

NEWS BRIEF

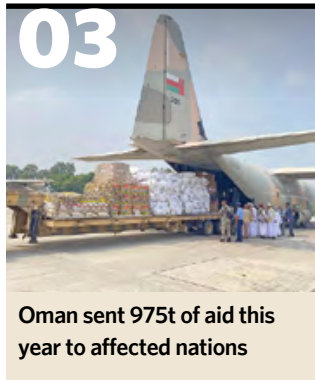
NEPTUNE'S CLOUDS MYSTERIOUSLY DISAPPEAR

California, US - The 11-year solar cycle of the Sun is responsible for Neptune's clouds disappearing, according to a new study made using the Hubble Space Telescope.

Neptune is the most distant planet from the Sun, and its orbit is so huge that its seasons each last about 40 years.

But seasonal changes aren't what are driving changes in Neptune's cloudy weather: it's the rhythmic activity of the Sun.

This is despite the fact that Neptune is so far away and receives just 0.1% of sunlight intensity compared to Earth.



Oman sent 975t of aid this year to affected nations



Mosques investigated in Pakistan riots



Japanese turn to wearable tech to beat the heat

India-Oman platform to start new era in space exploration, GIS data sharing

Our Correspondent Muscat

The India-Oman Space Platform was inaugurated on Thursday, heralding a new era for Oman in harnessing satellite data across multiple sectors, especially for natural disaster management.

Developed by Indian Space Research Organisation, the web-based Geographic Information System (GIS) platform offers invaluable images and data sourced from Indian earth observation satellites. Its integration with terrestrial space applications is poised to transform various developmental sectors, including but not limited to agriculture, water, fisheries, transportation, urban development, renewable energy, and notably, natural disaster management.

The inauguration ceremony took place at Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO)



headquarters in Bengaluru during a visit by H E Said Hamood al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Informa-

tion Technology. The minister engaged in discussions with S Somanath, Chair-

distinguished officials and experts from the space research body.

Apart from gaining insights

into India's vast space endeavours, both parties deliberated on expanding bilateral cooperation in space research and related in-

dustries.

On the sidelines of the visit, the delegation took a tour of the Indian satellite control and monitoring centre. The Omani delegation received a detailed briefing on the critical phase when India's Chandrayaan-3 vehicle decou-

The platform's integration with terrestrial space applications is poised to transform various developmental sectors

pled from its propulsion module, embarking on its mission to touch down on the lunar surface.

Further enriching the visit, H E Maawali and his delegation engaged with Indian space companies getting a glimpse of their capabilities and innovations while showcasing investment prospects in Oman.

Fitch affirms EDO rating at 'BB' with positive outlook

Our Correspondent Muscat

Global credit ratings agency Fitch has affirmed Energy Development Oman's (EDO) long-term issuer default rating (IDR) at 'BB' with a positive outlook.

EDO's long-term IDR is constrained by the rating of its sole shareholder, the Government of Oman, due to their close links in line with the agency's government-related entities rating criteria, Fitch stated in a commentary issued on Friday.

EDO, Oman's national energy company, owns a participating interest in two concessions, accounting for approximately 65% of Oman's oil and gas production. Fitch Ratings has revised



EDO's standalone credit profile (SCP) to 'bbb+' from 'bbb'.

'We have revised EDO's standalone credit profile due to its growing track record of maintaining a prudent financial profile and successfully managing the size and scale of reserves and production within the current fis-

cal framework,' the rating agency said.

According to Fitch, EDO's SCP remains supported by its large-scale oil and gas operations, and robust and resilient cash flow generation, thanks to contracted sales prices for gas and a flexible royalty framework. Additionally,

EDO maintains a flexible dividend policy and has low leverage.

Moreover, the rating agency expects the Omani government to continue providing support to EDO when necessary, given its pivotal role within Oman's infrastructure and economy.

'The oil and gas sector represents a significant portion of the Omani economy, with EDO's Block 6 concessions accounting for a substantial share of the nation's total oil and gas reserves. Furthermore, EDO is one of the largest corporate employers in Oman. Therefore, we assess the socio-political implications of default as strong,' Fitch stated.

According to Fitch's forecast, EDO will maintain a strong financial profile until 2026.



Over 27,000 students get admission for higher education in 2023/24

Muscat - The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) of Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has announced that a total of 27,629 students have secured admission in the first allotment for academic year 2023/2024 in higher education institutions, and granted scholarships or study allowances within Oman and abroad. The ministry said that 93% of the available seats were filled.

Dr Hamad Khalfan al Nu'amani, Director General of HEAC, informed that students who have secured admission have one week - from August 17 to August 23 - to complete registration formalities. He noted that students can complete their registration through the HEAC portal or other electronic channels that have been

announced.

Providing a breakdown of the admissions and scholarships and study allowances granted, Nu'amani stated that government higher education institutions accommodated 55.6% of the total number of students who secured admission and 42.2% were awarded internal study grants, while 2.2% were granted scholarships to study abroad.

Nu'amani added that HEAC will extend a 'mischoice service' to students, offering them an opportunity to amend their preferences from August 28 to 30 and contest for vacant seats, provided they meet eligibility criteria.

Scholarship seats offered by private higher education institutions and private sector companies increased 59.4% compared to last year.

Oman's exports to China jump 26.7% to \$36.24bn

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman's exports to China saw a significant jump of 26.7% to a total of US\$36.24bn in 2022. The overall trade volume between the two nations also saw an increase - of 25.8% - amounting to US\$40.45bn.

Chinese investments in Oman in 2022 reached US\$9.5bn, with new direct investments surging to US\$21.74mn, marking an impressive growth of 116.75%.

