such as Mohamed Salah, Victor Osimhen, Andre Onana, Sadio Mane and Hakim Ziyech.

Hosts must have a minimum of six stadiums - two with a capacity of at least 40,000 and four able to accommodate 20,000 or more spectators.

The Ivory Coast will stage the 2023/2024 Cup of Nations, which has been postponed from June and July this year to January and February next year to avoid the rainy season.

Fans barred from Pakistan World Cup warm-up over security fears

New Delhi, India - Pakistan's first warm-up match ahead of the ODI World Cup in archival India will be held behind closed doors due to security issues, the hosts said on Monday.

India and Pakistan are bitter adversaries and only play cricket against each other in international tournaments due to longstanding political tensions. Babar Azam's team will take on New Zealand on Friday in the south Indian city of Hyderabad, where large crowds are expected to gather for a Hindu festival.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said spectators will not be allowed inside the stadium and the match will "take place behind closed doors as per the advice of the local security agencies".

The match "coincides with festivals on the day and large gatherings are expected around

the city," the BCCI said in a statement, adding ticket holders will be refunded.

The tournament will begin on October 5 in Ahmedabad, with the city also hosting the hotly anticipated clash between India and Pakistan on October

ment opener against the Netherlands on October 6.

In August, fears over security for the India-Pakistan blockbuster clash in Ahmedabad saw the match moved back a day, because the match was originally scheduled at the start

The match "coincides with festivals on the day and large gatherings are expected around the city," the BCCI said in a statement, adding that the ticket holders will be refunded

14. Pakistan had agreed to visit India after they agreed to jointly host the recently concluded Asia Cup, allowing India to play its matches in Sri Lanka.

Pakistan will play its second warm-up against Australia on October 3 at the same venue, and stay on for their tourna-

of a nine-day Hindu religious festival. Pakistan's visit to India will be their first since the 2016 Twenty20 World Cup.

Visas for the Pakistan team to travel to India were issued on Monday, Indian and Pakistani media reported, just 48 hours before they were due to travel.

Captain Rohit Sharma says India needs players 'fresh' for World Cup

Rajkot, India - India have rested key players for their final ODI against Australia on Wednesday, with skipper Rohit Sharma saying he wants everyone "fresh" for the upcoming World Cup.

Rohit and star batsman Virat Kohli return for the third ODI in Rajkot after India clinched the three-match series in the second game. They had both been rested for the first two games

Shubman Gill has been rested for Wednesday's match, while Mohammed Shami, Hardik Pandya and Shardul Thakur have all gone home. Axar Patel is still recovering from a hamstring injury. Asian champions India, led by stand-in-skipper KL Rahul, won the first match and then hammered Australia by 99 runs to take an unbeatable 2-0 lead.

"We have got only 13 players to choose from and there is a bit of viral (sickness) going around



Rohit Sharma (2R) with Virat Kohli (R) and Ishan Kishan

in the team," Rohit told reporters on the eve of their last ODI before the World Cup starts October 5. "For the next few weeks it's important to look after the players and their well-being. We want everybody to be fresh for the World Cup."

India were crowned Asia Cup champions after crushing Sri Lanka in the final, and the win over Australia took them to the top of the ODI rankings.

"I am very happy with the last 10 ODIs we played, a lot of guys came into form scoring lots of

runs and the bowlers taking lots of wickets," Rohit said.

"In the last few games, guys who came back from injury have proven their fitness."

Senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin took three wickets in the second match against Australia in Indore on Sunday. Ashwin has been widely reported in Indian media as Patel's likely replacement in the World Cup squad.

Rohit praised Ashwin but did not commit to any team changes, with the squad able to be changed until Thursday.

"Ashwin has got the class, he has got the experience of playing the sport and handling the pressure," Rohit said.

"It's just that he hasn't played many ODIs in the last year or so. In the last couple of games we saw how well he bowled. He has got a lot of variation up his sleeve," he said.

Axed: Rampant logging hits India's renowned batmakers for a six

Sangam, India - When the Cricket World Cup opens in India next month several players will carry Kashmiri willow wood bats, but manufacturers say over-exploitation of trees means their craft faces ruin.

