

NEWS BRIEF

VEHICLES AGO ADRIFT IN WADI; FOUR MISSING

Buraimi - Four people are missing while three others were rescued by the Department of Civil Defence and Ambulance in Buraimi on Saturday.

The department responded to a report of two vehicles drifting away with seven people in these in a wadi in the wilayat of Mahda. 'Search is on for the missing,' the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority stated.

Heavy to moderate rains were reported in Nizwa and Al Hamra in Dakhliyah, besides Buraimi on Saturday.



Little-known senator to be Pakistan caretaker PM



England beat Colombia to reach World Cup semi-final

Oman mediates deal for release of 5 Americans

Washington, United States – A deal brokered by Oman, Qatar and Switzerland has led Iran to move five Americans from jail to house arrest.

This is the first step of a delicate deal that would unfreeze billions of dollars in Iranian funds and allow the prisoners to leave the Islamic republic.

The progress on the prisoners - one of them detained for nearly eight years - comes after quiet, exhaustive diplomacy between the long-time adversaries whose separate talks on restoring a nuclear deal broke down.

"My belief is that this is the beginning of the end of their nightmare, and the nightmare that their families have experienced," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters.

Sources familiar with the negotiations said the next step would be the transfer of US\$6bn in Iranian oil revenue frozen in South Korea to a special account in Qatar which Iran could access only for humanitarian purchases such as food and medicine.

In an Al-Monitor interview, an independent Middle East news and analysis website based in Washington DC, USA, in June, H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, said Washington and Tehran were "close" to finalising a deal on the release of Americans held in the Iranian capital.

"I can say they are close," he

My belief is that this is the beginning of the end of their nightmare, and the nightmare that their families have experienced

ANTONY BLINKEN



said of a likely prisoner agreement. "This is probably a question of technicalities." He said Oman has "offered in good faith our offices to help both sides, be it here or anywhere else".

Iran described the deal as a prisoner swap, with the state-run IRNA agency quoting Tehran's mission to the United Nations as saying that each country will be

"granting amnesty and releasing five prisoners".

If all goes as planned, the American prisoners could leave Iran sometime in September, one source said on condition of anonymity.

Four of the prisoners - Siamak Namazi, Emad Sharqi, Morad Tahbaz and the fourth who preferred to remain anonymous -

were taken out of Tehran's Evin prison on Thursday, a day after President Joe Biden's administration informed their families of the deal.

The four were escorted to a hotel where they will remain held under guard, a lawyer for one of the prisoners said.

Sources said that a fifth American, a woman, is also part of the discussions and has already been moved in recent weeks to house arrest.

"While this is a positive change, we will not rest until Siamak and others are back home; we continue to count the days until this can happen," Babak Namazi, Siamak's brother, said in a statement.

At the centre of discussions has been the unblocking of US\$6bn that Iran earned selling oil to South Korea. Seoul blocked the funds to comply with US sanctions imposed under former president Donald Trump that hit the Iranian economy hard.

While stressing that the arrangement was not final, sources said the funds would be converted from won to euros and administered by Qatar, which played a key mediatory role. No funds would be transferred directly to Iran.

Iranian state media said the prisoners would only be released once the money was deposited.

Agencies



Oman welcomes completion of oil removal from Safer

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman has welcomed the announcement by the United Nations of the completion of unloading oil from a dilapidated Yemeni tanker, removing the imminent risk of a spill.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry praised the efforts of the UN and the international community, and the cooperation of the Yemeni parties to avert an environmental disaster.

The UN said on Friday it had successfully transferred more than 1mn barrels of oil from FSO Safer.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres 'welcomes the news that the ship-to-ship transfer of oil from FSO Safer to the Yemen replacement vessel has been safely concluded today, avoiding what could have been a monumental environmental and humanitarian catastrophe', a statement said.

The milestone means that "the core aspect" of a years-long effort to address the threat posed by the Safer, often referred to as a "ticking time bomb", is now finished, said UN Development Programme head Achim Steiner.

"That removes the imminent and immediate threat that had become the focus of attention across the whole world: a tanker that could break apart or explode in the Red Sea," Steiner told AFP.

But the saga is not over. The UN has previously warned that even with its cargo removed, the Safer "will pose a residual environmental threat, holding viscous oil residue and remaining at risk of breaking apart".

The project's next phase, stripping and cleaning the Safer's tanks and preparing it for towing and scrapping, is expected to take "anywhere between two to three weeks", Steiner said.

The Safer has been moored around 50km from Hodeida since the 1980s.

Dhofar trip turns tragic; 2 dead and 12 injured

Our Correspondent Muscat

Two people lost their lives and seven others were injured when two vehicles collided in Haima, Al Wusta on Friday.

Rescue teams of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority in Al Wusta rushed to the accident site. Among the seven injured were children, CDAA stated.

On Saturday, Royal Oman Police informed that its aviation unit transported five injured passengers to Nizwa Hospital following another accident which occurred just after midnight in the Qarn al Alam area.

Despite ROP and CDAA's elaborate arrangements every year for the safety of visitors to Dhofar during khareef, several accidents occur on road leading to the governorate.

The Directorate General of Health Services in Al Wusta has reported accidents in the governorate frequently. In August alone, it reported 27 people were injured in accidents on road leading to Dhofar.

The majority of the accidents



reported are due to over speeding, and in certain cases when drivers lost control owing to bad weather.

On Saturday morning, ROP warned users of the Haima-Thumrait highway that horizontal visibility was low and in some areas almost zero as a result of active winds and billowing dust.

Naser Busaidi lamented the loss of lives during khareef on Twitter. "We witness these horrific accidents every year as a result of collisions on the single-lane stretch of the road leading to Dhofar. It is really sad that holiday trips turn into disaster and deaths."

Abu Shanab, another twiterati, said, "If you are on these roads, you will see how they race

and overtake from the wrong side. For some drivers, it seems they are in a rally."

Nasser al Wahaibi, a concerned citizen, attributed the accidents also to sand on the road.

To ensure effective response, CDAA has bolstered its existing centres and established additional posts along roads leading to Dhofar in Dakhliyah, Dhahirah and Al Wusta. These posts enable CDAA to respond to accidents reported during the season.

ROP has deployed special patrol teams and checkpoints on roads leading to Dhofar to guide khareef visitors. The Directorate General of Police Aviation has been supporting operations and providing air ambulance service in emergency situations.

Crypto mining centre to open in Salalah today

Salalah – A significant step forward in Oman's technological landscape will be marked with the inauguration of the Centre for Hosting, Data Processing and Mining of Cryptocurrencies in Salalah Free Zone on Sunday.

The centre will be officially opened under the patronage of H E Said bin Hamood al



Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The centre has been spearheaded by Exahertz, a subsidiary of Al Afaq Technology, and supported by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

It is part of the government's strategy to encourage digital investment and facilitate the implementation of advanced technologies.

INVITATION TO TENDER

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- Be a local company or a JV/Consortium led by local company registered in Oman or UAE, as applicable, to deliver the package(s) in the relevant country.
- Have recent experience executing projects of a similar size, nature (Rail freight facilities, rail passenger stations and rail maintenance depots etc.) in particular:
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 - Construction in a railway environment
 - Design and build experience.

HOW TO APPLY

The Prequalification documents will be available for purchase and downloading through an e-Payment Services Gateway from:

13th August 2023, 10:00 am until 27th August 2023, 4:00 pm

For a non-refundable amount of 2,100 OMR or AED 20,000 (excl. VAT)

Further information (including payment details and obtaining prequalification documents) can be obtained on our website at:

https://TenderDoc.oe-rail.com

Please address any further clarifications or queries to:

OER.FAC.PQ@oe-rail.com

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	44	29
Doha	42	31
Kuwait City	40	31
Manama	41	31
Muscat	35	28
Riyadh	44	28

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4.21am
Sunrise	5.42am
Duhr	12.17pm
Asr	3.43pm
Maghrib	6.47pm
Isha	8.03pm

SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO

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INVITATION TO TENDER

SOHAR ALUMINIUM

Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No. : 2023-ENG-SOW-0028

Tender Title: Replacement of weather wood for gas turbines

Scope : Sohar Aluminium Co. LLC (SA) manufactures and produces liquid and solid metals along with captive power plant facilities. SA requires manpower support job for replacement of weather wood for four gas turbines in SA power plant facility along with supply of UV protected drift eliminators. Detailed scope of work to be shared to vendors expressing their interest to participate in this tender.

Start Date for Issuing Tender Documents
21 August 2023

Last Date for Applying Tender Documents
20 August 2023

Last Date for Tender Submission
04 September 2023

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

Residents enthusiastic about new walkway in Wadi Kabir

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Wadi Kabir is abuzz with anticipation as a new 2km walkway nears completion. Positioned directly across Lulu Hypermarket Wadi Kabir stretching till the end of the road, this track is expected to become a popular evening exercise spot for residents.

Offering a diverse array of amenities, the walkway will meander past coffee shops, shawarma stalls, the Friday market and Sri Lankan School Muscat before ending near the Horse Roundabout.

Wadi Kabir resident Shakeb Aiyaz enthusiastically remarked, "This stretch promises to provide strollers a refreshing break away from the cacophony of city noise. The sound of children playing and birds returning to their nests in the evening will be very relaxing."

Aiyaz, who does his evening walks with his mother, added, "It is safe for both women and children to come for their walk here."

While being close to Qantab, once a popular destination among residents and tourists alike, the walkway will also fea-



(Muscat Daily)

ture a dedicated cycle track, encouraging residents to take up cycling as a healthy routine.

An engineer involved in the project informed that the walkway remained in planning stage for a considerable period of time before work finally commenced. With a similar facility completed on the other side of the road, it was decided that this stretch of the road would receive a similar enhancement. Set to be finished in the coming months, the stretch will include seating arrangements for senior citizens,

contributing to its community-friendly appeal.

Another Wadi Kabir resident Prakash Kumar is relieved to see the work in progress. "I had to go to the other side of the road with my family for morning walks. This was sometimes a hassle, as I needed to drive there and it was often tough to find parking."

But now with this walkway just next to his apartment, it will be easier for Kumar. "Like the other side of the road, this stretch promises to be clean and well maintained. Motivation to

work out regularly will come naturally."

The new walkway is a welcome addition to Wadi Kabir, reflecting Muscat Municipality's commitment to enhancing public spaces for leisure, exercise and community engagement. It is an investment in urban planning prioritising pedestrian experiences catering to all residents, young and old. The residents' eager anticipation testifies to the importance of such communal spaces in fostering a vibrant urban life.

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Board of Directors Report – Second Quarter 2023

Dear Shareholders,

It is my pleasure to present to you the financial results of Oman Arab Bank (SAG) (The Bank) for the second quarter of 2023.

Overall, financial performance has been strong, reflecting a solid financial position and a strong growth in assets. The Bank's financial performance is a testament to the strong leadership and the commitment of the Board of Directors and the management team.

The Bank's financial performance is a testament to the strong leadership and the commitment of the Board of Directors and the management team.

During the quarter, the Bank has achieved a number of milestones, including the successful launch of the new digital banking platform, the completion of the capital increase, and the successful completion of the merger with the Omani Islamic Bank.

The Bank's financial performance is a testament to the strong leadership and the commitment of the Board of Directors and the management team.

Financial Performance

The performance for the first half of 2023 shows a consolidated net profit after tax of OMR 115 million, up 45% compared to OMR 79 million for the same period of 2022.

Net income from operations increased by 45% compared to OMR 115 million for the same period of 2022, while net income from non-operating activities decreased by 10% compared to OMR 115 million for the same period of 2022.

Net assets and advances, including Islamic finance, grew by 12% to OMR 12.8 billion compared to OMR 11.4 billion at the end of June 2022. Customer deposits increased by 10% to OMR 12.8 billion at the end of June 2022, while customer loans decreased by 5% to OMR 11.4 billion at the end of June 2022.

Performance of the Parent Company

The parent company recorded a net profit after tax of OMR 115 million for the first half of 2023, compared to OMR 79 million for the same period of 2022. Operating income increased by 45% compared to OMR 115 million for the same period of 2022, while net income from non-operating activities decreased by 10% compared to OMR 115 million for the same period of 2022.

Net assets and advances, including Islamic finance, grew by 12% to OMR 12.8 billion compared to OMR 11.4 billion at the end of June 2022. Customer deposits increased by 10% to OMR 12.8 billion at the end of June 2022, while customer loans decreased by 5% to OMR 11.4 billion at the end of June 2022.

Sustainability and Social Responsibility

The Bank is committed to sustainable development and social responsibility. During the first half of 2023, the Bank has achieved a number of milestones, including the successful launch of the new digital banking platform, the completion of the capital increase, and the successful completion of the merger with the Omani Islamic Bank.

The Bank's financial performance is a testament to the strong leadership and the commitment of the Board of Directors and the management team.

Concluding Thoughts

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank all shareholders, customers and employees for their continued confidence in Oman Arab Bank.

The Board of Directors is committed to the long-term success of the Bank and to the well-being of its shareholders, customers and employees.

Rashad Al Zubair
Chairman of Board of Directors

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No.(27 / 2023)

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/23/181 2023/MM/HQ-38	Renewing IBM FILENET & CMS Licenses for Record and Document Management System	03/09/2023	24/09/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/161 2023/MM/HQ-39	Supply of Batteries	03/09/2023	24/09/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/182 2023/MM/HQ-40	Hiring of Tankers to provide Drinking Water and Sewage for Labour Camp at Al Musfah - Bousher	03/09/2023	24/09/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/183 2023/MM/HQ-41	Hiring of Sewage Tanker (5000 GLN) for Labour Camp at Ghala - Bousher	03/09/2023	24/09/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/106 2023/MM/QS-59	Construction of Drainage channels and Networks lines to Resolve Water Stagnation at 3 Locations in Al Al Amerat	03/09/2023	24/09/2023	First
PRE/23/065 2023/MM/QS-60	Beatifications , Electrical , Irrigation and Landscape Works for Golden Jubilee Walkway at Al Mawalih	28/08/2023	12/09/2023	Excellent

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2- Clarification and Support:

For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .

For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).

Value of real estate deals up 18.9% to RO1.4bn

Muscat - The value of real estate transactions in the sultanate increased 18.9% to RO1,402.5mn in 2023 till June, compared to RO1,170.3mn in the same period last year, according to the latest data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCISI).

Fees collected for legal transactions accounted for RO33.4mn at the end of June - an increase of 10.3% compared to the corresponding period of 2022.

The value of sale contracts dropped 1.1% to RO547.7mn; the number of sale contracts also decreased 8.5%.

The value of mortgage contracts rose 52.6% till June to RO852.1mn from RO1,062 mortgage contracts.

The value of swap contracts was valued at RO4.8mn from 732 contracts. The number of title deeds issued increased 1.3% to 117,870, while the number of title deeds issued to citizens of GCC countries rose 79.3% to 633.

1920

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WhatsApp introduces new features

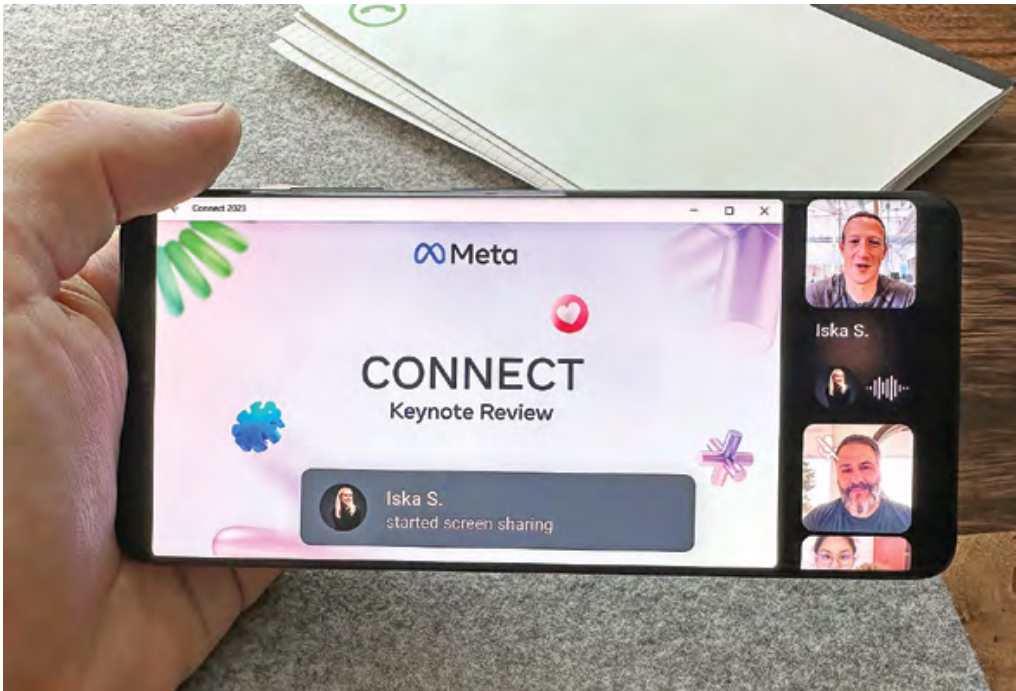
Muscat- Messaging and calling app WhatsApp has introduced two new features that are creating a buzz among users.