These figures were disclosed



by H E Li Lingbing, Ambassador of China to Oman, at an Omani-Chinese Forum in Salalah titled 'Historical Relations and Promising Prospects'.

The event, a collaboration between Oman-China Friendship Association, the Chinese Embas-

Chinese investments in Oman in 2022 reached US\$9.5bn, with new direct investments surging to US\$21.74mn, marking an impressive growth of 116.75%

H E LI LINGBING

sy in Oman and Al Roya newspaper, celebrated significant milestones - tenth anniversary of the Belt and Road initiative and the 45th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Sheikh Ghosn Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of State Audit Institu-

tion, presided over the ceremony. Hon Hatim Hamad al Ta'ee, Member of State Council, highlighted Dhofar's historical significance as a bridge between Omani and Chinese cultures. He recounted how Dhofar was a beacon guiding Chinese vessels,

highlighting the importance of Omani frankincense to Chinese maritime expeditions.

H E Lingbing conveyed her pleasure at revisiting Salalah, her previous trip having been to inaugurate the monument of Chinese navigator Zheng He.

Dr Khalid al Saeedi, Chairman of Oman-China Friendship Association, praised the forum for showcasing the enduring relationship between the two countries. He acknowledged the shared commitment of both nations to increase trade and economic ties.

17-day Jabal Akhdar Festival concludes with over 60,000 visitors

Our Correspondent Muscat

The second edition of Jabal Akhdar Festival drew its curtains on Saturday attracting over 60,000 enthusiasts from both within and outside Oman.

Held from August 3 to 19, the festival offered attendees a refreshing experience amidst scenic hills and pleasant summer weather, painting a panorama of

natural beauty combined with an engaging family environment.

The event, a collaboration between Dakhliyah governorate and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, witnessed an array of activities that catered to all age groups. There were sections dedicated to youth, children, Omani cuisine, local farmers of Jabal Akhdar and one where children immersed in the culinary world with Omani chefs.



(Supplied photo)

The festival's entertainment segment included international theatre shows like Aladdin and Chemical Science. Adventure enthusiasts were treated to the Jabal Akhdar Mountain Bike Race, a tourist walk and the Himam Trail Run. Paragliding performances further elevated the festival's thrill factor.

Ahmed bin Salem al Toubi, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs in Dakhliyah,

described the festival as a success. "It serves as a platform to highlight our diverse service and development projects in Jabal Akhdar," he said.

Toubi informed that 34 institutions and 45 productive families participated in the festival and added that the governorate will actively gather visitor feedback to further enhance the festival's offerings in the subsequent years.

Comedian Vir Das brings ‘Mind Fool Tour’ to Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Internationally acclaimed standup comedian and actor Vir Das is set to enthrall audiences in Oman as part of his extensive ‘Mind Fool Tour’.

Launching on September 13 at Tokyo’s Club eX located in Shinnagawa Prince Hotel, the seven-month tour will go to numerous historic venues in several countries.

The show in Oman is scheduled for September 28 at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

Additionally, Das has earmarked two more performances for Middle East comedy enthusiasts. On September 29, Dubai’s iconic Dubai Opera will host the comedian, followed by a September 30 show at The Quarry in Zallaq, Bahrain.

Characterised by sharp observational comedy, nuanced cultural commentary and unapologetic satire, Das’s comedic approach resonates universally.

He possesses the ability to transform everyday scenarios into comedic material, striking a chord with diverse audiences. Whether he’s spotlighting his own experiences or exploring the nuances of human behaviour, Das’s humour stands out for its authenticity and candor.

Apart from captivating live



Characterised by sharp observational comedy, nuanced cultural commentary and unapologetic satire, Das’s comedic approach resonates universally

audiences, Das has made notable contributions to screen entertainment. He has showcased his versatility by featuring in, producing and creating various series such as Netflix’s *Hasmukh* and Amazon’s *Jestination Unknown*.

His latest tour follows a highly successful fourth Netflix comedy

special, which was not only met with critical acclaim but also consolidated his position as a major force in India’s live entertainment scene last year. This success transcended borders, marking him as a top comedy seller on the global stage.

Tickets are available at www.livenation.me

Masar project in Amerat a boon for street vendors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality unveiled the Masar project in Amerat on Thursday, marking a significant development in redefining street vending activities in the city. The initiative is set to centralise street vendor operations, enhancing not only the urban aesthetic but also ensuring safety and orderliness.

At its core, the project’s vision is to maintain the cultural charm of street vending while introducing rigorous food quality standards. By providing a designated area for street vendors, the project aims to reduce the environmental impact, particularly from grilling carts, on residential spaces.

A critical aspect of the Masar project is to rejuvenate the business environment for street vendors, ensuring they can operate without inadvertently causing traffic congestion. The municipality’s goal is to eliminate random and unsystematic sales methods and enhance the overall visual appeal of the area. One of the strategic moves involves repositioning entrances and exits to keep vending sites at a safe distance from residential communities.

Designed to accommodate up to 20 vendor vehicles, the new



site has infrastructure improvements, including 12 lighting poles, marble waste disposal containers, seating areas and restrooms. Earlier this year, Muscat Mu-

nicipality revised regulations for mobile vending. The new guidelines serve as a testament to the municipality’s commitment to preserving urban spaces. ‘Our

objective is to ensure these businesses operate within a structured, legal framework that prioritises public safety,’ the civic body stated.

The updated regulations stipulate that only Omanis are eligible to run mobile vending businesses. Vendors are mandated to secure initial approval for their intended activity and can only commence operations after obtaining final consent from the municipality of the concerned wilayat. Furthermore, all licensed vendors are obligated to meet established health criteria while conducting business.