Unchecked logging without replanting has reduced swathes of woodland to scrub in the disputed Indian-administered Himalayan territory, and bat manufacturers face a bleak future.

"It's a case of culling all the time and no sowing," said Irfan Ali Shah, a senior official in the government's forest service.

Willow grows far more slowly than the more commercially viable poplar, and bat-makers warn the entire industry - a major em-

ployer - is at risk.

"We have started searching far-off corners of the valley, but there is not much good willow to be found anywhere for making the best quality bats," said Fawzul Kabir, whose GR8 bats are International Cricket Council-approved and sold worldwide.

"If the government doesn't help plant again soon on a large scale... we will run out of raw material in three to five years," he told AFP.

Found from Europe to central Asia, water-loving white willows - scientific name Salix alba - are deciduous trees growing up to 30 metres (100 feet) tall.

Numbers expanded enormously during the 19th century



The famed cricket bat industry in Kashmir is looking at an uncertain future because of unchecked logging

under British colonial rule, when plantations were laid for firewood during the freezing mountain winter. The ready supply of willow - the wood favoured by cricketers - also sparked a craft in

bats.

Willow has criss-crossing fibres that give it strength and tiny air pockets that reduce vibrations, making the wood light but powerful enough to smash a ball

for six. International big hitters have traditionally preferred willow from England, but the same tree grows in Kashmir and every year the region now produces three million "clefts" - the rough-

cut blocks of wood ready for shaping.

It is the bulk of global supply and bat-maker Kabir, 31, insists: "The best Kashmir willow bat is at least as good as English willow."

GR8 says its customers include cricketers from Indian heroes Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli to Australia's Steve Waugh and South Africa's Graeme Smith and AB de Villiers.

Kashmir's bat-makers prospered over the decades as cricket's popularity grew - demand surged after India's 1983 World Cup win and the sport now has more than a billion fans globally. Today, the industry employs some 120,000 people across 400 workshops, accord-

ing to manufacturers.

It is a key contributor to the economy of Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region claimed in full by both India and Pakistan but split between them, with the portion controlled by New Delhi roiled by a long-running insurgency.

But supplies are vanishing fast. Agricultural scientists at Sher-e-Kashmir University have warned female willow trees - the most suitable for bat-making - are facing "near extermination" in Kashmir. Nearly a million trees were logged in the past decade as the government removed plantations sucking up water from the shrinking Wular lake, protected under the United Nations Ramsar convention.



Sirivannavari Nariratana

Horse-riding Thai princess ‘goes for it’ at Asian Games

Hangzhou, China - Royalty graced the Asian Games on Tuesday with Thai Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana saddling up in the equestrian after being encouraged by the king to “go for it”.

The 36-year-old, who competed at the 2006 Games in badminton, is part of Thailand’s dressage contingent, riding in the team and individual competitions in Hangzhou. “I will do my best for (the people of Thailand),” she said at the Tonglu Equestrian Centre. “They’re my cheerleaders, my power, my fuel. I play for the Thai people.”

The princess, the only daughter of King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his former wife Sujarinee Vivacharawongse, is at her third Asian Games. As well as badminton in 2006, she also rode in the 2014 Games in South Korea. “Luckily our father is supporting us. He has always said, ‘Go for it! You want to do it? Do it,’” said the princess.

NO STOPPING HAUGHEY

Hong Kong star wins second gold to fire Paris Olympic warning as Honda motors past Seto

Hangzhou, China - Siobhan Haughey shattered her own Asian record to add the Asiad 100m freestyle title to her Olympic and world silver medals Tuesday, as Tomoru Honda stunned an exhausted Daiya Seto in the 400m medley.

Hosts China again bossed the Hangzhou pool, taking four of the six golds on the night including with an Asian record in the men’s 4x100m medley relay.

They have now topped the podium in 15 of the 20 races at the halfway mark of the six-day meet.

But the evening belonged to the 25-year-old Haughey, from Hong Kong, as she scorched her way to her second gold of the Games.

She had produced an exceptional swim on Monday to crush the pack by nearly two seconds and take out the 200m title, smashing an Asian Games record that had stood since 2010.