The first feature enables a user to record and share short 60-second personal videos directly in chats.

The second feature allows users to share screen during a video call. This screen-sharing function lets the host display their screen content to others, making it particularly handy for office meetings and similar activities.

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, introduced the update through his Facebook account, stating, "We're adding the ability to share your screen during a video call on WhatsApp."

Dr Haitham Hilal al Hajri, cybersecurity researcher and expert, described the instant video messages feature similar to



Snapchat.

"WhatsApp remains at the forefront of innovation, regularly introducing new features to keep users engaged and deter them from switching to rival platforms. However, this advancement also opens the door for potential misuse by malicious individuals."

WhatsApp remains at the forefront of innovation, regularly introducing new features to keep users engaged

DR HAITHAM HILAL AL HAJRI

According to Hajri, this feature could be misused by "wrongdoers to access your device, installing third party applications that might compromise your privacy, steal valuable information or gather data for potential blackmail or manipulation".

Abir Zahir al Jahwari, a resident of Bausher, is excited about these new features. "WhatsApp has become even more efficient with these, making it a quick and convenient choice compared to

other apps."

IT professional Tariq Hilal al Barwani considers the screen sharing feature a game changer, making WhatsApp useful for not just chatting but collaborative work.

"WhatsApp's latest move could give popular video calling apps like Google Meet and Zoom a run for their money. With group meetings becoming increasingly vital, this feature injects new life into the competition, pushing rivals to stay innovative and on their toes," Barwani said.

According to a report by WAbetalInfo, WhatsApp is currently introducing an option to schedule calls within group chats. Some lucky beta testers now have access to this feature, requiring them to install the update version 2.23.17.7.

(Contributed by Deeba Parween)

725 water licences given in July

Muscat - A total of 725 water licences were issued in July this year, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

In a statement, MAFWR said, 'The licences issued include requests for registering wells, dams and aflaj, for drilling wells, and development projects in various governorates.'

Of the 725 licences, 180 were issued in Dhahirah, followed by 156 in Dakhliyah, 104 in N Sharqiyah, 87 in N Batinah, 67 in S Batinah, 54 in Buraimi, 34 in Muscat, 20 in S Sharqiyah, 12 in Al Wusta, seven in Musandam and four in Dhofar.



Dhofar sees over 390,000 visitors for khareef in 40 days, up 12.8%

Salalah - The number of visitors from June 21 to July 31 to experience the khareef season in Dhofar stood at 396,108, up 12.8% compared to the corresponding period in 2022, according to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) data.

NCSI compiles visitor numbers in three categories - citizens, GCC visitors and tourists belonging to other nationalities.

According to the NCSI data, the number of Omani visitors this khareef increased 13% to 296,135.

A total of 59,555 visitors from other GCC states arrived this season, compared to 52,807 during the corresponding period in 2022.

The number of visitors belonging to other nationalities rose from 35,874 to 40,418 this season.

The NCSI data indicates that 305,350 visitors arrived via land checkpoints, while the number of air travellers who arrived in Dhofar was 90,758, registering an increase of 16% over the figures of this segment last year.

Monthly distribution of tourists for khareef shows 95% of the arrivals in Dhofar in July (375,362), compared to 20,746 between June 21 and 30.

ONA

Building No: 115, Plot No: 330, Block No: 146, Way No: 4202, Greater Muttrah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24730939, Website: www.nligulf.com

Directors' Report For The Six-Month Period Ended 30 June 2023

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Life & General Insurance Co SAOG & its subsidiaries (the "Group" or "NLGIC"), it's my pleasure to present to you the unaudited consolidated results of the Group for the six-month period ended 30 June 2023.

Performance Highlights for the Six-Month Period Ended 30 June 2023

Our financial results for the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 reflect the consolidated financial position and performance of NLGIC following the acquisition of Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance (ME) BSC (c) ("RSA ME") on 7 July 2022.

Gross Written Premiums and Net Underwriting Results

Gross Written Premiums ("GWP") grew by 92% to RO 181.6 million in the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 as compared to RO 94.6 million in the corresponding period of the previous year. This is primarily driven by the acquisition of RSA ME as well as the successful renewals of key partnerships and new wins during the half year, with significant growth of our medical portfolio in the United Arab Emirates ("UAE").

Net Underwriting Results ("NUR") grew by 108% to RO 19.2 million for the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 as compared to RO 9.2 million in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Investment Income

The Group's investment income increased by 161% to RO 5.7 million as compared to RO 2.2 million in the corresponding period of the previous year; this is mainly due to synergies of consolidation with RSA ME. Our investment strategy is designed to deliver a well-balanced and diversified portfolio encompassing debt and equity instruments to achieve an effective balance of risk and superior returns while maintaining adequate liquidity to meet statutory and necessary obligations.

Net Performance After Tax

The Group posted a consolidated Loss After Tax (attributable to shareholders of NLGIC) of RO 1.5 million during the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 as compared to Profit After Tax of RO 3.1 million in the corresponding period of 2022.

Despite the challenges faced by reduced profitability in motor insurance and medical insurance in the first quarter of 2023, the Group has recovered in the second quarter of 2023 by achieving profit after tax of RO 1.1 million compared to loss after tax of RO 2.6 million in first quarter of 2023. The primary factors driving the turn around are disciplined underwriting, alongside minimising risks, with strong processes and tools to maintain business quality and strength. We are encouraged by the strong and profitable growth seen in the second quarter of 2023.

- "Excellence in Insurance Services Award" at New Age Banking Summit, Oman
- "Industry Leader in Sustainability in Insurance award" at AIWA Sustainability Leadership Awards 2023, Oman

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Group, I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his dynamic and progressive leadership. Under His Majesty's visionary leadership, we pray for the continued steady growth, stability, and enduring prosperity of our great country. I would like to thank our esteemed shareholders, partners and regulators for their continued support and trust. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the management and staff of NLGIC for their professionalism, dedication and commitment.

Khalid Mohammed Al Zubair
Chairman

Unaudited interim condensed separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss for the six months ended 30th June 2023				
	Group	Parent Company		
	30 June 2023	30 June 2023	30 June 2023	30 June 2023
	RO	RO	RO	RO
	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)
Statement of profit or loss				
Income				
Gross premium written	181,643,369	94,572,440	108,855,860	94,572,440
Gross premium earned	155,892,942	78,766,968	87,560,562	78,766,968
Reinsurance share of ceded premium	(27,401,497)	(12,526,810)	(15,938,474)	(12,526,810)
Net premium earned	128,491,445	66,240,158	71,622,088	66,240,158
Commission income	2,595,874	1,671,305	2,575,648	1,671,305
Income from policy fees	660,084	676,812	660,084	676,812
Gross claims expense	(111,803,544)	(62,772,596)	(74,067,590)	(62,772,596)
Reinsurance share of gross claims expense	16,069,071	10,095,284	12,460,648	10,095,284
Commission expense	(16,811,520)	(6,666,627)	(8,451,467)	(6,666,627)
Net underwriting income	19,201,410	9,244,336	4,799,411	9,244,336
Investment income - net	5,740,808	2,196,330	2,809,208	2,196,330
Share of Profit from Subsidiaries	-	-	1,169,922	72,408
Expected credit losses on financial assets	(3,079)	(10,189)	(6,648)	(10,189)
Other operating income - net	34,621	33,768	34,571	46,410
Third party administration fees	(977,595)	(635,283)	(1,739,108)	(1,354,865)
General and administrative expenses	(23,424,944)	(7,044,200)	(6,804,889)	(6,414,956)
Finance cost	(2,072,272)	(102,422)	(2,104,618)	(102,422)
Amortisation of intangible assets	(358,609)	(11,798)	(11,798)	(11,798)
Income tax	(1,859,660)	(3,670,542)	(1,853,949)	(3,665,254)
(Loss) / profit before tax	(148,204)	(533,452)	309,450	(528,164)
(Loss) / profit for the period	(2,007,864)	3,137,090	(1,544,499)	3,137,090
(Loss) / profit for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	(1,544,499)	3,137,090	(1,544,499)	3,137,090
Non-controlling interests	(463,365)	-	-	-
	(2,007,864)	3,137,090	(1,544,499)	3,137,090
Other comprehensive income				
(Items that are or may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss):				
Exchange differences on translation of foreign operations	6,115	(8,559)	6,115	(8,559)
Changes in fair value of debt instruments at fair value through	261,768	(1,363,761)	263,517	(1,363,761)
Other comprehensive income - net	1,752	160,839	1,752	160,839
Share of FVOCI from Subsidiaries				
(Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss):				
Changes in fair value of equity instruments at fair value through				
other comprehensive income - net	305,740	6,329	302,243	6,329
Other comprehensive income	575,375	(1,205,152)	573,627	(1,205,152)
Total comprehensive (loss) / income for the period	(1,432,489)	1,931,938	(970,872)	1,931,938
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE (LOSS) / INCOME for the period attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	(970,872)	1,931,938	(970,872)	1,931,938
Non-controlling interests	(461,617)	-	-	-
	(1,432,489)	1,931,938	(970,872)	1,931,938
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	(0.004)	0.012	(0.004)	0.012

Unaudited interim condensed separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 30th June 2023				
	Group	Parent Company		
	30 June 2023	31 December 2022	30 June 2023	31 December 2022
	RO	RO	RO	RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	40,950,932	47,914,047	12,552,541	19,631,657
Bank deposits	143,953,873	147,277,552	44,421,366	42,143,517
Investment in securities	105,674,498	100,839,325	61,038,338	56,376,006
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	121,502,638	121,559,265
Insurance and reinsurance receivables	117,042,849	81,114,393	81,888,008	53,589,712
Reinsurance share of outstanding claims and IBNR reserve	24,085,438	23,262,905	7,609,982	6,498,774
Reinsurance share of actuarial / mathematical and unexpired risk reserve	18,665,874	18,082,401	16,013,783	12,165,379
Other receivables and prepayments	31,944,632	23,581,728	22,197,999	11,707,753
Loans to policyholders	41,339	47,587	41,339	47,587
Property and equipment	9,073,955	9,131,126	6,413,912	6,280,651
Deferred tax asset	956,569	638,574	716,328	398,570
Intangible assets (including goodwill)	26,344,314	26,572,822	413,657	425,455
Total assets	518,734,273	478,462,460	374,809,891	330,824,326
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
EQUITY				
Share capital	39,837,434	39,837,434	39,837,434	39,837,434
Legal reserve	9,199,031	9,199,031	9,199,031	9,199,031
Contingency reserve	17,574,687	17,531,397	17,574,687	17,531,397
Revaluation reserve	352,345	352,345	352,345	352,345
Share premium	29,176,468	29,176,468	29,176,468	29,176,468
Fair value reserve	(229,192)	(627,007)	(229,192)	(627,007)
Foreign exchange translation reserve	(39,345)	(45,460)	(39,345)	(45,460)
Retained earnings	16,364,242	13,789,249	19,139,517	16,564,524
Total equity attributable to shareholders of the Parent	112,235,670	109,213,457	115,010,945	111,988,732
Non-controlling interests	18,948,156	17,268,751.00	-	-
Total equity	131,183,826	126,482,208	115,010,945	111,988,732
Liabilities				
Gross outstanding claims and IBNR reserve	98,656,594	79,562,251	50,815,344	31,319,829
Gross actuarial / mathematical and unexpired risk reserve	131,085,283	101,738,096	83,381,841	62,086,543
Due to reinsurers	26,560,437	25,449,995	19,080,783	11,985,821
Other liabilities	47,295,041	61,219,213	29,804,555	36,030,138
Term Loan & Overdraft from Bank	77,417,961	77,093,974	77,417,961	77,093,974
Income tax payable	6,535,131	6,916,723	98,462	319,289
Total liabilities	387,550,447	351,980,252	259,798,946	218,835,594
Total equity and liabilities	518,734,273	478,462,460	374,809,891	330,824,326
Net assets per share	0.282	0.274	0.289	0.281

PDO seeks solutions for reuse of treated produced water

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the sultanate's largest hydrocarbon exploration and production company, is exploring and seeking solutions for the reuse of treated produced water to reduce carbon emissions and generate value for the country.

'PDO is carrying out an exercise to assess market willingness, ability, capabilities, and capacity to develop innovative solutions and strategies to fully utilise this treated water to generate value and reduce its greenhouse gas emissions at an accelerated pace,' the company said in a Request for Information (RFI) announcement.

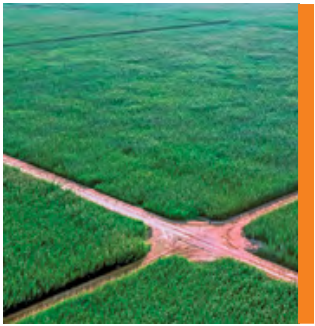
The purpose of the RFI is solely for information gathering and planning purposes, it added.

PDO currently produces around 1mn m³/day of produced water, which is set to exceed 1.1mn m³/day soon. Currently, 73% of the water that PDO produces to the surface is reused for pressure maintenance/chemicals in the enhanced oil recovery (EOR) processes, with the remainder sent to reed beds and deep disposal, according to the company's Sustainability Report 2022.

The reuse of treated produced water for value generation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction is a key focus area for PDO, which delivers the majority



PDO's Nimr Water Treatment Project contributes to greening of the desert, providing potential water solutions and reducing significant greenhouse gas emissions (PDO)



of Oman's crude oil production and natural gas supply.

With tremendous amounts of water produced in PDO's daily oil production operations, reuse of treated produced water has always been a key pillar in PDO's water management strategy, the company said in its RFI announcement.

PDO currently produces around 1mn m³/day of produced water, which is set to exceed 1.1mn m³/day soon. Currently, 73% of water that PDO produces to the surface is reused in EOR processes, with the remainder sent to reed beds and deep disposal

'PDO is now exploring and seeking solutions from the market to mature this opportunity of maximising the reuse of the produced water to generate value for the country and offset emissions relevant to its oil and gas operations,' the company added.

The company noted that

there is around 45-100 km³/day (summer - winter) of available treated produced water located in the PDO concession area in Oman.

'This treated water at the outlet of a water treatment plant is clean but remains slightly brackish with Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) concentration of up to

10,000 ppm. The amount of water and its salinity vary depending on the amount of evaporation in each season,' PDO said.

'The intention is to utilise this water in projects that could offset the greenhouse gas emissions directly linked to PDO operations and generate value for the country,' the company added.

PDO is willing to provide the treated water and allocate a sizeable plot (up to 10,000 hectares) from its concession area in Block-6 for this purpose.

As per the PDO announcement, the key criteria to evaluate market solutions are: maximum greenhouse emissions reduction, maximum water utilisation, maximum value generation, and accelerated schedule and simplicity.

Applicant companies, investors, entrepreneurs, and inventors who provide solutions that fulfil the criteria within the set deadline may be invited for further engagements with PDO, the company said. 'The engagements will serve as a unique opportunity to have a dialogue and contribute to shaping/fine-tuning future plans for this opportunity.'

The deadline for seeking clarifications on RFI is August 20, 2023. The expression of interest with a completed RFI response is to be submitted on or before September 1, 2023.