Dhahirah announces design competition for tourism fest

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhahirah governorate has issued a call for creative designs that suitably depict the name and theme of the forthcoming Dhahirah Tourism Festival. Both companies and individual Omani designers are encouraged to submit entries that reflect the historical landmarks of the governorate.

An official from the Office of Governor of Dhahirah emphasised the need for a design that has a contemporary flair while honouring the governorate’s rich history. “We’re seeking a design that is not only modern and unique but deeply rooted in the historical landmarks of the governorate,” the official stated.

Entries are required to utilise professional design software to ensure the submitted logo can be easily adapted for different platforms, especially social media. Participants are allowed to sub-



mit up to two designs, and the deadline for submission is August 31. The chosen design will be awarded RO5,000.

Shedding light on the broader vision behind the festival, the official said, “Our goal in hosting such festivals is multi-fold: to boost local tourism, spotlight our diverse heritage and augment Oman’s position on the global tourism map. Furthermore, such events support the local commu-

nity, bolster small and medium enterprises and increase hotel bookings.”

Expanding on the festival’s offerings, the official added, “Dhahirah Tourism Festival will feature a variety of events spanning culture, heritage and entertainment. Attendees can also look forward to unique adventure activities and tourism experiences exclusive to the governorate.”

300t of waste removed in cleanup in Seeb

Muscat - In an effort to enhance the aesthetics of public spaces, Muscat Municipality in Seeb recently launched an extensive cleanup operation across the entire wilayat. The initiative saw the removal of

300 tonnes of waste in 57 lots. The operation was executed by a team of 40 workers, working throughout the wilayat.

Juma al Amiri, Director of Health Affairs Department in Seeb, emphasised the cam-

paign’s commitment to eliminating all irregularities in Seeb. “We strive to enhance the cleanliness of our surroundings. We urge everyone to uphold cleanliness and prevent waste accumulation.”



وَلَاةُ الصِّحَّةِ
سُلْطَنَة عُومَان
SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ننقدم بثقة
Moving Forward
with Confidence



رؤية عُومَان
2040
Oman

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/ DGKH-30/3075/2023	Replacement of Pressurization Unit for Phase 5 at Khoula Hospital	03/September/2023	27/September/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25,000

Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via **Telephone: 24402200** , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



SEND USD WORLDWIDE
FOR BUSINESS, EDUCATION,
FIXED DEPOSITS & MORE

OMR 4 SERVICE FEE

SIMPLE | SECURE | SWIFT

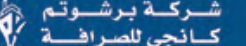


SEND MONEY TO ANY
BANK ACCOUNT IN UAE FOR
CORPORATES AND INDIVIDUALS

OMR 2.5 SERVICE FEE



PURSHOTTAM KANJI
EXCHANGE



شركة برشوتم
كانجي للصرافة



Download in App Store



Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn



OMAN'S EXCHANGE

Oman sent 975 tonnes of aid this year to affected nations

The significance of WHD can be traced back to a tragic inci-



The UN General Assembly, in memory of those killed, desig-

The modern world is fraught with complexities, witnessing the

Oman, in this global landscape, stands as a beacon of hope. Through coordinated efforts spanning governmental and societal sectors, it ceaselessly works towards alleviating global suffering based on meticulously crafted strategies.

ASMED begins 7th edition of 'Inspiration and Success'

The mentoring programme will engage 50 SME owners and budding startups following the country's mission to nurture entrepreneurial spirit in the Sultanate.

Now in its seventh edition, 'In-

By facilitating training seminars, the initiative aims to instill and popularise the essence of entrepreneurship throughout Oman.

EA calls for investments to boost ecotourism in Dhofar

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Positioned at Jabal al Qamar's eastern tip, Khawr al Mughhsail -

The EA sees a wealth of un-

as per the agreed future investment and management model.

Investors must submit a comprehensive development plan, including the project's components, its construction, and man-

'Careful attention must be given to preserve natural and cultural heritage and prohibit activities potentially harmful to the site's environmental and cultural values'. Alongside this, the EA of-

The EA also requires details about the company, its organisational structure, and proven expertise in managing ecotourism ventures.



Dhofar Foods & Investment S.A.O.G

P.O. Box 1220 – PC 211 – Phone 23225381 – Fax 23225258

Financial Statements Consolidated and Parent Company for period ended 30th June 2023

Chairman's Communique

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to place before you the unaudited group results of your company for the 2nd quarter ended 30th June 2023.

Financial Performance

Group

The group revenue for the period ended 30th June '23 was RO 20,522 Million, as compared to RO 19,072 Million achieved during the 2nd quarter of previous year. Group's gross profit for the period under review was RO 2,702 Million as against RO 3,454 Million achieved during 2nd quarter of previous year. The loss after tax for the period under review was RO (1,616) Million as against a profit after tax of RO 122 K during the same period last year.

Company

The company achieved a Revenue of RO 17,612 Million during the period under review, compared to RO 15,756 Million with increased of 12% compared to the previous year. The sale revenue increased were mainly due to feed mill sale increased and dairy products sale increased for 2nd quarter after dairy sale price adjustment. The international grain price are still on the high side due to Russia and Ukraine conflict which has high impact to period revenue and loss. The gross profit for the period reduced to RO 2,133 Million compared to RO 2,651 Million achieved during the same period of previous year despite 12% revenue increase due to international raw material price increase. The company loss after tax estimated RO (1,152) Million compared to profit RO 274K for same period last year.

The macro-economic indicators shows reduced level of liquidity, slow pace of investment and government projects delay and increasing interest costs, in-addition to dividend reduction of from listed Companies for current period.

The total assets of the company decreased by 6.7% and stood at RO 44,452 Million as compared to RO 47,626 Million at the same period of previous year. The NAV stood at 228 Bzs as against NAV of 296 Bzs as of last year. We believe this is mainly due to low market value of company investment available for sale for the current period.