She was fired up again over the shorter distance in blasting a 52.17sec to send a warning to Australian freestylers Mollie O’Callaghan and Emma McKeon, with the Paris Olympics less than a year away.



Hong Kong’s Siobhan Haughey is elated after winning the women’s 100m freestyle gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games on Tuesday (AFP)

“I haven’t swum a best time since Tokyo (Olympic Games in 2021), but I knew I had the ability of going faster,” said Haughey.

“I’m really glad that I could do it here at the Asian Games and break the Asian record. It just proves that I’m not at my peak yet and hopefully I can keep going and keep swimming faster.

“Me and my coach, we’re really prepared for Paris, and if I

just keep doing what I’m doing right now, I’ll be ready,” she added.

Haughey’s previous Asian record of 52.27 came when second to McKeon at the Tokyo Olympics. Only world champion O’Callaghan has gone faster in 2023.

China’s Yang Junxuan and Cheng Yujie came a distant second and third.

Haughey’s win dethroned defending champion Rikako Ikee, the standout performer at the last Asian Games, where she won six golds.

The Japanese star had been scheduled to race but failed to start the heats.

Beyond exhausted

Like Haughey, Chinese Olympic champion Wang Shun had a

double in his sights after an electric 1:54.62 in the 200 medley on Sunday, which made him the third-fastest man in history.

But his hopes of adding the 400m title were dashed by Honda, the Olympic and world 200m butterfly silver medallist.

Japan’s three-time world champion and Asiad title-holder Seto made a fast start with Wang challenging.

But Honda paced himself and produced a sizzling final 100m to win a first medley title, touching in 4:11.40 ahead of a fading Seto, who had swum a 4:07.00 this year but had nothing left in the tank. Wang was a distant third.

“This is the first time in my life that I feel beyond exhausted,” said Seto. “I cannot even stand right now, I need to lie down now.” AFP

Hosts China win first-ever eSports gold of Asian Games

Hangzhou, China - Hosts China on Tuesday won the Asian Games’ first-ever gold in eSports in a landmark for gaming, beating Malaysia 2-0 in the smartphone game Arena of Valor.

eSports is making its debut as a medal event at the Games in Hangzhou, seen as a major step towards the Olympics one day.

Medals are up for grabs in seven gaming titles, including Arena of Valor, League of Legends and EA Sports FC Online.

In the fantasy-themed Arena of Valor, players take on virtual avatars, each with different traits and strengths, and work together with teammates to destroy enemy towers before reaching the ultimate target, the opposing team’s crystal.

“Being able to stand on the podium, I felt very honoured and proud,” Chinese player Jiang Tao told reporters after his team’s historic victory.



Gold medalists Xu Bicheng, Sun Linwei, Luo Siyuan, Lin Heng, Jiang Tao, Chi Xiaoming at the medal ceremony

Emotions were high at the packed 4,500-capacity Hangzhou Esports Center, where the crowd was dominated by China fans. The young spectators waved flags and banners in support of the host country, as well

as photos of their favourite players. “Chinese eSports, step on-stage and create legends!” one banner read.

Team China stepped out on to the stage to roars, while Malaysia were greeted with polite ap-

plause. China immediately outpaced Malaysia in destroying enemy towers in the first round of the best-of-three match, putting the Southeast Asian team on the defensive.

AFP

Mum or dad for tee? India’s Ashok has parental choice at Asian Games

New Delhi, India - India medal hope Aditi Ashok has a tough choice to make before teeing up in a star-studded women’s golf field at the Asian Games in Hangzhou on Thursday - will it be mum or dad on her bag?

The 25-year-old finished agonisingly out of the medals in fourth at the Tokyo Olympics with effervescent mother Maheshwari, known to everyone as “Mash”, as caddie.

“Tokyo 2020 was a great experience and having my mum caddie for me was a fun experience,” Ashok told AFP before leaving for China.

Mash and dad Gudlamani have taken turns as bag-carrier since the golfer was seven and were there in 2016 when, as a teenager, she first grabbed headlines by winning the Women’s Indian Open. At 16 she was the youngest player at the Rio Olympics the same year, with her dad doing the caddie duties.

Her Tokyo exploits, where she



Aditi Ashok

was in silver-medal position for the first three rounds before being edged off the podium by former world number one Lydia Ko, put women’s golf firmly on India’s sporting map.