Samail Industrial City attracts 15 new projects in H1 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Samail Industrial City, which is managed by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'ayn), recorded significant growth during the first half of this year, securing 15 new contracts for projects covering an area of 100,000 sqm, with a total investment of RO13.5mn.

The total count of localised projects within Samail Industrial City reached 156 by the end of June 2023. Among these projects, 94 are currently in the production stage, 43 are under construction, and 19 are in the design phase.

Eng Yasser bin Ibrahim al Ajmi, the acting director-general of Samail Industrial City, revealed in a statement to the Oman News Agency that Mada'ayn has divided the city into several sectors.

These sectors include the foodstuff sector, which boasts a 17% occupancy rate, the logistics sector with an occupancy rate of 34%, and the building materials sector, which holds an occupancy rate of 26%. Additionally, the iron and wood sector's occupancy rate surpasses 60%, while the plastic and paper sector stands at over 85%, and the marble sector maintains an occupancy rate exceeding 78%.

Ajmi highlighted the presence of promising investment opportunities within Samail Industrial City, with initial feasibility studies available for various sectors. These include dairy and juice production, manufacturing and packaging of date products, manufacturing of breakfast cereals, calcining dolomite production, manufacturing of waterproofing insulators, manufacturing of copper bars and sheets, plastics and many others.

India's central bank holds key rates as food prices soar

Mumbai, India - India's central bank left interest rates unchanged Thursday but warned that higher food prices, caused in part by extreme weather, had impacted household budgets and halted a downward inflation trend.

The benchmark repurchase rate has been kept at 6.5% since the last hike by the Reserve Bank of India in February.

Consumer prices were "expected to surge during July (and) August led by vegetable prices", governor Shaktikanta Das said in a webcast.

"While the vegetable price shock may reverse quickly, possible El Nino weather conditions along with global food prices need to be watched closely against the backdrop of a skewed southwest monsoon so far," he added.

Inflation edged up to 4.81% in June after falling to 4.31% in May. It peaked at 7.79% in April last year. The bank's decision was in line with analyst expectations.

Economists warn inflation in the short term could again breach the RBI's upper tolerance band of 6.0% because of rising prices for crude oil and food, including tomatoes - a staple in Indian cuisine.

Tomato prices have soared in recent months after inclement weather and pest attacks in major production belts, the RBI noted in July.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told parliament on Thursday that the government was taking "lots of steps...to contain high prices which are hitting common citizens".

Sitharaman said the govern-



Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das

ment was importing pulses and had removed import restrictions to source tomatoes from neighbouring Nepal to ease the domestic inflation pressure.

The government is already selling subsidised tomatoes across the country and the prices in wholesale markets "are falling and we expect this to help us", she said.

"I want to highlight the fact that, on these essential commodities, we are taking enough steps - but more will also be taken, because we are conscious that people need essentials at an affordable price," Sitharaman added.

India imports more than 80% of its crude oil, making the world's most populous nation vulnerable to skyrocketing prices driven by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The RBI kicked off its monetary tightening cycle in May 2022 when rates stood at 4.0%.

Das said the monetary policy committee remained "focused on withdrawal of accommodation".

AFP

Global oil demand hits record high: IEA

Paris, France - The International Energy Agency said Friday it had revised upwards its forecast for global oil demand growth in 2023 as demand is "scaling record highs".

World oil demand already hit a record 103mn barrels per day in June and August and "could see yet another peak", the Paris-based IEA said in its monthly report.

"For 2023 as a whole, global oil demand is set to expand by 2.2mn barrels per day to 102.2 mn barrels per day," it said.

China accounted for 70% of growth, the IEA said, adding that demand in the Asian giant was "also stronger than expected, reaching fresh highs despite persistent concerns over the health of the economy".

"World oil demand is scaling record highs, boosted by strong summer air travel, increased oil use in power generation and surging Chinese petrochemical activity," the IEA said.

The forecasted expansion in global demand in 2023 would mark its "highest ever annual level", according to the agency, which in February had already



Global oil supply plunged by 910,000 barrels per day in July, to 100.9mn bpd, according to the IEA

forecast an annual record for the year of 101.9mn barrels per day.

The increasing demand for oil comes amid tensions on world markets after significant output cuts by several members of the OPEC+ alliance - made up of 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Coun-

tries (OPEC) headed by Saudi Arabia and their 10 allies led by Russia - to prop up prices.

As a result, global oil supply plunged by 910,000 barrels per day in July, to 100.9mn bpd, the IEA said in its report.

A sharp reduction in production by Saudi Arabia last month

For 2023 as a whole, global oil demand is set to expand by 2.2mn barrels per day to 102.2 mn barrels per day

saw output from the 23-nation OPEC+ alliance fall 1.2mn barrels per day, to 50.7mn bpd "a near two-year low".

Volumes by non-OPEC+ members rose to 50.2mn bpd, the report added.

Price increase on horizon?

In April, several OPEC+ members decided to slash production voluntarily by more than one million bpd - a surprise move that briefly buttressed prices but failed to bring about lasting recovery.

Oil producers are grappling with falling prices and high market volatility, reflecting continued fallout from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and China's faltering

economic recovery.

Saudi Arabia also announced last week that it was extending its voluntary oil production cut of one million barrels per day for another month to include September.

Moscow has pledged, too, to cut production by 500,000 bpd in August, and a further cut of 300,000 bpd for September.

"Market balances are set to tighten further into the autumn as Saudi Arabia and Russia extend supply cuts at least through September," the IEA said.

If the bloc's current targets are maintained, oil inventories could fall in the second half of the year "with a risk of driving prices still higher".

Looking ahead to 2024 as the world races to combat climate change and reduce the use of fossil fuels, the IEA said it anticipated demand growth to slow.

"With the post-pandemic rebound running out of steam, and as lacklustre economic conditions, tighter efficiency standards and new electric vehicles weigh on use, growth is forecast to slow to 1mn bpd in 2024," it said.

AFP

Air Arabia records 187% jump in second quarter profit

Sharjah, UAE - Air Arabia, the Middle East's prominent low-cost carrier operator, reported a record second quarter and first half 2023 financial and operational results, as the airline continues to demonstrate remarkable performance and growth.

Air Arabia registered a net profit of AED459mn during the second quarter of 2023, an increase of 187% compared to AED160mn net profit reported for the same period last year.



The second quarter net profit also included an exceptional one-off receivable that the airline received from one of its suppliers.

The company's turnover for the same period increased by 25%, as the strong demand for air travel continued, registering an AED1.39bn, compared to

AED1.11bn in the corresponding period last year.

More than 3.8mn passengers flew with Air Arabia between April and June 2023 across the carrier's seven hubs, an increase of 37% compared to the same quarter last year. The airline's average seat load factor during the second quarter of 2023 stood at an average of 76%.

For the first half of 2023, Air Arabia reported a net profit of AED801mn, an increase of 78%

compared to AED451mn registered in the corresponding first half of 2022.

During the first half of the year, Air Arabia added three new aircraft to its modern fleet bringing it to a total of 71 owned and leased Airbus A320 and A321 aircraft. During the same period, the carrier has expanded its network by launching 18 new routes across its seven operating hubs in the UAE, Morocco, Egypt, Armenia, and Pakistan.

WAM

Russia posts growth for first time in a year

The economic struggles prompted the Russian central bank to raise its benchmark interest rate to 8.5%.

NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)

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Email: contact@tanufwater.com, Web: www.nmwc.om

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to present the unaudited financial results for the six-month period ended 30th June 2023.

The consolidated financial statements include the results and the financial position of the Parent Company, National Mineral Water Company SAOG, and its Subsidiary, National Distribution and Development Company LLC (formerly known as Valuedaal Trading LLC), for the period ended 30th June 2023 (together referred to as the Group).

Sales and Operational Performance:

The Parent Company's sales revenue for the period ended 30th June 2023 was RO 3,272,567 compared to RO 3,912,734 during the same period last year. The decline was due to major maintenance in Quarter 1 2023 and supply chain challenges for imported items. As a result of the drop in revenue, the Parent Company's net profit for the period ended 30th June 2023 was RO 49,195 compared to a profit of RO 60,253 during the same period last year.

The sales revenue of the Group for the first half of the year was RO 3,272,567 compared to RO 3,929,115 during the same period last year and the Group's net profit was RO 49,045 compared to a net profit of RO 62,461 during the same period last year.

Subsidiary Company:

National Distribution and Development Company LLC (NDDC), formerly known as Valuedaal Trading LLC, trades in plastic and other confectionery items.

Future Outlook

Despite the continued and rapid increase of Raw material costs, along with the worldwide supply chain challenges especially PET Resin, the Group financial performance for the year has improved significantly. Management is looking forward to maintaining same positive performance over the year through increasing efficiencies, productivity and newly diversified product portfolio with the new introduced categories.

Acknowledgment

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our patrons, customers, bankers and shareholders for all the support they have extended to us during this year. I also take the opportunity to thank the management for their continued efforts in growing the Company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and his Government for the support extended to the private sector.

Khalid bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi
Chairman

1) The complete accounts, in either Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of written request at the above address.

2) The complete accounts have been uploaded on Website of MSM.

3) Any shareholder who is having incorrect address or not having any address in the company's register or Co. (MDSRC) may approach the registered office to register their correct address. Register maintained by Maintained by Muscat Depository Securities Registration.

SEPARATE AND CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30TH JUNE 2023

	Parent Company		Group	
	30.06.2023	30.06.2022	30.06.2023	30.06.2022
	RO	RO	RO	RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	2,267,283	2,609,981	2,267,354	2,610,332
Right-of-use assets	65,019	75,302	65,019	75,302
Intangible assets	13,046	16,767	13,046	16,767
Investment in a subsidiary	95,000	95,000	-	-
	<u>2,440,348</u>	<u>2,797,050</u>	<u>2,345,419</u>	<u>2,702,401</u>
Current assets				
Inventories	1,660,179	1,087,804	1,660,179	1,087,804
Trade and other receivables	2,803,211	2,446,820	2,804,019	2,533,931
Amount due from related parties	17,253	73,698	17,253	16,499
Bank balances and cash	55,151	149,645	58,755	149,913
Total current assets	<u>4,535,794</u>	<u>3,757,967</u>	<u>4,540,206</u>	<u>3,788,147</u>
Total assets	<u>6,976,142</u>	<u>6,555,017</u>	<u>6,885,625</u>	<u>6,490,548</u>
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304	2,700,304
Share premium	135,169	135,169	135,169	135,169
Legal reserve	487,733	478,388	487,879	478,534
Accumulated loss	(979,692)	(1,052,730)	(1,046,262)	(1,118,872)
Equity attributable to shareholders of the Parent Company	<u>2,343,514</u>	<u>2,261,131</u>	<u>2,277,090</u>	<u>2,195,135</u>
Non-controlling interest	-	-	1,512	1,526
Total equity	<u>2,343,514</u>	<u>2,261,131</u>	<u>2,278,602</u>	<u>2,196,661</u>
Liabilities				
Non-current liabilities				
Employees' end of service benefits	162,856	235,008	162,856	235,008
Bank borrowings	559,882	816,154	559,882	816,154
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	47,357	66,274	57,357	66,274
Total non-current liabilities	<u>780,095</u>	<u>1,117,436</u>	<u>780,095</u>	<u>1,117,436</u>
Current liabilities				
Lease liabilities - current portion	14,400	14,400	14,400	14,400
Trade and other payables	1,543,683	1,194,162	1,543,368	1,194,163
Amount due to related party	25,291	-	-	-
Bank borrowings	2,269,159	1,963,917	2,269,160	1,963,917
Income tax payable	-	3,971	-	3,971
Total current liabilities	<u>3,852,533</u>	<u>3,176,450</u>	<u>3,826,928</u>	<u>3,176,451</u>
Total liabilities	<u>4,632,628</u>	<u>4,293,886</u>	<u>4,607,023</u>	<u>4,293,887</u>
Total equity and liabilities	<u>6,976,142</u>	<u>6,555,017</u>	<u>6,885,625</u>	<u>6,490,548</u>
Net assets per share	<u>0.087</u>	<u>0.084</u>	<u>0.084</u>	<u>0.081</u>

SEPARATE AND CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2023

Dhofar Municipality ties with Thawani

Dhofar Municipality announced its collaboration with Thawani Technologies (Thawani) to leverage the latest immersive technologies and create unforgettable and hassle-free experiences for visitors to Southern Oman during the Dhofar Khareef Season 2023.

By utilising bank cards, visitors can effortlessly purchase tickets by tapping them on the NFC-enabled devices (Lamsa). Additionally, Dhofar Municipality is providing customers with a modern, exceptional and first-of-its-kind experience in the Middle East through the innovative .facial recognition technology provided by Thawani's Face Payment device.

A revolutionary new way to pay for ticket purchases with just a glance, the Face Payment technology ensures highly secure transactions, as each customer's face serves as their unique identifier. The Face Payment device will be available at all sale points during the Dhofar Khareef Season 2023 activities, enabling visitors to enjoy a convenient, cashless, and secure ticket purchasing process.

Ahmed al Harthy, head of Communication at Thawani Technologies, said, "We are committed to delivering innovative payment solutions using reliable facial recognition and financial technology or FinTech. Through our cooperation with



Dhofar Municipality, people can utilise our safe, smart, and secure Face Pay device, ensuring their identities are protected while

navigating Dhofar during the Khareef season."

As part of the collaboration between Dhofar Municipality

and Thawani Technologies, all gateway payments for the Mawaseem Dhofar App will now be exclusively processed through

Thawani's payment gateway. Developed and owned by Dhofar Municipality, the Mawaseem Dhofar app supports visitors in

navigating the region and making the most of their Khareef experience by providing practical information on attractions.

First Saudi Film Confex to debut in Riyadh

The Saudi Film Commission is expected to debut its new industry event, the Saudi Film Confex, in Riyadh later this year.

Running from 1-4 October in BLVD Expo, the four-day conference and exhibition will lay the foundations for the Kingdom's future film industry ventures and will attract the world's leading filmmakers, producers, directors, investors, and media, a press release said.

"Saudi Film Confex will encompass pillars that support activities and interests in the Kingdom, with the goal of enhancing the industry's presence and promoting the economic value of film industry. Featuring the participation of various entities to showcase their services and innovation, curated workshops, and six interactive zones, the event is underpinned the growing economic role of the film industry in Saudi Arabia.

The venue boasts 40,000sqm of exhibition space, catering for over 100 exhibitors, 50 keynote speakers. Three main topics will be addressed throughout Saudi Film Confex, including industry trends, global practices, and challenges and opportunities in filmmaking. Thoughtfully designed workshops will also be spread over three days.

ahlibank offers cash back at Shell Oman

In a continued effort to offer value-added benefits and services to its customers, Ahlibank has once again teamed up with Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) to provide all its credit card holders with an exciting cash back offer.

Scheduled to run for 5 days each month until October 2023, the promotion offers all Ahlibank credit cardholders 20% cash back when fuelling or shopping in shell service stations and Select shops with a maximum cap of RO10 per customer, a press release said.

Commenting on the promotion, Muneer al Balushi, AGM-head of Retail Distribution, Ahlibank, said, "Our role as one of the sultanate's leading banking institutions requires us to develop offers and services that meet customer needs over time. This will enable us to fulfill their

intention to utilise their credit cards in the best way possible. Such offers enhance our customers' loyalty and give them added value".

"We are pleased to announce this offer, which will help us strengthen relationships with existing clients and build relationships with new ones. With the launch of the latest promotional offer, Ahlibank is demonstrating its leadership in providing innovative banking reward programmes and solutions that meet the diverse needs of its customers" he added.

The cash back campaign reflects the bank's commitment to its growth strategy by creating products and services that offer value-added benefits to the customers and help consolidate its position in the market as one of Oman's leading and most trusted banks.



Anantara's Ras Al Khaimah Resort to launch by year-end

Bringing the concept of eco-luxury to the shores of Ras Al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates, Minor Hotels shares an update on its new luxury resort scheduled to launch in the emirate later this year.

Now in the final stages of development, Anantara Mina Al Arab Ras Al Khaimah Resort will open in Q4 and will be the brand's ninth property in the UAE, a press release said.