Corporate Governance

The Company believes that to succeed on a sustainable basis, it must maintain high standards of corporate governance towards its shareholders, employees, consumers and community. To this end, the Company has always and will remain focused on good corporate governance. Your company has adhered to all the regulations covering corporate governance in Oman and your Board is fully committed to ensure compliance of all the applicable rules and regulations.

Omanisation / Training

Your company attaches enormous importance to Human Resources as a strategic asset with specific attention to employ and nurture the local Omani talent. We continue to develop our staff to lay the foundation for our future growth with great amount of

emphasis being done to develop local talent.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Board, I express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tareq for his wise leadership and constant and generous support extended to the private sector. I would also like to thank our Management, staff, bankers, suppliers and our customers for their continuous trust placed upon your company.

Nasser Bin Mohammed Salim Al Harthi
Chairman

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE 6 MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUN 2023

	Group 2023 RO'000	Parent Company 2023 RO'000	Group 2022 RO'000	Parent Company 2022 RO'000
INCOME				
Revenue from sales of goods and services	20,481	17,565	19,031	15,709
Rental income	41	47	41	47
Cost of sales	(17,819)	(15,479)	(15,617)	(13,105)
Gross profit	2,702	2,133	3,454	2,651
EXPENSES				
Selling and distribution	2,740	2,200	2,744	2,272
General and administration	1,136	696	1,144	727
Directors' remuneration and meeting	72	52	61	43
	3,948	2,948	3,949	3,043
Profit / (loss) from operations	(1,246)	(815)	(495)	(392)
Investment income (net)	196	196	282	282
Other income	184	120	935	904
Share of result of associates	140	-	334	-
Finance costs (net)	(890)	(653)	(776)	(521)
Profit / (loss) before taxation	(1,616)	(1,152)	280	274
Taxation	-	-	-	-
Net profit / (loss) for the year	(1,616)	(1,152)	280	274
Other comprehensive income for the year:				
Potentially reclassifiable to the income statement:				
Movement in Fair value reserve	19	19	(1,642)	(1,642)
Deferred tax effect on movement in fair value reserve	-	-	-	-
Other comprehensive income for the year	19	19	(1,642)	(1,642)
Total comprehensive income for the year	(1,597)	(1,133)	(1,362)	(1,368)
Net profit / (loss) attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	(1,567)	(1,152)	321	274
Non-controlling interest	(49)	-	(41)	-
	(1,616)	(1,152)	122	274
Total comprehensive income attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	(1,548)	(1,133)	(1,472)	(1,368)
Non-controlling interest	(49)	-	(47)	-
	(1,597)	(1,133)	(1,519)	(1,368)
Basic earnings per share (RO)	(0.019)	(0.014)	0.002	0.003

	Group 2023 RO'000	Parent Company 2023 RO'000	Group 2022 RO'000	Parent Company 2022 RO'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	12,720	6,826	13,516	7,278
Right-of-use assets	954	824	1,040	920
Intangible assets	41	20	62	28
Investments in subsidiaries	0	1,992	0	2,933
Investments in associates	4,051	2,812	3,237	2,812
Fair Value through other comprehensive income	11,816	11,816	12,800	12,800
Investment properties	2,090	2,090	2,090	2,090
Biological assets	4,074	4,074	4,825	4,825
Deferred tax asset	101	96	384	232
Total non-current assets	35,847	30,550	37,954	33,918
Current assets				
Inventories and biological assets	10,118	7,375	10,778	8,478
Accounts and other receivables	5,361	5,924	6,333	4,994
Bank balances and cash	866	603	442	236
Total current assets	16,346	13,902	17,553	13,708
Total assets	52,193	44,452	55,507	47,626
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	8,085	8,085	8,085	8,085
Legal reserve	2,599	2,599	2,599	2,599
Voluntary reserve	3,712	3,712	3,712	3,712
Revaluation reserve	525	0	525	0
Fair value reserve	3,778	3,778	4,662	4,662
Retained earnings	185	268	4,080	4,897
Equity attributable to Shareholders of the Parent Company	18,884	18,442	23,663	23,955
Non-controlling interest	-19	-	55	-
Total equity and non-controlling interest	18,865	18,442	23,718	23,955
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Non-current portion of term loans	5,300	4,470	992	283
Employees' end of service benefits	964	634	910	617
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	598	488	673	573
Deferred tax liability	14	-	13	-
Total non-current liabilities	6,876	5,592	2,588	1,473
Current liabilities				
Bank borrowings	14,686	9,897	18,950	13,855
Current portion of term loans	883	235	1,769	1,519
Accounts and other payables	10,488	9,905	8,065	6,432
Current portion of lease liabilities	392	380	413	392
Income Tax Payables	3	0	4	0
Total current liabilities	26,451	20,417	29,201	22,198
Total liabilities	33,328	26,010	31,789	23,671
Total equity and liabilities	52,193	44,452	55,507	47,626
Net assets per share (RO)	0.234	0.228	0.293	0.296

Note : The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any share- holder who request the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request.

Bank lending grows 6.5% in H1; deposits up 4.4%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank credit growth in Oman accelerated to nearly seven per cent in the first half of 2023 as compared to below five per cent credit growth recorded in 2022, according to the Central Bank of Oman.

Total outstanding credit extended by the banking sector (both conventional and Islamic banks) grew by 6.5% to RO30.3bn as of June 2023 against the same month of the previous year, the CBO said in its monthly statistical bulletin.

Of the total outstanding credit, bank credit to the private sector demonstrated increased growth of 7.0% year-on-year to reach RO25.4bn. Non-financial corporations received the highest shares of the total private sector credit, at approximately 45.9% at end-June 2023, followed by household sector at 44.4%. The share of financial corporations was 6.0% while other sectors received the remaining 3.7% of total private



sector credit.