But level-headed Ashok, who plays on the US LPGA and Ladies European Tours, did not dwell on her Tokyo disappointment.

“My mindset has always been to focus on the process more than the outcome. I always give my best and move on to the next

event. And I keep doing the same week after week.”

Ashok has gone on to crack the world’s top 50 for the first time this year after earning a fourth European Tour win in Kenya in February.

“This season so far has been the high point,” Ashok said. “Not because of any one week in particular, but mainly because of the way I’ve played on both the tours and managed my game as well as breaking into the top 50.”



Hong Kong players celebrate their win against South Korea in the men’s rugby sevens final on Tuesday (AFP)

Hong Kong beat Korea to win Asian Games men’s rugby sevens gold

Hangzhou, China - Hong Kong retained their Asian Games men’s rugby sevens title on Tuesday when they beat South Korea 14-7 in the final in Hangzhou, as hosts China won the women’s gold.

After an attritional first half, Hong Kong took the lead right on the siren when Liam Doherty broke two tackles. He flipped the ball to Cado Lee running off his shoulder and Lee did the rest. Russell Webb converted.

They doubled their advantage seconds into the second half when Doherty was released into

space by Max Denmark’s quick pass and ran in unopposed to score. Again Webb added two points.

South Korea got a consolation try through Kim Eui-tae but Hong Kong were always in control.

Japan, beaten 12-7 by Hong Kong in a semi-final sudden-death extra-time thriller, came from behind to prevent China winning a shock bronze.

China took a 19-14 lead at the end of the second half to a huge roar from a packed home crowd at the Hangzhou Normal University Athletics Field.

As China kicked off, the siren sounded for full-time, giving Japan one last play. They made it count with Kippe Taninaka touching down to tie the scores and Yoshihiro Noguchi converting to silence the fans.

But the crowd were cheering again a few minutes later as China held on to pip Japan 22-21 in the women’s final, which turned into another nail-biter.

Captain Gu Yaoyao opened the scoring in the first minute and three further touchdowns gave the hosts a seemingly comfortable 22-0 half-time lead.

But a stirring second-half fightback had China on the ropes and only a mad scramble to kick the ball dead behind their own tryline after the siren denied Japan a winning try.

China regained the gold medal they first won in 2014 at Incheon, gaining revenge for losing the final 7-5 to Japan in Jakarta five years ago.

Hong Kong’s women won an Asian Games sevens medal for the first time when they held out in the face of wave after wave of Thailand attacking play to prevail 7-5.



Jack Crowley

Scotland are tough customers, says Irish fly-half Crowley

Paris, France - Fly-half Jack Crowley says Scotland will not be taken lightly by Ireland even if the Irish are expected to beat them in their final Pool B match on October 7 and secure their place in the quarter-finals.

Crowley is likely to be captain Johnny Sexton's understudy again - in preference to the more experienced Ross Byrne - after impressing in cameo appearances in the 82-8 romp against Romania and the hard-fought 13-8 win over defending champions South Africa last Saturday.

The Irish top the pool with 14 points but could still lose out on a last-eight spot if they end up in a three-way tie with Scotland and the Springboks.

The statistics are stacked in Ireland's favour - they are on a record run of 16 successive Test wins and have won their last eight meetings with the Scots.

"I suppose they are going to grow throughout the competition aren't they?" said Crowley.

"We have come up against them in the Six Nations and they have been one of the toughest competitors you come up against because of the way they

play as well, so the game plan again is going to be different compared to the South Africa game. "So our eyes are firmly on them. Recovering this week, preparation is massive Wednesday to Sunday and then back into the game week.

"I'm sure they will be gunning for us."

'Disneyland Paris'

The 23-year-old Munster playmaker has been marked out for great things by both Irish legend Ronan O'Gara and Australia's 1999 World Cup-winning fly-half Stephen Larkham.

He showed commendable composure to slot over a penalty three minutes from time against the Springboks. Although it was in front of the posts, there was still considerable pressure on him.

He let the clock run down to just four seconds before he kicked it but Crowley said it was deliberate.