Set along the Arabian Gulf

coastline on Mina Al Arab Island in Ras Al Khaimah with a backdrop of the majestic Hajar mountains, Anantara Mina Al Arab is situated amid 1.5km of mangroves and lagoons in a natural reserve. The resort will be a 45-minute drive from Dubai International Airport and just 15 minutes from Ras Al Khaimah International Airport.

Designed to blend seamlessly with the natural surroundings, the new-build resort features 174

guest rooms, suites and villas, including the first over water villas in the emirate. All the accommodation has been built in a sustainable fashion, with furniture and fittings using eco-friendly materials such as sustainable wood and recycled fabrics and plastics.

The resort will also feature a range of sustainable initiatives including greywater waste recycling, thermodynamics and solar panels for water heating.

Bank Nizwa launches eco-friendly debit card



Bank Nizwa recently announced the introduction of a first of its kind eco-friendly corporate debit card in the sultanate. The new cards cater to the specific needs of corporate and SME clients, providing a convenient solution for business transactions.

With round-the-clock access to company accounts, smart and customisable services and the highest levels of transparency in operations, the cards are aimed at making transactions more seamless and prompt, a press release said.

Cardholders can enjoy multiple benefits such as cash withdrawals and deposits, secure,

contactless payments at Point of Sale (POS) machines and e-commerce platforms and accessibility across a diverse network which includes OmanNet and GCCNet as well as Mastercard International. With innovative features, the cards also adhere to Islamic banking principles.

Khalid al Barwani, deputy general manager Wholesale Banking, Bank Nizwa, said, "Vigilant and responsive to the evolving demands of the market, Bank Nizwa has been able to identify and address the common challenges encountered by corporates when it comes handling transactions."

NBO wins 'Best Brand Identity in Oman'

National Bank of Oman (NBO) has been awarded the title of 'Best Brand Identity in Oman 2023' by the International Business Magazine.

This esteemed recognition not only reaffirms NBO's purpose-driven and value-oriented communications strategy, along with its reignited brand identity, but also celebrates the bank's illustrious 50 years of legacy and rich history.

For half a century, NBO has been committed to excellence and innovation, which has been instrumental in shaping its modernisation journey. By seamlessly blending tradition with contemporary values, NBO has crafted a brand that stands apart in the competitive banking industry, a press release said.



Sherifa al Maskari, head of Brand at the National Bank of Oman, said, "In 2022, NBO unveiled its new brand identity, featuring a vibrant look and feel to

differentiate it further from other brands and competitors. The new identity revamped the bank's values, aligning them with its strategic goals, aspiration, and the way it communicates its products and services. NBO's four values of being authentic first and foremost, relentlessly pioneering, creating value through connection, and pursuing simplicity, are the guiding principles that empower the bank to unlock opportunities as one."

She further stated, "Winning the 'Best Brand Identity Award' has served as a motivational factor to strive for even greater heights, continuing to innovate and expand NBO's services to solidify its leading position in the local banking industry,"

Lulu unveils 'Celebrations of India'

LuLu Oman launched its 'Celebrations of India' campaign to commemorate the 77th Indian Independence Day.

The week-long festival, coinciding with Indian Independence Day celebrations on August 15, will showcase the rich and diverse product range, culinary traditions and regional flavours of the country.

The event was inaugurated by H E Amit Narang, ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in the presence of officials from the Indian community and Lulu officials. The festival will be continue until August 16 at selected Lulu outlets across the sultanate, a

press release said.

'Celebrations of India' showcases the diversity of India, and is an opportunity for the people of Oman to enjoy the products and produce that are at the heart of Indian culture. Lulu has also flown in many exclusive Indian products from its network of food processing and logistics centres across India for the campaign.

Experience the best of Indian products in all categories from fresh and frozen food to non-food, grocery including a wide variety of millets, hot food and bakery, meat, household items, home appliances, gar-

ments and footwear, lifestyle and fashion. There are also amazing promotions and offers on a wide range of Indian products on display.

Ananth A V, director - Oman, Sri Lanka and India of Lulu Group, stated, "Every year, we organise the Celebrations of India campaign to showcase a variety of Indian products.

It is a wonderful chance for the Indian community to enjoy many of the products that they have been accustomed to. Our customers today are world citizens and so this is part of our continuing efforts to bring the world to their doorstep, he

added".

Through seasonal campaigns and promotions, Lulu continuously reaches out to its customers with a wide variety of products sourced from across the world. For Lulu Hypermarkets, the most widely recognised face of the Lulu group, this event is another way for the brand to show its commitment towards building a world class shopping experience.

Lulu Hypermarkets offer the vision of being a place where the world comes to shop and so every one of Lulu's offerings is designed keeping the widest consumer spectrum in mind.

West African bloc scraps meeting on Niger

The Economic Community of West African States had approved a military force to reinstate Bazoum

Niamey, Niger - West African leaders deferred a crisis meeting due on Saturday on dealing with the coup in Niger after approving the deployment of a 'standby force to restore constitutional order' as soon as possible.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional bloc had approved a military force to reinstate elected President Mohamed Bazoum, who was ousted by members of his guard on July 26.

Chiefs of staff from member states of the West African bloc were scheduled to attend a meeting on Saturday in the Ghanaian capital Accra but later indefinitely suspended it for 'technical reasons'.

Sources said the meeting was originally set up to inform the organisation's leaders about 'the best options' for activating and deploying the standby force.

"The military option seriously envisaged by ECOWAS is not a war against Niger and its people but a police operation against hostage takers and their accomplices," Niger's Foreign Minister Hassoumi Massoudou said on Saturday.



Chairperson of ECOWAS and President of Nigeria Bola Ahmed Tinubu reacts after addressing ECOWAS Head of States and Government extraordinary session in Abuja, on Thursday (AFP)

ECOWAS is determined to stop the sixth military takeover in the region in just three years and has severed financial transactions and electricity supplies and closed borders with landlocked Niger, blocking much-needed imports to one of the world's poor-

est countries. Thousands of coup supporters rallied in the Niger capital Niamey on Friday to protest against the ECOWAS plan to send troops.

'Down with ECOWAS' Protesters gathered near a

French military base on the outskirts of Niamey shouting 'Down with France, down with ECOWAS'.

Niger's new leaders have accused former colonial power France, a close Bazoum ally, of being behind the hardline

The military option seriously envisaged by ECOWAS is not a war against Niger and its people but a police operation against hostage takers and their accomplices

HASSOUMI MASSAOU DOU

ECOWAS stance.

Many protesters brandished Russian and Niger flags and shouted their support for the country's new strongman, General Abdourahmane Tiani.

"We are going to make the French leave! ECOWAS isn't independent, it's being manipulated by France," said one demonstrator, Aziz Rabeh Ali.

France has around 1,500 troops in Niger as part of a force battling an eight-year militant insurgency. It is facing growing hostility across the Sahel, withdrawing its anti-militant forces from neighbouring Mali and

Burkina Faso last year after falling out with military governments that ousted elected leaders.

Niger's new leaders scrapped defence agreements with France last week, while a hostile protest outside the French embassy in Niamey on July 30 prompted Paris to evacuate its citizens.

Fears for Bazoum

The European Union and the African Union joined others in sounding the alarm for Bazoum on Friday.

UN rights chief Volker Turk said Bazoum's reported detention conditions 'could amount to inhuman and degrading treatment, in violation of international human rights law'.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock warned that the 'coup plotters must face harsh consequences should anything happen' to Bazoum or his family.

Top US diplomat Antony Blinken said he was 'dismayed' by the military's refusal to release Bazoum's family as a 'demonstration of goodwill'.

A source close to Bazoum said: "He's OK, but the conditions

are very difficult". The coup leaders had threatened to assault him in the event of military intervention. Human Rights Watch said it had spoken to Bazoum earlier this week. The 63-year-old described the treatment of himself, his wife and their 20-year-old son as 'inhuman and cruel', HRW said.

"I'm not allowed to receive my family members (or) my friends who have been bringing food and other supplies to us," the group quoted him as saying.

"My son is sick, has a serious heart condition, and needs to see a doctor," he was quoted as saying. "They've refused to let him get medical treatment."

Under pressure to stem a cascade of coups among its members, ECOWAS had previously issued a seven-day ultimatum to the coup leaders to return Bazoum to power.

But the generals defied the deadline, which expired on Sunday without any action being taken.

The coup leaders have since named a new government, which met for the first time on Friday. AFP

Australia PM condemns 'scare' tactics on Indigenous reform

Sydney, Australia - Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Saturday attacked an opposition 'scare campaign' against his plan to give Indigenous people a constitutional right to be consulted on laws that impact them.

Opinion polls show faltering support for the reform, which was proposed by Indigenous communities to give them a so-called Voice on policymaking as well as recognition in the constitution for the first time.

Australians will vote on it in a referendum expected in mid-October. An Essential survey of 1,150 voters released last week put the 'no' camp ahead for the first time with 47 per cent against, 43 per cent in favour and 10 per cent undecided.

Other recent surveys indicated the 'yes' side was slightly ahead despite a gradual decline over the past year. To pass, the constitutional amendment needs a majority of votes in favour, both nationally and in most states.

Albanese said the conserva-



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (AFP)

tive opposition Liberal Party had been 'running a scare campaign about the Voice'. Opposition leader Peter Dutton has warned that putting the Voice in the constitution would 'change our whole system of government'.

But he has vowed to simply recognise Indigenous people in the constitution.

'Lift up all Australians'

Albanese described Dutton's

promise as 'disingenuous', saying he had been part of the previous conservative government that failed to give Indigenous people recognition in the constitution.

Supporters say the constitutional reform enshrining a Voice would help address the colonial legacy and inequalities faced by Aboriginal Australians, whose ancestors have lived on the continent for at least 60,000 years.

More than 200 years since British settlement and the ensu-

ing persecution of Indigenous Australians, they are more likely to be poor, undereducated, sick or jailed. But opponents say the proposal is divisive, lacks detail, adds unnecessary bureaucracy and risks clogging up the courts.

False claims have also been spread online, including one debunked by AFP's Fact Check that Australians risked having their land taken away from them in case of a 'yes' vote.

The prime minister urged Australians to seize the moment and vote for the reform.

"I say this: There is an opportunity to get constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people this year," Albanese said.

A vote in favour of the constitutional change would 'lift up all Australians', he said.

"If not now, when?" he asked, warning that a 'no' vote could put the question on the back burner for a long time to come.

"I say to Australians, this is an opportunity. Don't miss it."

AFP

Baby among 2 people dead as migrant boat sinks off Tunisia

Tunis, Tunisia - At least two Tunisians including a baby died when their boat sank on Saturday soon after leaving the country's shores, the coastguard said, amid a spike in attempts to reach Europe. Tunisia is a major gateway for migrants attempting perilous voyages across the Mediterranean in often rickety boats in the hopes of a better life.

The vessel carrying 20 Tunisians went down at 2am when it was only 120 metres (395 feet) from the coast in Gabes, the North African country's coastguard said. "Two bodies have been recovered, one of a 20-year-old man and the other of an infant," said a statement.

Five passengers were missing, the coastguard said, adding search operations were ongoing and 13 others had been rescued.

Authorities in the city of Gabes have launched an investigation to 'determine the circumstances of this tragedy', it added.

More than 1,800 people have died this year in shipwrecks in the central Mediterranean migration route, the world's deadliest -



Migrants are seen on board a small boat, as coast guards prepare to transfer them onto their vessel, at sea between Tunisia and Italy, on Thursday (AFP)

more than twice as many as last year, according to the International Organization for Migration. On Monday judicial officials reported the deaths of 11 migrants in a shipwreck off Sfax, with dozens more missing. The eastern Tunisian port city of Sfax, which is located about 130km (80 miles) from the Italian island of Lampedusa, has emerged as a key migrant launchpad.

Migrant interceptions double

The Tunisian coastguard says it intercepted 34,290 migrants in the six months to June 20, most

from sub-Saharan African countries, compared with 9,217 over the same period in 2022.

The number of Africans attempting to make the crossing has spiked since Tunisian President Kais Saied alleged, in a speech on February 21, that 'hordes' of irregular migrants were causing crime and posing a demographic threat to the mainly Arab country. Many have also fled since hundreds of migrants were arrested or chased into the desert after the deadly stabbing of a Tunisian man in a brawl with migrants in Sfax on July 3.

AFP

Death toll in IS attack on Syria army bus rises to 33

Beirut, Lebanon - An attack by Islamic State group militants on Syrian government forces in the war-torn country's east has killed 33 soldiers, a monitor said on Saturday, revising an earlier toll of 26 deaths.

The shooting on Thursday evening on an army bus was the extremist group's deadliest attack on government forces this year, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Despite losing their last piece of territory in Syria in 2019, IS has maintained hideouts in the vast Syrian desert from which it has carried out ambushes and hit-and-run attacks.

"The death toll from the army bus attack rose to 33 soldiers," said Rami Abdel Rahman, who heads the British-based monitoring group which relies on a wide network of sources inside

Syria.

The militants surrounded the bus in the desert near Mayadeen, in Deir Ezzor province, and opened fire, the Observatory reported on Friday.

IS claimed the attack later on Friday, saying its fighters had carried out an ambush 'on two military buses', targeting them 'with heavy weapons and rocket-propelled grenades' and setting one on fire, according to a statement from the militants' Amaq news agency.

Syrian state news agency SANA said the 'terrorist attack' had caused a number of military casualties, citing an army source.

Abdel Rahman said IS 'has recently been escalating its deadly military attacks... aiming to cause as many deaths as possible'.

AFP

Malaysians vote in elections seen as referendum on Anwar

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Malaysians in six states went to the polls on Saturday to vote for state assembly members in elections widely seen as a barometer of support for Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's unity government.

While the elections are unlikely to immediately affect Anwar's current two-thirds majority in parliament, analysts said his hold on power could weaken if his Pakatan Harapan coalition suffers a setback, especially among Malay Muslim voters in the largely Islamic Southeast Asian nation.

Polls closed at 6pm (1000 GMT), with the results expected to be known later on Saturday.

Voter turnout was between 56-70 per cent of the more than 9.7mn registered voters as of 4pm, the Election Commission said.

The results for the 245 assembly seats at stake in the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Penang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan are expected to



Selangor's chief minister Amirudin Shari of Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) and his wife Masdiana Muhamad gesture before casting their vote at a polling station during the state election in Selayang on Saturday (AFP)

be known within hours.

Of the six, Anwar's coalition currently holds Negeri Sembilan and the country's two richest states: Selangor, home of Malaysia's biggest port, and Penang, which hosts a thriving

semiconductor industry.

The other three states are controlled by an influential rural-based Malay Muslim alliance led by former prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

Malays account for two-thirds

of Malaysia's 33mn population, which includes large ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities.

Anwar, in an appeal on Facebook on the eve of the polls, urged voters to give his coalition a 'clear and strong mandate... to

bring a better agenda for all races in this country'.

The 76-year-old, who had campaigned on a promise of reforms in last year's general elections, is pushing for a more inclusive society where other races are allowed greater participation, while his opponents want primacy of the Malay Muslim majority.

Opposition coalition Perikatan Nasional has expressed confidence in making further inroads.

One key Perikatan member is the Malaysian Islamic Party, or PAS, which aims to create a theocratic state.

Having won 49 parliamentary seats, or more than 20 per cent of the 222-member parliament last year, PAS has in recent months stepped up racial and religious rhetoric to shore up support.

"I feel quite excited and I hope Perikatan can win again in this area," said housewife Jamilah Baharin, 48, who voted in Kedah state, a PAS stronghold.

AFP

Hawaii starts probe into wildfire handling as death toll hits 80

Lahaina, US - Hawaii's chief legal officer said on Friday she was opening a probe into the handling of devastating wildfires that killed at least 80 people in the state this week, as criticism grows of the official response.

The announcement and increased death toll came as residents of Lahaina were allowed back into the town for the first time - with most finding their homes had been reduced to ashes, and even the lucky few angry at a sense of abandonment. "Everything has been co-conut wire," said William Harry, referring to a system of rumors.

"One person heard, then told another, but it's not official information. They don't come here and explain anything." Another man, who did not want to be named, told AFP he felt like he had been left to fend for himself.