Conventional banks' total outstanding credit grew by 5.1% year-on-year in June this year. Conventional banks' credit to the private sector increased 5.4% to RO20.2bn while their overall investments in securities dropped by 5.9% to RO4.6bn, the CBO data showed.

Banks' investment in government development bonds decreased by 5.1% year-on-year to RO2.1bn in June, while their investments in foreign securities

dramatically rose by 90.8% to RO1.3bn.

On the other hand, total banking sector deposits in Oman grew by 4.4% to RO27.5bn at the end of June 2023 against the same period a year ago.

Total private sector deposits increased by 2.7% to RO18bn. In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest contribution was from household deposits at 51.8%, followed by non-financial corporations at 29.6%, financial

corporations at 15.6% and other sectors at 2.9%.

Aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 3.1% year-on-year to RO22.2bn at end-June 2023. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 66.4% of total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 2.1% as of June 2023 to reach RO14.8bn.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase of 7.7% at RO5.4bn and deposits of public enterprises increased by 1.6% to RO1.6bn.

Total assets of Islamic banks and windows in Oman increased by 12.5% on a year-on-year basis to reach RO7bn at the end of June 2023.

Islamic assets now constitute about 17.2% of the total banking system assets in Oman as of the end-June 2023.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO5.8bn at the end of June 2023, recording a growth of 12.8% over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 10.6% to RO5.2bn.

Saudi, Oman and UAE bet big on green hydrogen

Dubai, UAE - After riding a fossil-fuel boom for decades, Gulf Arab states are eyeing "green" hydrogen as they try to transition their economies and ease the climate crisis at a stroke.

Oil producers Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman are investing heavily in the climate-friendly fuel in a search for alternative revenues to crude and gas.

Green hydrogen, which is the hydrogen created when renewable energy electrolyses water, appears to solve many problems: it is low-polluting and has widespread potential uses, which could make it lucrative and planet-saving at the same time.

But the fuel, which currently makes up less than one per cent of total hydrogen production, is not yet commercially viable and needs a major scaling-up of renewable energy sources - a process that could take years.

Despite this, the Gulf nations sense an opportunity to remain major players in energy markets as oil revenues fall.

"Gulf states aim to lead the global hydrogen market," said Karim Elgendy, associate fellow at Britain's Chatham House think tank.

"They see green hydrogen as critical to remain major energy powers, allowing them to continue their influence as fossil fuel demand declines."

Most hydrogen is produced from polluting fossil fuels, but green hydrogen is extracted from water using renewable energy such as wind, solar and hydropower.

'Export leaders'

Wielding its massive investment capital, oil-rich Saudi Arabia is constructing the world's largest green hydrogen plant at NEOM, the \$500bn futuristic megacity



Gulf states are aiming to lead the global hydrogen market (AFP)

being built on the Red Sea. The \$8.4bn plant will integrate solar and wind energy to produce up to 600 tonnes of green hydrogen a day by the end of 2026, officials say.

In July the UAE, which will host the United Nations' COP28 climate conference this year, approved a hydrogen strategy that aims to make it one of the top 10 producers by 2031.

Oman, which lags Saudi Arabia and the UAE in fossil fuel production, looks poised to lead the Gulf's clean hydrogen race

"Hydrogen will be a critical fuel for the energy transition," said Hanan Balalaa, a senior official at the UAE's oil firm ADNOC, calling it a "natural extension" for the company.

"We believe hydrogen and its carrier fuels have great potential as new, low carbon fuels, that the UAE is well placed to capitalise" on, Balalaa told AFP.

But it is Oman, which lags Saudi Arabia and the UAE in fossil fuel production, that looks poised to lead the Gulf's clean

hydrogen race.

The sultanate is on track to become the sixth-largest exporter globally and the biggest in the Middle East by the end of the decade, the International Energy Agency said in a June report.

Oman aims to produce at least one million tonnes of green hydrogen a year by 2030, and up to 8.5mn tonnes by 2050, "which would be greater than total hydrogen demand in Europe today", the IEA said.

According to auditing firm Deloitte, Middle Eastern countries, primarily the Gulf, will lead global clean hydrogen trade in the short-term, exporting around half of their domestic production by 2030.

By 2050, North Africa and Australia are projected to have the greatest potential, although Gulf states will remain "export leaders", the company said in a June report.

The investment in green hydrogen has not curbed expansion in oil and gas, with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia planning to grow their hydrocarbon industries.

Experts predict it could still take years before Gulf countries can produce green hydrogen at a cost competitive with fossil fuel-based alternatives.

AFP

CBO attends annual IFSB meetings in Riyadh

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) attended the annual meetings of the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB)—the 42nd Council meeting and the 21st general assembly— which took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia during August 15-16, 2023.

The meetings were hosted by the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA).

During the annual meetings, the Council of the IFSB approved

the reports prepared by the IFSB secretariat, endorsed the recommendations of the IFSB executive committee, adopted decisions on administrative and financial matters, and approved the priorities for the coming year.

The CBO also attended the symposium commemorating the IFSB's 20th anniversary, and the Islamic Financial Stability Forum, which were held on the sidelines of the annual meetings.

Based in Kuala Lumpur,

Malaysia, the IFSB was established in 2002 by a group of financial regulators and supervisors interested in safeguarding the soundness and stability of Islamic financial services.

The IFSB's work complements that of the Basel Banking Supervision Committee and other international organisations concerned with financial regulation and supervision, by developing new international standards or adapting existing

ones in line with the Islamic Shariah principles.