"Yeah, I'm not sure who was standing to my right, I think it might have been James Lowe," said Crowley.

AFP

Uruguay, Namibia braced for their own 'personal final'

Pool match offers the only realistic chance of victory for minnows

Décines-Charpieu, France - Rugby World Cup minnows Uruguay and Namibia clash in Lyon on Wednesday in their own personal "final" where the winner takes home the glory and the loser faces four years of frustration.

Plumped into a tough Pool A with three-time champions New Zealand, hosts France and Tier 1 Italy, this match always presented the most realistic hopes for both sides to win a game at the tournament.

And even more so for a Namibia side playing in its seventh World Cup that still searching for a first victory after 25 defeats in as many matches.

Head coach Allister Coetzee has been forced into making eight changes from the team demolished 96-0 by France last time out, with regular captain



Uruguay's captain Andres Vilaseca (R) in action in the match against Italy (AFP)

Johan Deysel suspended after his red card for a headbutt that broke France captain Antoine Dupont's cheekbone.

But Coetzee also has a host of players missing through injury.

"It's tough to play four matches in 18 days for any Tier II country, we don't have a lot of depth," complained the South African.

"But I must say our players

have really stepped up. I call them warriors because it's really not easy, some teams get 12 days or 13 days off between games."

There is an extra motivation to finally end their World Cup

hoodoo after their best chance of winning a match four years ago in Japan was taken away when their game against Canada was cancelled due to a typhoon.

AFP

Kerr sees future at Warriors despite expiring contract

San Francisco, United States - Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr said Monday he is confident of remaining with the club despite not yet signing an extension to his existing contract.

Kerr, who has led the Warriors to four NBA championships since taking over as coach in 2014, is entering the final year of his contract when the 2023/2024 season tips off at the end of October.

The 57-year-old told reporters on Monday however that he is relaxed about inking a new deal in the future, confident he can come to an agreement with owner Joe Lacob and new general manager Mike Dunleavy Jr.

"I feel great about my position here," Kerr said. "I want to be here. I know Mike and Joe want me here, and so I'm very confident something will get done. I'm not stressed about it at all."



Steve Kerr

Kerr added there was no question of uncertainty about his long-term contract status unsettling him during the season.

"You know, I'm perfectly capable of coaching whether I have one year left or an extension," Kerr said. "Makes no difference. But I fully expect to be here."

Dunleavy meanwhile said the Warriors were comfortable to bide their time before tying Kerr and star player Klay Thompson

to new deals. Thompson is also entering the final year of his current contract.

"There's no real timeline in the immediate future that we have to abide by, so we'll continue to have conversations," Dunleavy said. "But the main goal is secure those guys moving forward, and I think they feel a little bit of the same. But we are optimistic, and I think we are in a good place there."

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PARIS FASHION WEEK

PARIS
FASHION
WEEK
OPENS
WITH
DRAMA
AND
DASHES OF
HUMOUR



IN
A

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"There's something very Belgian about it," the 27-year-old designer said backstage. "It's important for me to play with the codes and have some paradoxes."

Also showing on Monday was Victor Weissbach, a former classical dancer who trained in fashion with Jean Paul Gaultier and loves to bring cabaret to the catwalk.

There were doses of humour - opening with an extravagant wedding gown that, he said, was designed for 'a woman who gets married entirely in Swarovski'. But he also showed a more serious side, with structured and chic pieces alongside more offbeat items like hooded suit jackets.

Far from a newcomer, but long absent from the official line-up in Paris, is Pierre Cardin, which returned to the catwalk for the first time in 25 years last season and was back with a glamorous show on Monday night.

The label's founder died in 2020 and his nephew Rodrigo Basilicati-Cardin is currently in charge but embroiled in a bitter succession dispute with family members who have accused each other of fraud and other crimes.

AFP.



US fashion icon model Alva Chinn walks the runway of the Pierre Cardin show



Milan Fashion Week was not even over and the fashionistas were already back in Paris on Monday for another 100-plus shows in the hectic womenswear season.

The spring-summer 2024 collections in the French capital run until October 3, with 107 brands presenting, of which 67 are giving runway shows. All eyes are on Balmain's show on Wednesday night after the dramatic theft of 50 of its outfits.