"Where is the government? Where are they?" he fumed.

"This is insane. We can't move freely, we don't get the support, now we've heard about looting." Hawaii's Attorney General Anne Lopez said her office would be examining 'critical decision-making and standing policies leading up to, during and after the wildfires on Maui and Hawai'i islands this week."

"My department is committed to understanding the decisions that were made before and during the wildfires and to sharing with the public the results of this review." Late Friday, Maui county officials gave an updated death toll from the disaster.

"The number of fatalities is at 80," the county said, adding that 1,418 people were at emergency evacuation shelters.

Reunion

For some of those who made it



This aerial photo shows destroyed buildings and homes in the aftermath of a wildfire in Lahaina, western Maui, Hawaii on Friday (AFP)

The announcement and increased death toll came as residents of Lahaina were allowed back into the town for the first time - with most finding their homes had been reduced to ashes

back into Lahaina, there was elation as they tearfully reconnected with neighbours they feared might not have got out alive.

"You made it!" cried Chyna Cho, as she embraced Amber Langdon amid the ruins. "I was trying to find you."

For some of the luckiest, there was joy - albeit tempered by the scale of the tragedy that counts among the worst natural disasters to hit the state of Hawaii.

"I just couldn't believe it," Keith Todd told AFP after finding his home intact.

"I'm so grateful, but at the same time it's so devastating."

Todd, 64, discovered his house and his neighbour's house untouched, and his solar panels providing electricity to the fridge, which was still dispensing ice on demand. But even those few whose homes still appeared habitable were being warned they might not be safe.

"Some structures in the Lahaina water system were destroyed by the fire... These conditions may have caused harmful contaminants, including

benzene and other volatile organic chemicals (VOCs), to enter the water system," said Maui's water department. "As a precaution...(we) are advising residents to not use the tap water for drinking and cooking until further notice."

'It hurts'

Some of those who made it back to Lahaina wandered in stunned silence trying to take in the enormity of the destruction.

Anthony La Puente said the shock of finding his home burned to nothing was profound.

"You are not able to find the things you grew up with, or the things you remember," he told AFP of the house he had lived in for 16 years. "The only thing I can say is that it hurts. It takes a toll on you emotionally," the 44-year-old said.

La Puente dug through the still

warm ashes of his home, picking out a Starbucks tumbler that had survived, but despairing at the loss of irreplaceable things, like mementoes of his late father.

"I had packed up my dad's belongings' hoping to sort through them at some point, he said. But that will never happen.

"Now it's gone." The number of people killed surpassed the count from when a tsunami struck the Big Island in 1960. "Without a doubt, there will be more fatalities. We don't know ultimately how many will have occurred," Governor Josh Green said.

Crews from Honolulu arrived on Maui along with search and rescue teams equipped with K-9 cadaver dogs, Maui County said.

Firefighters were continuing to extinguish flare-ups and contain wildfires in Lahaina.

AFP



Brazilian former President, Jair Bolsonaro (AFP)

Bolsonaro aides raided in Brazil jewels probe

Rio De Janeiro, Brazil - Brazilian police raided the homes of Jair Bolsonaro allies accused of re-selling gifts including jewelry from foreign dignitaries for the 'illicit enrichment of' the former president, a judicial judgment showed on Friday.

The divisive right-winger categorically denied any wrongdoing, his lawyers saying he 'never appropriated or misappropriated any public good', in a statement posted on the G1 news site.

The scandal broke earlier this year, when newspaper *Estado de Sao Paulo* reported customs officials had seized a set of jewels from a government aide who tried to bring them into the country undeclared in his backpack in 2021.

Brazilian law bars public officials from keeping expensive gifts.

Elements of the police investigation were disclosed in a judgment by Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes to justify search warrants carried out by federal police on Friday at the homes of former Bolsonaro aides.

"The evidence collected showed (the existence) during the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, of a network to divert goods of a high amount which were offered

to him," part of the judgment read. "Beyond allowing an inadmissible enrichment of the President of the Republic... it is possible that the Brazilian head of state was co-opted by foreign nations through these assets", investigators believe.

They also reported goods placed in 'a suitcase transported on the presidential plane on December 30', when Bolsonaro left Brazil for the United States, two days before the inauguration of his left-wing successor Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who defeated him in an October 2022 election.

Among these state gifts were two sculptures given by the government of Bahrain during a state visit in 2021, as well as gifts from Saudi Arabia including a watch and a fountain pen from the Swiss luxury brand Chopard, investigators say.

One of those suspected of re-selling these gifts is Mauro Cid, a former top aide to Bolsonaro, who has been in prison since May over falsification of COVID-19 vaccination certificates.

According to investigators, Cid mentioned in an audio message '25,000 dollars in cash' which would be intended for the ex-president after the sale of certain goods.

AFP

US Justice Department names special counsel to probe Biden's son

Washington, US - The US Justice Department on Friday escalated its investigation into President Joe Biden's son Hunter, naming a special counsel amid allegations of tax fraud and illicit overseas business deals.

Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed prosecutor David Weiss, who has been investigating Hunter Biden since 2019 on low-level tax and gun charges.

The announcement came just as Weiss told the federal court in Delaware that a plea deal struck with Biden in June was no longer valid, indicating that he could move to file felony tax charges against the president's son in other jurisdictions.

Garland said Weiss, who was originally appointed as a federal prosecutor by Joe Biden's political rival Donald Trump, had requested special counsel status to be able to pursue his probe more widely.

"Upon considering his request, as well as the extraordinary circumstances relating to this matter, I have concluded that it is in the public interest to appoint him as special counsel," Garland said.

Deals in China, Ukraine

The move comes as Joe Biden is running for reelection, possibly in a rematch with ex-president Trump, himself accused of felony crimes in

the investigation by another Justice Department special counsel, Jack Smith.

Republicans have made Hunter Biden's business dealings a target in trying to damage the Democratic incumbent's standing some 15 months before the election.

Garland gave no hint on the subject matter of Weiss' expanded probe, only saying his elevation to special counsel 'reaffirms' the independence and authority of his investigation.

Hunter Biden has come under investigation in Congress over business deals he did in China, Ukraine and elsewhere during and after his father's 2009-2017 term as vice president. A former business associate told Congress recently that Hunter had gotten his father involved in telephone calls with his foreign partners several times.

Republicans allege Joe Biden used his political position to help his son - a claim the president denies.

Hunter Biden is also believed to be facing possible prosecution for acting as an unregistered foreign agent, in relation to some of his off-shore business deals.

Until now, Weiss's investigation has focused on low-level charges that Hunter Biden, 53, didn't pay taxes on millions of dollars in income, and illegally bought a firearm.

AFP

2 dead, 16 missing in China mudslide

Beijing, China - Two people died and 16 others are missing after a mudslide triggered by heavy rains occurred near the northern Chinese city of Xi'an, state media reported on Saturday.

China has faced deadly floods and historic rainfall in recent weeks, with the death toll from storms in the northern part of the country reaching at least 78 on Friday.

"Affected by short-term local heavy rainfall, at 18:00 on August 11... there was a sudden mountain flash flood and mudslide," reported state broad-

caster CCTV.

"A preliminary inspection showed that, at present, two houses in the village have been washed away and infrastructure including roads, bridges and power supply have been damaged," said the report.

Four of the people initially trapped by the mudslide have been saved, CCTV added.

Chinese state media said emergency response and rescue efforts were continuing on Saturday morning as 16 individuals remained missing.

AFP

SPECIAL DAY



Students with special needs dressed in traditional clothes take part in a street carnival with family members ahead of Indonesia's 78th Independence Day in Makassar, South Sulawesi, on Saturday (AFP)

Colombians accused in Ecuador, Haiti assassinations

Quito, Ecuador - Two years after a Colombian squad allegedly shot dead the president of Haiti, authorities in Ecuador have accused a group of Colombians of being behind the assassination of a top presidential candidate, pointing to the export of a culture of political hitjobs.

Colombia has a long history of politicians being assassinated by opponents, drug traffickers, or paramilitaries, and even its president, Gustavo Petro, campaigned before his election from behind a wall of bulletproof shields.

After the shock assassination of Ecuador journalist and anti-corruption crusader Fernando Villavicencio on Wednesday, authorities released pictures of six Columbian suspects, one of them splattered with blood.

A seventh suspect was killed in a shootout at the scene of the



Tamia (right foreground) and Amanda Villavicencio, daughters of slain Ecuadorean presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio, stand by their father's coffin at the Quito Exhibition Center in Quito, on Friday (AFP)

crime. The country's main newspaper, *El Universo*, reported Villavicencio was assassinated 'hitman-style and with three shots to the head'. Police said the suspects were arrested in a series of raids in which they also

found a rifle, a machine gun, grenades and ammunition.

In a message of support to Ecuador, Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro drew a direct link to the murder of Haitian president Jovenel Moise in his

home in July 2021 by a group of 17 Colombian mercenaries.

"A gang of Colombian hitmen, mercenaries, went to Haiti to assassinate a president," he said during an official event.

"These criminal gangs of hit-

men are unfortunately taking this Colombian model of political assassinations outside of its borders." Jorge Mantilla, a Colombian investigator into organised crime, said that the arrests showed the 'specialisation among Colombian criminals in the use of violence' after six decades of armed conflict between the state and guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug gangs.

He said the two assassinations "show the capacity that these violence professionals have of connecting with transnational crime networks." Villavicencio said last week he had received several threats from Los Choneros, one of Ecuador's most powerful criminal groups which the Insight Crime thinktank said became the armed wing of a Colombian drug cartel. It also has ties to Mexico's Sinaloa cartel.

AFP

Little-known senator to be Pakistan caretaker PM until poll due in months

Islamabad, Pakistan - A little-known senator from Pakistan's least-populous province was named caretaker prime minister on Saturday to see the country through to an election due in months.

Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, from Balochistan province, takes on a country that has been wracked by political and economic instability for months, with Imran Khan, the country's most popular politician in jail.

Kakar was confirmed by President Arif Alvi as the choice of the outgoing coalition government, led by Shehbaz Sharif, and opposition leader Raja Riaz Ahmad.

"We first agreed that whoever should be prime minister, he should be from a smaller province so smaller provinces' grievances should be addressed," Riaz said.

Kakar, 52, will lead Pakistan through to general and provincial elections due by November, but which some officials have already said will be delayed until next year.

Political analyst Hasan Askari Rizvi told AFP that Kakar 'has a limited political career and not much weight in Pakistani poli-

tics', but that could work in his favour. "This can be an advantage because he has no strong affiliation with the major political parties," he said.

"But the disadvantage is that being a lightweight politician he may find it difficult to cope with the problems he's going to face without the active support of the military establishment."

Khan in jail

The country has been in political turmoil since former international cricket star Imran Khan was dismissed as premier by a no-confidence vote in April 2022, culminating in him being jailed last weekend for three years for graft.

He has been disqualified from standing for office for five years, but is appealing against his sentence and conviction.

Authorities have cracked down hard against Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in recent months, crushing his grassroots power by rounding up thousands of his supporters and officials.

Analyst Ayesha Siddiqua, noting Kakar had done courses at the National Defence University - formerly the military's war col-



This file photo shows Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar speaking during an interview with AFP in Quetta on January 16, 2016 (AFP)

It seems that the establishment has struck and they have found somebody who will be watching over their interests rather than that of politicians

AYESHA SIDDIQA

lege - said he would be close to the establishment. "It seems that the establishment has struck and they have found somebody who will be watching over their interests rather than that of politicians," she said.

Question mark over election date

Parliament was officially dissolved on Wednesday with elections due within 90 days according to the constitution.

But there has been speculation for months that they would be delayed as the establishment grapples to stabilise a country facing overlapping security, economic and political crises.

Data from the latest census carried was finally published last weekend and the outgoing government said the election commission needs time to redraw constituency boundaries.

Asked this week on television if a vote would take place this year, interior minister Rana Sanaullah replied: "An absolutely straightforward answer - No."

The election commission has yet to comment.

Last month parliament rushed through legislation that gives the caretaker government more power to negotiate with global bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, another clue it may be around for a while.

Some analysts think the delay could give time for the main coalition partners - the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) - to figure out how to address the challenge of Khan's PTI.

"But in reality, delaying the election could simply anger the public more and galvanise an opposition that has already suffered through months of crackdowns," said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center.

AFP

Red alert in India's Uttarakhand

New Delhi, India - The Indian Meteorological Department on Saturday issued a red alert for Uttarakhand for Sunday and Monday.

"Urgent red alert issued for Uttarakhand as heavy to very heavy rainfall, reaching extremely heavy levels (more than 204.4mm), is forecasted for August 13th and 14th. Stay safe," India Meteorological Department tweeted.

There has been heavy rain in many districts of the state for the last couple of days, causing waterlogging and flooding and disrupting the normal lives of the people.

Earlier, five pilgrims were killed after a car they were travelling in was buried under the debris of a landslide at Tarsali under Chowki Phata in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur district, police said on Saturday.

According to officials, the victims, including one from Gujarat, were on their way to Kedarnath when the incident took place on Thursday evening.

The incident also led to the blocking of the Guptkashi-Gaurikund highway leading to Kedarnath Dham for traffic on Friday, said officials, while adding that about 60 metres of the road had been badly damaged.

ANI

Six people dead as migrant boat sinks in Channel



A P677 Cormoran Flamant-class patrol vessel of the French Navy sails on Calais' harbour, northern France, during a rescue operation on Saturday (AFP)

Lille, France - Six people were killed when a boat carrying migrants heading to Britain sank in the Channel early on Saturday, French maritime officials said, as a search continued to find those still missing. A spokeswoman from the French coastal authority Premar said between five and 10 passengers were still missing, while 55 had been rescued.

Three French ships, a helicopter and a plane have been mobilised to search the area off Sangatte in northern France, along with two British ships.

The local prosecutor said that the first victim was a man aged between 25 and 30 years old of Afghan origin, who had been evacuated by helicopter to a hospital in Calais but later died.

Five other people in a critical condition were taken to Calais on a lifeboat but declared dead on the ship's arrival, said the Premar spokesperson.

The boat capsized around 2am local time (0000 GMT) off the northern coast of France, according to the prosecutor.

An AFP reporter in Calais saw some of those rescued disembarking from a patrol boat with emergency services on site.

French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne wrote on the social media site X, formerly known as Twitter, that her 'thoughts go out to the victims' as she praised the efforts of the rescue teams.

Perilous crossing

More than 100,000 migrants

have crossed the Channel on small boats from France to southeast England since Britain began publicly recording the arrivals in 2018, official figures revealed on Friday.

French authorities have stepped up patrols and other deterrent measures after London agreed in March to send Paris hundreds of millions of euros annually towards the effort.

The route across one of the world's busiest shipping lanes has repeatedly proved perilous, with several capsizings and scores of migrants drowning in the waters over the last decade.

In recent days there have been several attempts to cross the Channel in boats after weather conditions improved.

Overnight Thursday, Premar reported that 116 migrants had been rescued including children, on three separate boats.

Some 755 migrants were detected on Thursday on 14 small boats headed for England's southern coast, the UK interior ministry statistics showed, the highest tally on a single day this year.

Those boats brought the number of arrivals so far this year to nearly 16,000.

Five migrants died at sea and four went missing while trying to cross over to Britain from France last year.

In November 2021, 27 migrants died when a boat capsized in the Channel.

AFP

FIGHTERS AND DEITIES



School children dressed as freedom fighters and deities wave Indian national flags ahead of the country's Independence day in Amritsar on Saturday (AFP)

Myanmar floods: 48,000 people waiting to go home

Bago, Myanmar - A baby slept peacefully under a mosquito net oblivious to hundreds of evacuated flood victims lined up for food at a monastery in Myanmar on Saturday, all waiting for water levels to recede before they can return home.

Floods and landslides caused by monsoon rain have killed five and forced around 48,000 people to flee their homes, the relief ministry said.

On Saturday in Bago city, northeast of Yangon, children floated on rubber tyres squealing with joy, while adults paddled wooden canoes with supplies through the murky brown and yellow water to evacuation shelters. Hundreds of families sat fanning themselves in an open-air hall at a monastery as volunteers distributed meal packs of rice and egg curry.