The IFSB's 20th anniversary coincides with the 10th anniversary of the roll-out of Islamic banking business in Oman. Since its inception, the Islamic banking sector in Oman has grown remarkably.

On behalf of H E Tahir al Amri, executive president of the CBO, the Omani delegation was headed by Malik al Mahrooqi, advisor to the executive president of the CBO.

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX index posts weekly gains as financial stocks rise

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) reported gains for the last week, mainly supported by positive movement in the financial sector stocks.

The MSX30 Index closed at 4,785.26 points at the end of last week, gaining 0.59% compared to the previous week's close, which stood at 4,757.21 points. Financial Index rose the most by 0.35% while MSX Shariah Index also closed higher by 0.05%.

However, Services Index closed down by 0.8% and Industrial Index fell by 1.8% during the last week.

Local news

►Oman's general budget registered a surplus of RO656mn by the end of the first half of 2023, compared to a surplus of RO784mn achieved over the same period in 2022. According to the Fiscal Performance Bulletin issued by the Ministry of Finance, public revenue of the state budget at the end of the first half of 2023 amounted to RO6.342bn, down by 6% compared to RO6.725bn registered over the same period in 2022. At the end of the first half of 2023, net oil revenue amounted to RO3.257bn, up by 2% when compared to RO3.187bn registered

over the same period in 2022. The average oil prices amounted to \$83 per barrel while average daily oil production reached 1.061mn barrels per day.

►Renaissance Services has been awarded a RO2.7mn contract by the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital. The awarded contract is for the provision of catering services to patients and attendants for two years (from January 12, 2024 to January 11, 2026).

►Samail Industrial City, which is under the Public Authority for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has achieved significant growth in performance indicators during the first half of 2023. It has signed 15 contracts to attract projects covering an area of 100,000 square meters, with investments reaching up to RO13.5mn. The total number of projects located in the industrial city reached 156, with 94 projects in the production phase, 43 projects under construction, and 19 projects in the planning phase. The total investment in these projects amounts to RO150mn, and they are spread over an area of 2.2mn square metres, employing 2,600 workers.

►Oman's Ministry of Transport, Communications, and In-



formation Technology (MTCIT) has welcomed a new entrant to the country's thriving data hosting and processing sector. The Afaaq for Advanced Technologies data hosting and cryptocurrency mining center was inaugurated in the Salalah Free Zone. The center, set up by Exahertz International, is valued at over RO135mn and is the second major data hosting and processing venture that the ministry has attracted in recent months. The first, Al-Madina Al-Khadraa, was announced in November 2022 and is valued

at RO150mn.

►Oman LNG has announced the signing of a binding term-sheet agreement with Germany's SEFE Secure Energy for Europe to supply 0.4mn metric tonne per annum (mtpa) of LNG starting from 2026. The agreement is based on a four-year contract, starting in 2026.

►Galfar Engineering & Contracting Company announced that its project pipeline grew to RO644mn by the end of June 2023, supported by major project awards worth RO323mn during the first half of this year.

The company's financial position continued to be positive, supported by a robust order backlog with stable operating profit, Galfar said in its financial report submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

GCC markets

Saudi capital Riyadh aims to double in size over the next seven years on the back of \$1tn infrastructure projects across the city in bid to cater to an ever-increasing population which will soar to 15mn from 7.5mn, experts said in a report

ahead of Cityscape Global Expo. Following the announcement by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi capital is set to experience a surge in construction activity with some \$12.2bn of contracts being awarded till date. A further \$18bn worth of projects are currently at the bidding/evaluation stage with an additional \$170bn to be awarded in the near future, stated the experts.

Saudi Arabia's annual inflation rate, which eased for a second month in July to 2.3% from 2.7% in June, is likely to ease over the remainder of this year to between 1% and 1.5%, the London-based consultancy Capital Economics said. According to data issued last Tuesday by Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Statistics, the price rise was mainly driven by an 8.6% surge for housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels and a 1.4% rise in food and beverage prices.

Saudi Arabia's crude oil exports fell in June to a 21-month low, data from the Joint Organizations Data Initiative (JODI) showed on Wednesday. The world's largest oil exporter saw exports fall by 124,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 6.8mn in June. Saudi production also declined slightly to 9.96mn bpd, which is

a 19-month low. Earlier this month, Saudi Arabia said it will extend its voluntary oil production cut of one million barrels per day until September

Global news

US consumer prices increased moderately in July amid lower costs for goods, including used motor vehicles, a trend that could persuade the Federal Reserve to leave interest rates unchanged next month. The CPI rose 0.2% last month, matching the gain in June, the Labor Department said. Though the increase in the annual CPI rate picked up for the first time in 13 months, that was because it was calculated from a lower base after prices subsided last July following a jump that had boosted inflation to a pace not seen in more than 40 years.

Britain's annual inflation rate dropped sharply in July to a 15-month low, official data revealed Wednesday, on the back of lower energy prices and in line with economists' expectations. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by an annual rate of 6.8%, down from 7.9% in June, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said, easing the country's cost-of-living crisis.

Europe's gas storage hit 90% ahead of November target

Brussels, Belgium – Reserves of natural gas in the EU are filled to 90% of capacity well ahead of a November 1 target date, making it “well-prepared for winter,” its energy commissioner said Friday.

The speedy filling of storage facilities means the bloc is “in a much more stable position than it was this time last year,” when Russia’s invasion of Ukraine sent energy prices soaring, the commissioner, Kadri Simson, said.

The crisis sparked by Russia’s war led to the European Union adopting a law requiring the 90% gas storage by November 1 each year.

Before Moscow launched its invasion in February 2022, Russia accounted for nearly half of the EU’s natural gas imports.