Armed robbers seized the clothes on their way from Charles de Gaulle Airport to Balmain's Paris headquarters, leaving creative director Olivier Rousteing racing to pull together a replacement collection.

This week also sees final shows for two big name designers. Gabriela Hearst is leaving Chloe after fewer than three years. Her sustainable focus was critically acclaimed but did not bring a major boost to sales. It will also be the last show for Sarah Burton, who took over at Alexander McQueen following the founder's suicide in 2010.

Paris is the last of the big four fashion weeks in the busy September calendar that sees back-to-back events in London, New York and Milan.

The biggest story this season has been a new creative director at Gucci.

The debut by Sabato de Sarno in Milan on Friday was a relatively low-key affair but gave a boost to the share price of French parent company Kering, which has been struggling lately to keep up with its major rival - LVMH.

The first day of Paris Fashion Week always focuses on emerging designers and there was excitement this year about avant-garde newcomer Marie Adam-Leenaert from Belgium, who brought a dash of much-needed humour to the opening show.

It opened with a chorus singing 'Let's go to the beach!' only to follow it with a series of decidedly un-beachy grey, formal and structured outfits before introducing some more summery Barbie pink and sky-blue dresses.





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ISICATHAMIYA CONTEST

Zulu soul

A CAPPELLA SINGING WARMS UP DURBAN, ACCOMPANIED BY RHYTHMIC MOVES BY A GROUP OF DANCERS WEARING SYNCHRONISED SUITS, TO PROPAGATE ITS CULTURAL HERITAGE

Every little detail counts in an isicathamiya competition - the harmony, choreography, costumes, entrance sequence, exit and, of course, the singing.

On Saturday night at a Durban theatre in eastern South Africa, Philani Ntuli and his group of 15 singers aced their performance, drawing loud cheers from the public. The precise five-minute routine brought out their powerful bass voices enhanced by two pairs of altos and sopranos.

Group members hopped rhythmically from one foot to the other, before leaving the stage in single file, the jackets of their salmon-coloured suits folded on their forearms.

While many South Africans were glued to their TVs as the Springboks took on Ireland in the Rugby World Cup, the theatre was buzzing with several hundred music lovers.

Developed in South Africa after the First World War, this a cappella singing style is anchored in Zulu culture. Competitions - often lasting all night - are a mainstay of the genre.

In Durban, performers from at least 130 all-male groups battled to the tune of catchy rhymes, singing about everyday contemporary themes, from road safety to COVID-19 measures.

Mostly dressed in matching suits inspired by 1940s and 50s fashion, the ensembles, comprising an average of more than 10 members, quickly followed one another on stage to the delight of concertgoers.

"It's more based into the reality than other music," Nomtobeko Mtobela, 35, who came to the theatre with two friends, said of the genre. "It has that African thing into it".



A traditional Isicathamiya group performs a traditional song and dance on stage at the Natal Playhouse Theatre in Durban

Furtive steps

Isicathamiya has its roots in a mix of local music, religious choirs and the so-called 'minstrel' shows popular in the United States in the 19th century.

It became popular thanks to contests organised by Zulu miners working in big South African cities, who used to meet on Saturday evenings and sing until dawn.

To this day, competitions are organised throughout the year, particularly in Johannesburg and the Zulu heartland of KwaZulu-Natal, of which Durban is the largest city. The Saturday night contest, however, was advertised as one of the most important of the year and carried special significance.

Ending well past midnight, it fell on Heritage Day, a public holiday aiming to promote the diversity in what is known as the 'Rainbow Nation'.

Isicathamiya takes its name from the Zulu word 'cathama' which evokes the action of walking softly and furtively like a cat. It gained international recognition with American singer Paul Simon's 1986 album 'Graceland', which featured leading isicathamiya group Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

Almost four decades later, it is still going strong, as testified by the large number of young singers taking part in the Durban contest.

20-year-old Ntuli, who is the frontman of his group, thinks it is a good thing for young people. "It keeps us away from criminality because we spend most of our time rehearsing," he said.

Winners took home prestige as well as a monetary prize. The festival included awards for elegance and a separate beauty contest for women called 'onobuhle'.

AFP

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