Parents and children curled up on mats surrounded by bags of their meagre possessions - clothes strung up on makeshift washing lines above.

Tin Win, 52, said although the conditions at the shelter were cramped and people were only



A woman wades through a flooded street in Bago township in Myanmar's Bago region on Saturday (AFP)

receiving two meals a day, she was thankful to be safe and dry.

"The space is tiny and there is not much space to sleep. We have to lie down next to each other," she told AFP.

"If there is no more rain, we hope to go back home in three days."

Across the city, dogs scrambled onto Buddhist pagodas and steps to escape the flood water

as rain pelted down.

The Myanmar weather bureau said the Bago River had risen a foot higher on Saturday but was expected to start going down over the coming days.

Myanmar experiences heavy monsoon rains every year, but scientists believe extreme weather events are being exacerbated by climate change.

Escaping the deluge was a

First direct flight from Belarus arrives in India

New Delhi, India - The first direct flight from Belarus, Belarusian Airline Belavia, finally arrived in India.

On the social media account, X (formerly known as Twitter), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, on Saturday, shared a video showing a flight arriving in India and the Belarusian Ambassador to India, Andrei Rzhuevsky, along with the staff untie the ribbon.

"First direct flight from #Belarus arrived in #India," it said in a tweet.

Earlier, on Wednesday, Rzhuevsky had confirmed that the first-ever direct flight between Minsk, the capital of Belarus and Delhi, India would start on August 12.

While speaking to ANI, Ambassador said that a lot of efforts were made to launch a regular flight service between Belarus and India.

"It was not the easy way. For the last couple of years, we did our routine job just to fulfil this project into life. And now I am proudly announcing that at the end of this week (on Saturday) the first ever scheduled flight from Minsk to India will take place," he said.

The Belarus Ambassador also stated that only a couple of flights were operated before this regular flight service. He also highlighted the importance of this flight service in terms of business and tourism.

ANI

that five people had died and as of Saturday 48,000 have been evacuated from Kachin, Karen, Chin, Rakhine, and Mon states and the Magway and Bago regions. "We have provided necessary food including instant noodles and drinking water," she said.

"People are staying at monasteries, schools and other higher places."

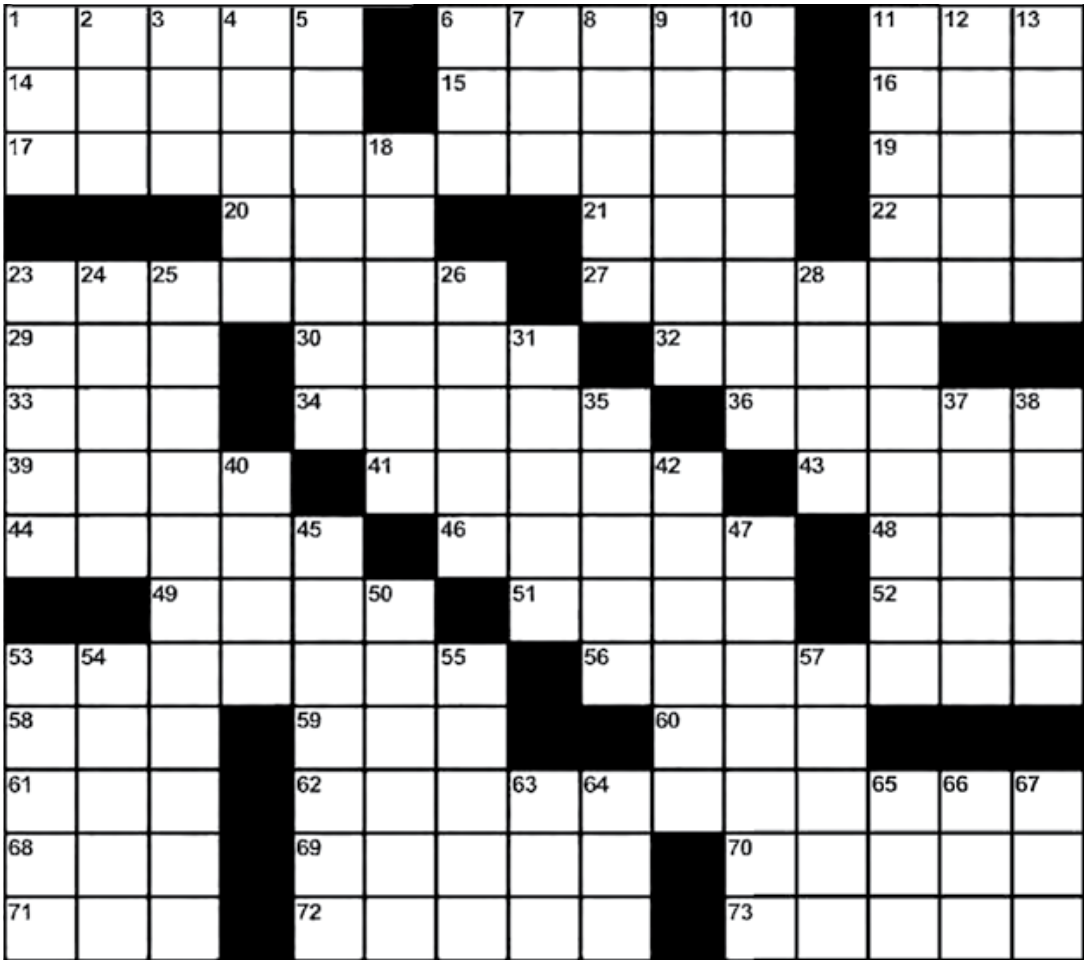
Meanwhile, Myanmar Red Cross volunteers are busy evacuating families, distributing food and providing health care in flood-hit Karen state, the international organisation said on Twitter, which has been re-branded X.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since a February 2021 military coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government and plunged the nation into a bloody conflict between the junta and opponents of their rule.

According to a local monitoring group, more than 3,900 people have been killed since the coup, a figure the junta puts at 5,000.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1) Use one's reflexes
6) One from Cedar Rapids
11) Cheesecake leg
14) Tidal flood
15) Recto's opposite
16) Pi-sigma connection
17) Elite military unit
19) Underwater electricity source
20) Mai follower
21) Filbert or cashew
22) What to do after being served
23) Pressing importance
27) Maroons
29) Neither's go-with
30) Bar mitzvah honoree
32) Modern Old World money
33) It can be behind the eight ball
34) Spread out, as fingers
36) Brainy club
39) Brings into play
41) Certain moles
43) Makes a drink last
44) Camping shelters
46) It comes from the hip
48) Meal crumb

49) _ Christian Andersen
51) Main actor
52) Prefix with "con"
53) Old Japanese military leaders
56) Less abundant
58) Cross-shaped Greek character
59) Ben Carson's grp.
60) Compact submachine gun
61) Roll- (some deodor-ants)
62) Oft-stuffed veggie
68) Cause of grief
69) Exit
70) Out of practice
71) Bra's relative
72) Was at fault
73) Kitchen rack item

DOWN
1) Avg., in sizes
2) Hammer and anvil locale
3) Time of one's existence
4) Minotaur's home
5) Flat people?
6) " _ Gotta Be Me"
7) Above, to a poet
8) Small brown birds
9) Clever

I 0) Quack remedy
11) Envious veggies?
12) Like the frontrunner
13) Drops feathers
18) Mounds of arms
23) Like some director's edi-tions
24) Awaken
25) They offer controlled growing conditions
26) Sounds from a pound
28) Trojan War figure
31) Finger features
35) Butler-turned-poet?
37) Indulgent outing
38) Millionaire on the Ti-tanic
40) Pre-wedding party
42) Acquire quickly
45) Get close and cozy
47) Hungry sheep
50) One who is loud at night
53) Uses the cargo hold
54) Vietnamese city
55) Weapon with a pointy head
57) Destroy a contract, in a way
63) Dec. 24, e.g.
64) "The Simpsons" neigh-

bor Flanders
65) Letters on a tire
66) List ending, often
67) Kind of whiskey

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Your dreams are important right now. They provide you with some valuable insight about what's going on in your subconscious. They could also confirm a few suspicions you've been having about a trusted friend or sweetie. Have a conversation with a mutual friend and see what they can tell you about this person. They could let you in on some facts that might change how you feel, but only in a good way. Suspicions are tricky things.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You mixed business with your personal life in the past and it was a big mistake. So when it looks like it might happen again, it's understandable that you respond by being adamant about having no financial dealings with people you consider friends. But by sticking to this strict policy, you could be missing out on a great thing. There are exceptions to every rule, and today you should put some extra effort into determining whether or not this could be one of them.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
If you can't seem to get revved up to start the day, have faith in yourself! It's just one of those days when you're going to have to fake it till you make it. Your body can be tricked by your mind, so just think that you have energy and you'll have it. Slap a smile on your face, put one foot in front of the other, and then just keep going through the motions of your day. Sooner or later, the momentum of your movements will help get your motor started and improve your attitude.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Your usual instinct is to deal with needy people compassionately, but you have to start removing your emotions from things. Sometimes people get in the habit of taking advantage of generous people like you, and you need to know how to sense when you're dealing with one of these folks. The problems of other people are nothing you should take on, especially right now when you have important issues of your own to focus on. Turn toward yourself and away from users.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
If you're working hard to get closer to someone right now, stop! Getting started with someone new should be fun and exciting, not exhausting and frustrating. If things aren't working out between you, maybe they aren't supposed to, at least not yet. But if romance is the furthest thing from your mind right now, you're likely to have a very relaxing day. No one will be bugging you and no one will be pressuring you to spend more time with them.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You simply shouldn't take negative things seriously today. Any metaphorical stop signs, refusals, brick walls, or red lights aren't the end of the world. They're simply annoyances that you must ignore. Give things another try. Figure out a new route. Maybe there's something you haven't thought of. Chances are good someone who's been down this road before has some excellent insights, so why don't you send them an email or call them and find out what advice they have for you?

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Major career changes are never easy at first, but that's no excuse to avoid a transition if that's what you think will make you happier. You have to trust your gut on this. If it feels like the right thing to do, then it is. At the very least, if things don't work out exactly the way you want them to, you'll learn something. Not only is it unhealthy to doubt yourself, it's no fun! You'll have many more adventures in your life if you start taking a few more risks.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
What vision do you have for your future? If you haven't given any thought to where you want to be in your life in the next few years or decades, today is a good day to put your mind to the task. It's more important than ever to understand what you want for yourself, and it won't take long to come up with some ideas about it. And ideas can be the blueprint for your reality if you're ready to put in the necessary effort.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Any joint assets you have with another person are getting a little too connected. A separation might be in order. It's not necessarily going to become a problem, but you do have to start being more mindful of the melding before it does. Today, if there's an option to pay separately, take it. Splitting things down the middle might be easier, and for the next few days you need to be more aware of exactly how much you're spending. Knowledge is power.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
The past will have a strong hold on you today, so be prepared for your mind to wander back to the life you used to live. It's healthy to look back every once in a while, so let yourself do it. The spell of nostalgia might make you miss the people and places that are no longer part of your life, but then you'll realize that they're still a part of you in a way. But if you get a strong urge to get back in touch with someone, do it. Search for them and connect to see what they're up to.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
You know you're smart, and your confidence and intellectual strength will be very useful today. They'll help you get noticed and connect with people who can offer you the opportunity you've been waiting for. Don't shy away from innovative ideas that confuse you. You're at your best when you're forced to figure stuff out, and it will be your puzzle-solving ability that will show important people that you're a force to be reckoned with.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Every once in a while you have to put yourself first. Today, you need to make giving yourself the attention you need your top priority. That means you should do whatever you want to do, and avoid doing whatever you don't want to do. If you've been invited to a big party but you're dreading the idea of going, there's nothing wrong with you! You're just not in the mood to socialize. Forcing yourself to have fun is a sure way to not have fun.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE
01. Which extra element did Einstein include in his understanding of general relativity, which he had not previously included in the theory he published in 1905 of special relativity?
A. Electromagnetism
B. Time
C. Mass-energy equivalence
D. Gravity

02. Anthony Wilding is the only New Zealander in what sport's Hall of Fame?
A. Surfing
B. Golf
C. Tennis
D. Archery

03. Who was shot by Valery Solanas on 3 June 1968?
A. Larry Hagman
B. John Lennon
C. Ronald Reagan
D. Andy Warhol

Answers: 1. D 2. C 3. D

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

A	S	B	S
M	C	Y	D
G	E	L	R
N	U	T	O

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

ENGLAND KEEP 'DREAM ALIVE'



England's Alessia Russo (R) celebrates after scoring the winner against Colombia in their Women's World Cup quarter-final in Sydney on Saturday (AFP)

Sydney, Australia - England fought back from a goal down to beat Colombia 2-1 on Saturday in a bruising encounter and set up a tasty Women's World Cup semi-final with Australia.

Forward Alessia Russo scored the winner for the European

champions just after the hour in front of 75,000 in Sydney to end Colombia's run in the tournament.

Earlier in the day, co-hosts Australia beat France 7-6 in a thrilling penalty shootout in Brisbane to reach the last four for the

first time in their history.

The semi-final will be in Sydney on Wednesday.

Colombia, playing in their first quarter-final, took the lead against the run of play through a wonderful dipping effort from the edge of the box by Leicy Santos

on 44 minutes.

But England struck back deep in first-half stoppage time when Lauren Hemp pounced on a goal-keeping error by a fumbling Catalina Perez, before Russo sealed the quarter-final in the Lionesses' favour with her cool fin-

ish. "I am buzzing, we are keeping the dream alive," said Russo.

"We have had to dig deep from the first game, they have so many talented players who can cause you trouble in a second."

Eyeing up the clash with Australia in front of what will be a

an England attack. Jeers went up each time the Lionesses had the ball but they seemed to be enjoying themselves and finding pockets of space in front of the Colombian defence with ease.

Nelson Abadia's side have a reputation for being physical and

rest of the team.

England drew level moments before half-time and it was a goalkeeping mistake, Perez spilling the ball under pressure from Russo and Hemp stabbing into an empty net.

AFP

I am buzzing, we are keeping the dream alive. We have had to dig deep from the first game, they have so many talented players who can cause you trouble in a second

ALESSIA RUSSO

Australia beat France in penalty thriller to reach World Cup semi-finals

Brisbane, Australia - Co-hosts Australia beat France 7-6 in a thrilling penalty shoot-out to reach the semi-finals of the Women's World Cup for the first time in their history on a night of drama in Brisbane on Saturday.

Australia now go to Sydney on Wednesday to face England.

Cortnee Vine scored the winning penalty to end a remarkable shoot-out that saw both teams take 10 spot-kicks, the quarter-final having ended 0-0 after 120 nerve-shredding minutes.

Vine held her nerve to send the crowd into raptures and keep the Matildas' dream of winning the World Cup on home soil

alive. Australia goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold missed a chance to win the shoot-out when her kick hit the post, but then saved twice from Kenza Dali after the VAR spotted she had both feet off her line the first time.

Vicki Becho missed France's 10th penalty, and it was left to Vine to take Australia through by beating France's substitute goalkeeper Solene Durand, who had been sent on especially for the shoot-out.

It was an agonising way for France to go out after a tense encounter watched by a sell-out crowd of 49,461.



Australian players celebrate their win against France in in Brisbane on Saturday (AFP)

Les Bleus had been hoping to get to the semi-finals for just the second time, following their defeat in the last four in 2011, but instead go home.

Australia's victory was achieved despite Sam Kerr again being left on the bench at kick-off, with the talismanic Matildas captain, now fit after a calf injury, coming on early in the second half and going on to convert her penalty in the shoot-out.

Kerr comes off bench

Matildas coach Tony Gustavsson stuck with the same team that started against Denmark in the last 16, while France brought

the fit-again Maelle Lakrar back into their defence.

Lakrar really should have given France an early lead to silence the hostile crowd, but the 23-year-old somehow succeeded in diverting an Eugenie Le Sommer shot over the bar with the goal gaping.

That was a let-off for the hosts, who were then grateful to Arnold for tipping a Le Sommer effort behind and for stopping a stinging Lakrar attempt following a corner. It looked like the occasion was getting to Australia, but they began to threaten in the final minutes of the first half.