EU has filled 90.12% (93bn cubic metres) of gas storage capacity

Although Russia’s gas is not subject to sweeping EU sanctions, its supply to the EU has dwindled to under ten percent as Moscow has turned off the taps.

That move initially sent energy prices – linked to the price of gas – spiking in mid-2022, but they fell sharply towards the end of the year as Europe benefited

from a mild winter and more gas was shipped in from the United States and the Middle East.

The European Commission said that, as of Friday, the European Union had filled 90.12% of storage capacity, equivalent to 93bn cubic metres of natural gas.

By EU country, the levels varied.

Spain has 99% of its capacity filled, while France has 83% and Latvia 77%.

The commission calculates that, by having 90% storage filled, the EU has enough gas to cover a third of its needs over winter.Simson cautioned that gas prices remained “sensitive”, with it becoming suddenly more costly early this month because of fall-out from a strike threat at Australian gas facilities and robust Asian demand.

The commission would continue to monitor the situation, she said.

EU member countries have committed to reducing gas consumption by 15% between April this year and the end of March 2024.

AFP

US Fed members disagreed over whether to raise rates

Washington, US – A couple of Federal Reserve officials would have backed pausing US interest rate hikes last month, but ultimately supported another increase to tackle high inflation, according to minutes of the meeting published Thursday.

The July gathering saw all 11 voting members of the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) support lifting rates by 25 basis points, as inflation remains stubbornly above the central bank’s long-term two per cent target.

At the same meeting, “most participants” continued to see significant risks that price increases would persist, and this could require further tightening of monetary policy, the minutes showed.

The FOMC decision to raise



Patrick Harker

rates lifted the Fed’s benchmark lending rate to a range between 5.25%-5.5%, its highest level since 2001.

“A couple of participants indicated that they favored leaving the target range for the federal funds rate unchanged or that they could have supported such a proposal,” said the latest report.

They judged that maintaining

the interest rates level would still “likely result in further progress” towards policymakers’ goals while allowing time to evaluate outcomes.

Since the last Fed decision, several FOMC members have voiced sharply different views on the likelihood of further rate hikes, highlighting the divisions that now exist in the most senior ranks of the US central bank.

Fed Governor Michelle Bowman said recently that she expected “additional rate increases will likely be needed to get inflation on a path down to the FOMC’s two percent target.”

But Philadelphia Fed president Patrick Harker took a different view, telling a conference in early August that, barring any “alarming” new data,

AFP

Chinese developer Evergrande files for bankruptcy protection

New York, US – Embattled Chinese property giant Evergrande Group filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States on Thursday, court documents showed, a measure that protects its US assets while it attempts to restructure.

Evergrande, once China’s top property developer, was found in 2021 to be struggling with more than \$300bn in liabilities, as it came under intense pressure after officials tightened scrutiny of the real estate industry.

The company’s woes have come to symbolize the growing crisis in China’s sprawling property sector, which accounts for a huge portion of the world’s number two economy, that many fear could spill over globally.

Several major developers have been hit in the unfolding drama as they fail to complete housing projects, triggering protests and mortgage boycotts from homebuyers.

In July, Evergrande reported a net loss of more than \$113bn in 2021 and 2022.

The group’s liabilities stood

at almost \$340bn at the end of 2022, with \$85bn of borrowings. The developer had about \$2bn in total cash at the time.

In the latest filings in New York, Tianji Holding and Scenery Journey – of which Evergrande is the ultimate holding company – filed for Chapter 15 protection, which provides mechanisms for dealing with insolvency cases involving more than one country.

Evergrande has worked on an offshore debt restructuring agreement for months and unveiled a proposal earlier this year.

The plan offers creditors a choice to swap their debt into new notes issued by the company and equities in two subsidiaries, Evergrande Property Services Group and Evergrande New Energy Vehicle Group.

Evergrande first defaulted on its bonds in 2021, fanning fears of contagion.

The latest court documents referenced restructuring proceedings in Hong Kong.

AFP

ADVERTISEMENT OF SALE BY PUBLIC AUCTION

The legal liquidator of a company announces the disposal of a factory specialized in the manufacture of UPVC doors and windows for sale through public auction, the sale includes the following:

- 1- Factory buildings.
- 2- Manufacturing machinery, equipment and tools.
- 3- The right to assign the factory area that exceeds 4,000 square meters in the Rusayl Industrial Area.
- 4- Office devices and equipment.
- 5- Accounting software.
- 6- Electronic production system.
- 7- Raw materials.

The auction will take place in the office of the legal liquidator located in Al-Khuwair, behind Zakher Mall, at exactly ten o'clock in the morning on Sunday, corresponding to 27/8/2023, and Tuesday, corresponding to 22/8/2023, from nine in the morning until two in the afternoon, has been determined as a date for inspecting the factory components for those wishing to inspect before Auction date.

The participation fee in the auction is the amount of RO 5,000/- (five thousand Omani riyals), which will be refunded at the end of the auction or the amount will be considered to the person who won the auction.

For more details, please contact 71555163



OMAN REINSURANCE COMPANY S.A.O.C
Post Box 1968, Postal Code 114, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman, Telephone: 24397700 Fax: 2439 7777

OMAN REINSURANCE COMPANY S.A.O.G. DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE 6 MONTHS ENDED 30 JUN 2023



Dear Shareholder,

After Compliments,

The Board of Directors is pleased to present the unaudited results of Oman Reinsurance Company S.A.O.G. ("OmanRe" or "the Company") for the six months period ended 30 June 2023 prepared under IFRS 4.