AFP

Good chemistry' takes Sweden into familiar territory at World Cup

Auckland, New Zealand - They don't attract the same level of attention as many of their rivals, but Sweden might be starting to quietly believe this is their year after reaching yet another semi-final at the Women's World Cup.

The pre-tournament talk was about the United States and a third straight title, England adding the World Cup to their European crown and Australia going for glory on home soil.

But Sweden are ranked third in the world for a reason and are now gearing up for a third World Cup semi-final in four editions after beating Japan 2-1 on Friday.

After losing to the Netherlands in the last four in 2019, and to Japan at the same stage in 2011, Sweden face Spain on Tuesday hoping to secure a first final appearance since 2003, when they were edged out by Germany.

It is not just the World Cup though. Peter Gerhardsson's team were also beaten semi-fi-



Sweden's Filippa Angeldahl (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Japan on Friday (AFP)

nalists at last year's Euro.

In fact, they have reached at least the semi-finals eight times in their last 10 appearances at the European Championship, without winning the title. They have also been silver medallists at the last two Olympics.

Sweden might have fallen short all too often when it comes to the crunch, but all that past

experience could serve them well against a Spain team appearing at this stage of the World Cup for the first time.

"We have been in this situation before, playing semi-finals. It's huge. We just have a really good team," said veteran forward Sofia Jakobsson.

The 33-year-old is one of the most seasoned campaigners in

Gerhardsson's squad, having been part of the team at the 2011 World Cup.

She has seen many players come and go, and only four of the team that started against Japan also lined up in the 2019 semi-final.

'Trust each other'

Jakobsson puts Sweden's consistency down to the players getting on with each other, something which may appear simplistic but is helpful at a major tournament when teams spend weeks together in hotels far from home.

"We push each other in training, we have really good fun outside the field and I just think we really have a good chemistry in the group," she said.

"Obviously it helps when you win games as well."

Sweden were one of just three teams to win all three group games, along with Japan and England.

AFP

Rows and refuseniks: Spain defy turbulence to make last four

Sydney, Australia - Spain were plunged into turmoil when 15 players refused to feature under coach Jorge Vilda, but less than a year later they are in the Women's World Cup semi-finals for the first time.

It is a remarkable turnaround for Vilda and a squad that is not even at full strength in Australia and New Zealand because of the very public disagreement.

Moreover, there were hints even coming into the World Cup that all was still not well in the Spain camp. Perhaps they are still not. But Vilda's side stuck together to defeat the 2019 runners-up the Netherlands 2-1 in extra time and will face Sweden in the last four on Tuesday.

Even on the eve of Friday's game against the Dutch in Wellington there was no escaping the turmoil which had threatened to torpedo Spain's World Cup in the past year.

"The team is united," Vilda said, asked by a Dutch journalist to comment. "We have a group



Spain coach Jorge Vilda gives instructions to his players during a training session in Auckland (AFP)

that competes and they are all fighting for the same objective, and they are very motivated."

Discontent between players on the one side and the Spanish football federation (RFEF) and Vilda on the other had been brewing for some time.

In September 2022 the situation exploded - 15 of the squad emailed the RFEF to say they did not want to be considered for selection, citing their "emotional

state".

They were unhappy with numerous things: the atmosphere around the camp, Vilda being too strict and the team's lack of success under the coach since his reign started in 2015.

The RFEF backed the coach however and he omitted the protesting players for friendlies against Sweden and the United States, which Spain drew and won respectively.



Man Utd agree Fred transfer to Fenerbahce

London, United Kingdom - Manchester United have reached an "agreement in principle" for the transfer of Fred from Old Trafford to Turkish side Fenerbahce, the English Premier League club announced Friday.

A statement on United's website added Fred would fly to Istanbul for a medical on Saturday, with the deal also subject to the midfielder "agreeing personal terms and receiving international clearance to process the move".

United paid tribute to Fred by saying: "The 30-year-old leaves so many positive memories from his time at Old Trafford, where he has been a hugely popular individual, both as a person and as a player. Everybody at the club would like to wish the very best of luck to Fred for the future, as we await confirmation that the deal is completed."

No fee has been disclosed.

AFP

Gunners survive Forest scare

Arsenal made to sweat in 2-1 victory

London, United Kingdom - Arsenal's Premier League title challenge got off to a winning start on Saturday but the big-spending Gunners were made to sweat in a 2-1 victory over Nottingham Forest.

First-half goals from Eddie Nketiah and Bukayo Saka had the home side cruising at the Emirates.

But they were made to suffer a nervy finale after Taiwo Awoniyi came off the bench to pull a goal back for Forest seven minutes from time.

The day got off to an embarrassing start for Arsenal as kick-off was delayed by 30 minutes due to issues with an e-ticketing scheme that left tens of thousands of fans unable to take their seats in time for the scheduled 1130GMT kick-off.

Once the action got underway, Declan Rice, Kai Havertz and Jurrien Timber were handed their league debuts after joining for combined fees in excess of £200 million (\$254 million).

However, three points for the home side was soured by an injury suffered by Timber as he pulled up early in the second half.

By that point the game should have been over as a contest as Arsenal sprang out of the blocks.

Mikel Arteta's men are looking to go one better after finishing second behind treble-winners Manchester City last season.

City cruised to a 3-0 win at Burnley to open the Premier



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka (C) celebrates with Eddie Nketiah after scoring against Nottingham Forest in their English Premier League match at the Emirates Stadium in London on Saturday (AFP)

The day got off to an embarrassing start for Arsenal as kick-off was delayed by 30 minutes due to issues with an e-ticketing scheme that left tens of thousands of fans unable to take their seats in time

League season on Friday night and Arsenal should have followed suit rather than holding on for the final whistle.

Forest have their home form to thank for staying in the English top flight last season on their return to the Premier League after

a 23-year absence.

Steve Cooper has targeted an improvement to their poor return on the road, but they barely laid a glove on the hosts until the introduction of Awoniyi and Anthony Elanga late on.

Martinelli magic

Forest's rearguard resistance lasted 26 minutes until the visitors were undone by a moment of magic from Gabriel Martinelli.

The Brazilian's turn took him past two defenders before the ball broke for Nketiah to drill low beyond Forest debutant Matt Turner, on his return to the Emirates after leaving Arsenal this week. Turner had no chance with the second six minutes later as Saka cut onto his favoured left foot and arrowed a trademark strike high into the far corner.

Timber had recovered from a knock at the end of the first pe-

riod to take his place at the start of the second.

But the Dutch international then pulled up holding his hamstring and had to be replaced just four minutes into the second-half.

Awoniyi was surprisingly left out by Cooper despite scoring in Forest's final four games of last season, including the winner against Arsenal that secured his side's survival in May.

AFP

De Bruyne injury sours Man City's winning start

Burnley, United Kingdom - Manchester City could be without Kevin De Bruyne for a number of weeks after he suffered the recurrence of a hamstring injury as the defending champions opened the Premier League season with a 3-0 win at Burnley on Friday.

Erling Haaland scored twice before Rodri completed the scoring to give City a perfect start to their quest to become the first side to win four consecutive English top-flight titles.

But the night was soured for Pep Guardiola's men by the sight of De Bruyne limping off midway through the first-half.

The Belgian had suffered a hamstring tear in City's Champions League final victory over Inter Milan two months ago.

"He was injured again unfortunately," said Guardiola. "Same place and position as the Champions League and he will be out for a while.

"It depends on the magnitude but will be a few weeks out. He has to free (his) mind and relax because he came back from that position (previous injuries) and he will be back now." Burnley's 2022/23 season finished over a month before City's European Cup final win in Istanbul.

Guardiola has bemoaned his side's short pre-season com-



Manchester City's Erling Haaland (L) comforts Kevin De Bruyne as the Belgian leaves the pitch following an injury during their English Premier League match against Burnley on Friday (AFP)

pared to their rivals, but they were quick out of the blocks.

"We are still not in our best (physical) form but we have to try to not drop many points in that period," added Guardiola. "It's a question of mentality and we were fortunate to break the game early.

"A lot of teams are going to

suffer here, so that is why I am so pleased."

Haaland fired City to the treble last season by scoring 52 times in his first year at the club.

The 23-year-old took just over three minutes of the new campaign to open his tally once more when he swept home Rodri's header across goal after a well-

worked corner between De Bruyne, Bernardo Silva and Phil Foden.

Burnley boss Vincent Kompany has a statue outside City's Etihad Stadium in honour of his decorated playing career with the English champions. Kompany returned the Clarets back to the Premier League at the first time of

There were a lot of periods of the game where we did ourselves proud

VINCENT KOMpany

asking and transformed Burnley's playing style in the process during his first season in charge.

Despite the scoreline, the home side were far from out-classed but paid for the lack of a clinical finisher like Haaland.

Luca Koleosho and Zeki Amdouni missed good chances to equalise, while Amdouni also had a penalty appeal turned down.

"There were a lot of periods of the game where we did ourselves proud," said Kompany.

However, they were hit with a sucker punch when Julian Alvarez laid off Kyle Walker's cross into the path of Haaland to produce an unstoppable effort in off the underside of the bar nine minutes before half-time.

With the wind taken from Burnley's sails, City took a stranglehold of the game after the break without ever having to hit top gear.

AFP



Harry Kane

Bayern sign England captain Kane on four-year contract

Munich, Germany - England captain Harry Kane ended his record-breaking career with Tottenham on Saturday signing a four-year deal with Bayern Munich until 2027.

Kane said he "felt it was time to leave" the Premier League club he had spent two decades with as he chases trophies with the Bundesliga giants.

"I felt like it was the time to leave. I didn't want to go into the season with a lot of unresolved future talk," Kane posted on social media.

"Obviously a lot of emotions going through me right now; sad to be leaving the club I've spent nearly 20 years of my life at, from 11-year-old boy to a 30-year-old man now.

"There's been so many great moments and special memories, memories that I will cherish forever."

After protracted negotiations between Bayern and Spurs' chairman Daniel Levy a deal was finally struck on Thursday.

Kane flew to Munich on Fri-

day evening to complete the traditional medical where he was greeted by a multitude of Bayern fans before putting pen to paper on his new contract.

Six-time European champions Bayern were in desperate need of a striker after struggling to replace Robert Lewandowski who left for Barcelona last season.

The reported fee for Kane is a Bundesliga record 100 million euros (\$110 million, £86 million) plus 10 million euros in bonuses. Kane, who was out of contract next summer, leaves Tottenham having scored 280 goals in 435 games to become the club's all-time leading goalscorer, but without a trophy.

"I'm very happy to be a part of FC Bayern now," Kane said in a club statement. "Bayern is one of the biggest clubs in the world, and I've always said that I want to compete and prove myself at the highest level during my career. This club is defined by its winning mentality - it feels very good to be here."

AFP

Caicedo confusion hanging over Chelsea, Liverpool

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Chelsea and Liverpool have gone to battle in the transfer market for the signature of Brighton's Moises Caicedo before they face off at Stamford Bridge on the opening weekend of the Premier League season.

The Ecuadorian is set to become the most expensive player in English football history as both clubs see the 21-year-

old as integral to their hopes of bouncing back after disappointing seasons.

Liverpool have agreed a £110 million deal (\$140 million, 127 million euros) with Brighton, but the player is believed to still favour a move to Chelsea.

The Blues slumped to 12th in the Premier League last season - their lowest finish since 1994 - despite spending over £500

million on new players during the first year of the club's new ownership.

Chelsea are now looking to throw more money at their issues after a summer clearout left new manager Mauricio Pochettino short of midfield options.

But after they failed to match the asking price during months of negotiations, Liverpool

looked to have stolen a march when they were the highest bidders by a deadline imposed by Brighton on Thursday.

The Reds are also in need of new midfielders after losing captain Jordan Henderson, Fabinho, James Milner, Naby Keita and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain since the end of last season.

AFP



Moises Caicedo

THE RIFT DEEPENS

PSG sideline Mbappe for season-opener as Dembele arrives

Paris, France - French superstar Kylian Mbappe has been left out of Paris Saint-Germain's season opener on Saturday deepening the stand-off between the France captain and the Ligue 1 champions.

As Mbappe's contract dispute with the Qatari-backed club rumbles on PSG announced a new signing - Ousmane Dembele on a five-year-deal from Barcelona.

He is the ninth summer arrival at a side which has lost Lionel Messi to Inter Miami, and may soon be facing up to life without Mbappe.

In an affair that has dominated transfer market headlines Mbappe has refused to sign an extension to his PSG deal, meaning he can leave for free next year, with Real Madrid long seen as his preferred destination.

PSG want to sell him now and bring in a significant transfer fee for a player who cost 180 million euros (\$198m) from Monaco in 2017.

"The position is very clear. If Kylian wants to stay, he must sign a new contract. We can't let the best player in the world today leave for free. It's impossible," PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi said last month.

Mbappe has not been allowed



Kylian Mbappe

train with the first team and played only one of PSG's five warm-up games and was not invited to the pre-season tour in Japan and South Korea.

Despite his sidelining Mbappe was one of the first to welcome Dembele to the Parc des Princes. "Welcome home my brother,

so happy to see you here, the adventure begins," Mbappe posted on social media to greet Dembele with whom he won the World Cup in 2018.

The 26-year-old Dembele joined Barcelona in 2017 from Borussia Dortmund and had extended his contract last year until

2024. PSG took advantage of the player's 50 million euros (\$54 million) release clause to sign the former Rennes forward.

"I'm very happy to join Paris Saint-Germain and can't wait to play in my new colours," Dembele said in a PSG statement.

"I hope to continue to grow

here and make all who love the club proud."

Ninth signing

Dembele, who has 37 caps for France and scored four goals, joins three other World Cup winners at PSG - Mbappe, Presnel Kimpembe and Lucas Her-



I'm very happy to join Paris Saint-Germain and can't wait to play in my new colours. I hope to continue to grow here and make all who love the club proud

OUSMANE DEMBELE

nandez.

He is the club's ninth summer signing after defenders Milan Skriniar and Lucas Hernandez, midfielders Manuel Ugarte and Cher Ndour, forwards Marco Asensio, Lee Kang-in and Goncalo Ramos and goalkeeper Arnau Tenas.

At Barcelona, despite early problems adjusting to the Catalan side and injuries, Dembele scored 40 goals in 185 matches, winning three league titles in 2018, 2019 and 2023 and two Spanish Cups 2018 and 2021.

PSG are bolstering their attacking options with the futures of Mbappe and also Neymar uncertain.

"The passion and determination shown by Ousmane when he joined PSG is fantastic and is

the attitude required for all our players," said Khelaifi.

"We are proud to have another French World Cup winner in Paris Saint-Germain at the moment to enter a new great era for our club."

New PSG coach Luis Enrique also left out Brazilian Neymar from Saturday evening's game with the forward suffering a "viral syndrome".

The club are reported to be open to selling the former Barcelona star and Italian midfielder Marco Verratti, who has also not been called up against Lorient.

Enrique is expected to start three newcomers in attack - Lee, Portuguese Ramos and Spaniard Asensio.

AFP



Al Ahli's Roberto Firmino celebrates after scoring against Al Hazem in their Saudi Pro League match on Friday

Firmino hits hat-trick on Saudi debut

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - Brazilian forward and former Liverpool star Roberto Firmino hit a hat-trick on his Saudi Pro League debut on Friday as Al Ahli defeated Al Hazem 3-1.

The 31-year-old skipper found the net in the sixth, 10th and 72nd minutes for the promoted team who also fielded fellow new signings Riyad Mahrez, Allain Saint Maximin, Frank Kessie and goalkeeper Edouard Mendy.

Firmino left Liverpool in the summer after eight seasons at Anfield, during which time he scored 111 goals in 362 appearances and won the Premier League, Champions League and

Club World Cup.

Al Ahli are considered to be one of the title favourites along with Al Nassr, Al Hilal and defending champions Al Ittihad.

Backed by the nation's sovereign wealth fund, the Saudi Pro League has lured big names from the major European leagues with the promise of huge salaries.

Karim Benzema and N'Golo Kante have also made the move to the Gulf state since Cristiano Ronaldo's switch to Al-Nassr in January started the trend.

Former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard has also taken over as coach at Al Ettifaq.

AFP

Messi scores another as Miami progress, LAFC stunned by Monterrey comeback

Fort Lauderdale, United States - Lionel Messi made it eight goals in five games for Inter Miami as they eased into the semi-finals of the Leagues Cup with a 4-0 win over Charlotte FC on Friday.

But Major League Soccer champions Los Angeles FC crashed out of the competition after giving up a two goal lead and losing 3-2 at home to Mexico's Monterrey.

Miami will travel north to face the Philadelphia Union for Tuesday's semi-final after they beat Mexican team Queretaro 2-1.

Monterrey, the only Mexican team left in the tournament, will be away to Nashville who crushed Minnesota 5-1.

Messi slotted in Miami's fourth goal, at DRV PNK stadium, in the 86th minute of what was a relatively routine victory for Gerardo Martino's team. Watched by Argentina national team coach Lionel Scaloni, Messi had one of his quietest games in Miami's pink jersey but was still able to find the target for his legions of fans and help secure a fifth straight win since his arrival.

Miami took the lead in the 12th minute through a Josef Martinez penalty and doubled their advan-



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi scores against Charlotte in their Concacaf Leagues Cup quarterfinal in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on Friday (AFP)

tage in the 32nd minute through in-form Robert Taylor, who clipped home a low cross from DeAndre Yedlin.

Charlotte, who had been largely content to frustrate Messi and Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets in the opening 45 minutes, showed more adventure after the break and substitute Patrick Agyemang should have pulled a goal back but his close-range header bounced over the

bar. Immediately following that let-off, Miami made sure of victory with Diego Gomez playing a low cross towards Messi in the middle only for Charlotte defender Adilson Malanda's attempted interception ended up in his own goal.

Malanda's ill-fated slide had denied the home crowd their expected Messi goal celebration, but that was to arrive three minutes from the end of time.

With the North Carolina side tiring, Ecuador striker Leonardo Campana had time, inside the box, to calmly look up and slip the ball across to Messi for the simplest of conversions.

After Sunday's helter-skelter game in Dallas ended 4-4, with Miami progressing after penalties, Martino was pleased to see his team keep control of the contest.

AFP



Tanzid Hasan Tamim

Bangladesh call up young opener Tanzid for Asia Cup

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh called up young opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim on Saturday to their 17-member squad for the Asia Cup one-day international tournament beginning later this month.

Left-handed Tamim was a member of the Bangladesh team that won the 2020 Under-19 World Cup in South Africa and has since been groomed as a new prospect by the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

The 22-year-old scored 179 runs in four matches of July's Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Sri Lanka, with three half-centuries and a strike rate of 117.

"Our national selection panel is very confident about Tanzid," chief selector Minhajul Abedin told reporters.

"Hopefully, he is waiting to give the country something very good."

Tamim takes the place of former captain Tamim Iqbal, who pulled out of the Asia Cup due to injury.

The Bangladeshi selectors also picked up lower-order batsman Shamim Hossain, who played 17 Twenty20 internationals for Bangladesh but has yet to make his ODI debut.

AFP



Sydney McLaughlin

Hurdles star McLaughlin out of world championships with injury

Washington, United States - Reigning world and Olympic 400-meter hurdles champion Sydney McLaughlin said Friday a knee injury will keep her from competing in the World Athletics Championships that open next week in Budapest.

The 24-year-old American, who set the 400 hurdles world record of 50.68 seconds last

year at the World Championships in Eugene, said in a social media posting she has a "minor knee issue" and cannot race. "I am sad to share that I must withdraw this year's World Championships meet in Budapest," she posted.

"After consulting with my doctors and coaches, I need to take care of a minor knee issue

so that I can be fully healthy for next year's Paris Olympics. I look forward to seeing everyone back on the track soon!"

McLaughlin, racing the flat 400m this season, won the US title last month at Eugene with a world-leading 48.74 seconds.

Her place on the US squad for the world meet in the 400 will be taken by Lynna Irby-Jack-

son, who was fourth at US championships and already on the American roster as a member of the 4x400m relay pool.

McLaughlin's career medal haul also includes the 2019 Diamond League 400 hurdles crown plus helping the US 4x400 relay capture gold at the Tokyo Olympics and 2022 and 2019 world championships.

ALCARAZ FALLS TO PAUL, MEDVEDEV OUSTED

Toronto, Canada - Frustrated world number one Carlos Alcaraz was knocked out of the ATP Toronto Masters 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 on Friday as American Tommy Paul ended the Spaniard's 14-match winning streak.

Top-seeded Alcaraz was unable to escape the poor form that has plagued him all week as he prepares for a US Open title defense starting in just over two weeks.

I realize I didn't play well in all of these matches. All I can do now is practice to be better. I have some weeks before the US Open. But now I have to be focused on Cincinnati

CARLOS ALCARAZ

The 20-year-old muttered to himself and chastised his play during a match lasting more than two and a quarter hours.

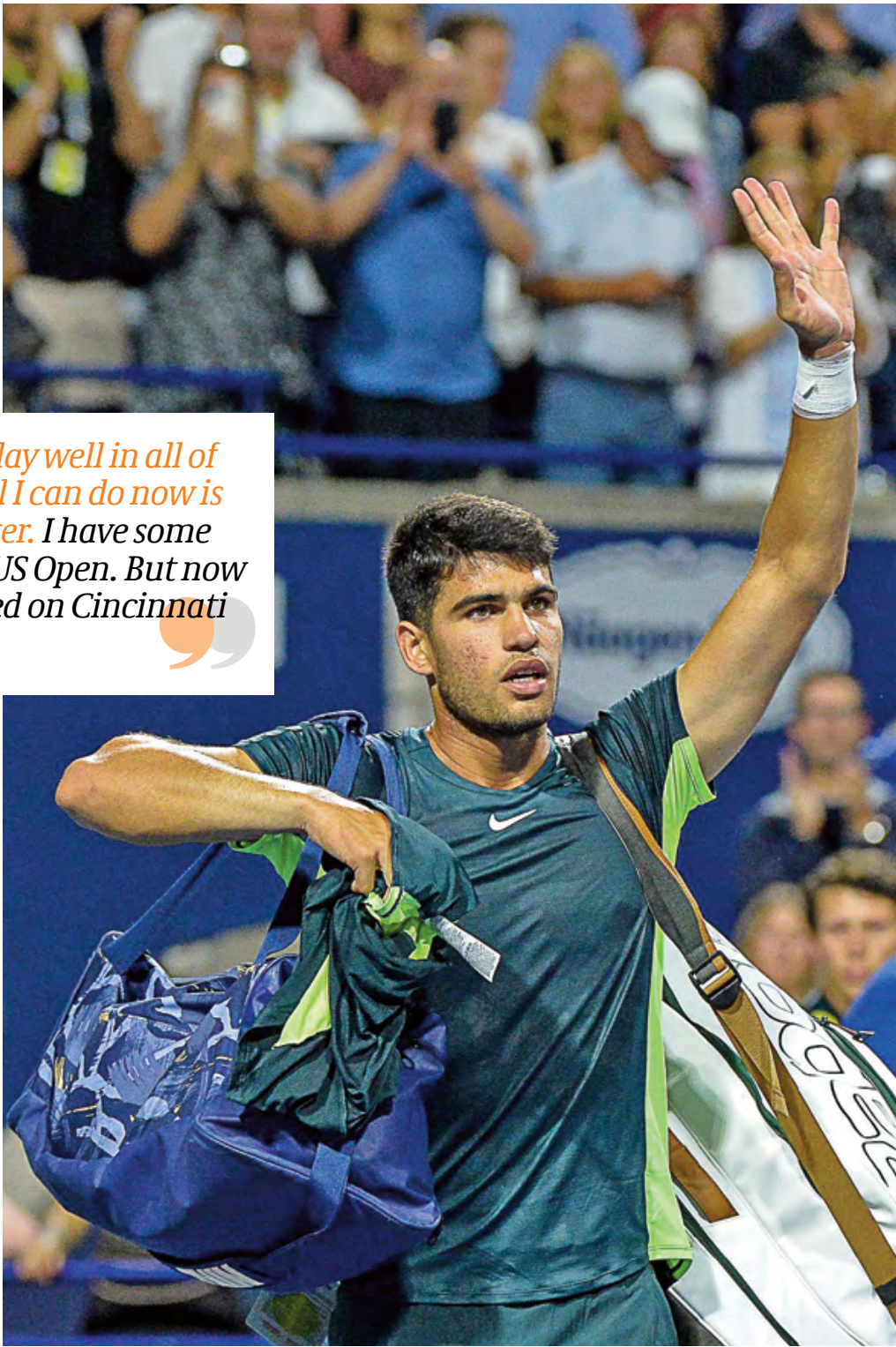
"I realize I didn't play well in all of these matches," Alcaraz said. "All I can do now is practice to be better."

"I have some weeks before the US Open. But now I have to be focused (from Monday) on Cincinnati. It's a Masters 1000. It's a big tournament as well."

"I take a lot of lessons from this tournament."

Paul, ranked 14th, repeated his defeat of the Spaniard a year ago in the Montreal second round and now faces a semi-final against sixth seed Jannik Sinner, who defeated French showman Gael Monfils 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

"It's never easy to play Gael," Sinner said. "I just tried to stick to



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain waves to the fans as he leaves the court after the defeat

my game plan. "I'm having my best season, I'm happy to be in the semis. I hope to raise my level tomorrow."

Paul, meanwhile, was trying to figure out how he got past Alcaraz.

"I don't know if I think I have the recipe, but I played a really good match today," Paul said after notching another Canadian win over the Spaniard.

"I went after my shots. You can't start any points on your heels against him, he'll take advantage of it so you've really got to go after your shots early in the rally."

"Luckily I was feeling really good, playing first-strike tennis."

Alcaraz struggled early for the second straight match after barely escaping a third-round encounter with Hubert Hurkacz.

The reigning Wimbledon and US Open champion had 27 winners and 30 unforced errors while Paul's numbers were 19 and 29.

After losing serve three times in the opening set, Alcaraz recovered enough to take the second.

But the Spaniard was well off his game, floating a volley wide to trail 4-2 in the final set.

Paul took quick advantage, advancing on his second match point from an Alcaraz return wide.

"I knew he would be there in the third set," Paul said, adding: "It helps to have beaten an opponent before. That attitude is important."

Second-seeded Daniil Medvedev was also sent spinning out of the tournament, falling 7-6 (9/7), 7-5 to Australian Alex de Minaur.



Iga Swiatek

Swiatek holds off Collins to line up Montreal semi-final with Pegula

Montreal, Canada - World number one Iga Swiatek outlasted a determined Danielle Collins 6-3, 4-6, 6-2 on Friday to book a semi-final clash with Jessica Pegula at the WTA Montreal Open.

Swiatek looked on the way to a quick win when she rode two breaks of serve to a 5-1 lead in the opening set. But Collins, the first qualifier to reach the quarter-finals of the event since 2019, overcame an early break in the second and broke Swiatek for a second time in the 10th game to force the third set.

From there, however, Swiatek was in control. She broke Collins for a second time for a 5-2 lead and claimed the victory on her third match point with a sizzling forehand winner.

"I really wanted to play powerful and I'm pretty happy that I managed to even increase the power in the third set," said

Swiatek, who claimed her fourth career Grand Slam title at the French Open this year.

Swiatek, whose Thursday win over Karolina Muchova took nine hours to complete thanks to two lengthy rain delays, said her energy level was still high.

"For sure tomorrow is going to be a little bit tougher since we have not a lot of time to recover, but physically I've been really well prepared," she said.

Fourth-seeded Pegula reached the semi-finals for a third straight year with a 6-2, 5-7, 7-5 victory over her sixth-seeded doubles partner Coco Gauff, whose nine double faults ultimately proved too much to overcome.

"It's always tough to play your doubles partner," said Pegula, whose victory marked the end of a four-match skid against top-10 players.

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MANSOUR'S masterpieces

Exclusive art of Palestinian artist, Sliman Mansour, spanning 50 years, is on display at Zawyeh Gallery, in Palestine, for a month

Zawyeh Gallery in Ramallah, Palestine, has announced the opening of the 'Sliman Mansour: Limited Edition' exhibition on August 12, showcasing 21 iconic artworks by Sliman Mansour, carefully curated from his extensive work spanning the past five decades.

The exhibition features a unique collection of hand-signed limited-edition prints, exhibited for the first time. The complete collection of artworks will be available online, providing a broader audience with the opportunity to view and potentially acquire

pieces that capture the essence of Mansour's work, a press release said.

Ziad Anani, founder and director of Zawyeh Gallery, emphasised, "The exhibition celebrates the art of Sliman Mansour and his profound portrayal of Palestinian resilience, identity, and connection to the land. It provides an exceptional chance for the audience to view Mansour's artworks, including some of his early works from the 70s and 80s."

He adds that what makes this exhibition unique is the opportunity to see a selection of Mansour's masterpieces all in one place, especially given the artist's limited produc-

The exhibition celebrates the art of Sliman Mansour and his profound portrayal of Palestinian resilience, identity, and connection to the land

ZIAD ANANI
Founder and Director of Zawyeh Gallery



tion and artistic presence during the past period. While Mansour's works have found homes in museums worldwide, his last solo exhibition was held a while ago (in 2011) at the Palestinian Art Court (Al Hoash) in Jerusalem.

Born in 1947 in Birzeit, Sliman Mansour is one of the prominent Palestinian artists and a founding member of the art movement in Palestine. He is renowned for his captivating works that reflect the Palestinian heritage and struggle

over the years. His paintings often feature powerful Palestinian symbols associated with the land, depicting themes such as Jerusalem, Palestinian nature and rural life, and Palestinian women in traditional embroidered dresses, among others.

The Ramallah exhibition welcomes visitors every day, except Fridays, from August 12 to November 12, while the international audience can visit the exhibition online through www.zawyeh.net.



A section of the stolen exhibits which are to be returned to Italy

New York returns over 40 stolen antiquities to Italy

New York authorities on Tuesday returned to Italy several dozen stolen antiquities worth nearly US\$3.5mn, as the American megapolis strives to shake off the reputation as a key global hub for illicit art trade.

Investigators handed back 42 exceptional pieces - some 2,500 years old - to Italian officials during a ceremony in New York, according to a statement from Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg.

"We continue to undo the damage wrought by decades of well-organised

antiquities smuggling networks throughout Italy," Bragg said, adding that more than 200 antiquities have been repatriated to Italy since he took office in 2022.

Vincenzo Molinese, commander of the Italian government's so-called Carabinieri Art Squad, hailed 'the great success of the investigation' thanks to collaboration between the United States and Italy.

Among the works found and returned was a vase from the region of Apulia in southern Italy that dates back to 335 BC. It was stolen from a burial

site before being smuggled abroad by Giacomo Medici, a notorious trafficker of Italian antiquities, according to prosecutors.

After passing through London, the bowl, which was used to mix water and wine, was seized in July from a private collection in New York last month.

Since 2017, New York prosecutors have repatriated pieces that were looted from around 20 countries between the 1970s and 1990s. These included works from ancient Greece, the Roman and Byzantine empires, Iraq, China, India and Southeast Asia.





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Marianne Dubuis stared intently through a magnifying glass, using a slim cutter to make tiny incisions in paper as she carved out delicate tableaux of life and human emotions.

However, "if we keep doing the same things



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MARIANNE DUBUIS

over and over, the tradition dies", said Dubuis, who wants to reinvent the art form in her own way.

CLASSIC ALPINE SCENES

His works, as well as the more numerous creations of other masters in the field such as Louis Saugy and Christian Schwitzguebel, sell at auction for several tens of thousands of francs (dollars), according to Emmanuel Bailly.

"When I have a private commission, they come and tell me about their life," she said. "I put in what I feel about this person - the essence of what they told me."

FROM WILLIAM TELL TO UN

Dubuis weaves in modernity with tradition to carve out images of Switzerland today. At the end of 2021, she created a 50sqcm work representing historical heroes like William Tell as well as chocolate, mountain rescue helicopters or the international organisations based in the country, such as the United Nations.

Intricate artworks with intricate carvings involves painstaking efforts to maintain the essence of each piece

Swiss paper cutting artist Marianne Dubuis works on a piece at her home, in Chateau d'Oex, in western Switzerland



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