The Financial Highlights for six months ending 30 June 2023 are summarized below:

	30 June 2023 OMR	30 June 2022 OMR
Gross Written Premium (GWP)	29,256,675	21,945,531
Underwriting results	1,737,769	1,589,873
Investment and other income	1,224,099	1,095,957
Expenditure – General and Admin Expenses	(1,709,099)	(1,518,069)
Net Profit after tax	707,048	673,062

Premium and underwriting performance

The company continued to increase its Gross Written Premium (GWP) during the first half of 2023. The GWP for the six months ending 30 June 2023 was OMR 29.2 million which is 33% higher than OMR 21.9 million for same period last year. Underwriting performance has been resilient achieving an underwriting profit of OMR 1.7 million for H1 2023 compared to OMR 1.6 million for H1 2022. This underwriting performance is after taking into account Turkish Earthquake Loss which is a major loss event. The net claims ratio in the first half of 2023 was 59.1% slightly higher than 58.3% of same period last year. Overall combined ratio was 97.0% which is marginally higher than 96.1% of the same period last year.

General and Administrative Expenses

During H1 2023, the total expenditure amounted to OMR 1.7 million as against OMR 1.5 million for the same period in 2022. The general and admin expenses as a percentage of GWP is 5.8% for H1 2023 vs 6.9% for H1 2022.

Investment Income

The investment and other income for the half year ended amounted to OMR 1.2 million vs OMR 1.1 million for the same period last year. The investment income is better than last year is because of favourable interest rate environment.

Net Profitability

The Company's net profit after tax for the first half of 2023 was OMR 707k compared to OMR 673k for the same period last year. The volatile currency environment resulted in a foreign exchange loss of OMR 442k for the period ending 30 June 2023 compared to OMR 353k for the period ending 30 June 2022.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

The Directors of Oman Re wish to acknowledge the valuable guidance and assistance received from the Capital Market Authority, and the support received from clients and business partners. We look forward to receiving their continued support and encouragement.

The Directors also wish to extend their thanks and appreciation and express their gratitude for the continuing commitment and dedication of its strategic shareholders, the Executive Management and employees at all levels. The Directors are thankful to the esteemed shareholders for their support and the confidence placed in the Company and the Board.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Executive Management and the Staff Members, we are honoured to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said for his visionary leadership during these difficult times and we pray to the Almighty God to grant him every strength to continue to lead the Sultanate on the path of sustainable development.

Dr. Juma Bin Ali Al Juma
Chairman of the Board

Condensed Interim statement of financial position as at 30 June 2023 (Expressed in Omani Rial)

	30 June 2023 (Un-audited)	31 December 2022 (Audited)
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	80,890	92,568
Investment property	1,900,000	1,900,000
Investment property under development	184,592	184,592
Intangible assets	108,947	120,887
Investments at fair value through other comprehensive income	31,109,492	29,191,780
Non-current portion of bank deposits	6,267,996	6,590,268
Deferred tax asset	369,260	339,946
Total non-current assets	40,021,177	38,420,041
Current assets		
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	386,672	637,539
Insurance and other receivables	13,697,441	11,025,292
Accrued income	22,815,817	13,964,880
Deferred policy acquisition costs	5,792,195	3,936,555
Reinsurers' share of insurance funds	27,296,260	23,015,386
Current portion of bank deposits	16,070,518	15,826,000
Cash and cash equivalents	1,076,355	2,755,277
Total current assets	87,135,258	71,160,929
Total assets	127,156,435	109,580,970
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	32,615,926	32,615,926
Legal reserve	641,431	641,431
Investment fair value reserve	(1,476,973)	(1,738,919)
Contingency reserve	5,681,236	5,681,236
Accumulated losses	(7,224,376)	(8,110,588)
Total capital and reserves	30,237,244	29,089,086
Non-current liabilities		
Employees' benefit liabilities	340,479	324,998
Total non-current liabilities	340,479	324,998
Current liabilities		
Technical provisions	81,355,879	67,541,322
Reinsurers' premium and other payables	14,991,509	12,356,990
Deferred commission income	231,324	268,574
Total current liabilities	96,578,712	80,166,886
Total liabilities	96,919,191	80,491,884
Total equity and liabilities	127,156,435	109,580,970
Net assets per share	0.0914	0.0879

Condensed Interim statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the six-month period ended 30 June 2023 (un-audited) (Expressed in Omani Rial)

	Period from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2023 (Un-audited)	Period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2022 (Un-audited)
Income		
Gross premiums written	29,256,675	21,945,531
Net underwriting results	1,737,769	1,589,873
Investment and other income, net	1,224,099	1,095,957
	2,961,868	2,685,830
Expenses		
General and administrative expenses	(1,709,099)	(1,518,069)
Foreign exchange losses, net	(442,177)	(353,713)
	(2,151,276)	(1,871,782)
Net profit before tax for the period	810,592	814,048
Income tax expense	(103,544)	(140,986)
Net profit after tax for the period	707,048	673,062
Other comprehensive income:		
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss:		
Valuation gains / (losses) on fair value through other comprehensive income on equity instruments, net of deferred tax	309,652	(506,236)
Items that will or may be reclassified to profit or loss:		
Valuation gains / (losses) on fair value through other comprehensive income on debt instruments, net of deferred tax	131,458	(1,346,859)
Other comprehensive income / (loss) for the period	441,110	(1,853,095)
Total comprehensive income / (loss) for the period	1,148,158	(1,180,033)
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	0.002	0.002

MoH officials visit New Khasab Hospital project, other centres

As part of their filed visits to various health institutions in the country, senior officials from the Health Ministry visited different health institutions, including the New Khasab Hospital project in Musandam.

H E Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs in the ministry, together with Badr Salim al Mammari, Secretary General of Oman's Tender Board, made the visit on Wednesday.

They discussed with the officials in the governorate the health needs in view of the governorate's population and urban growth data and the proposals put forward in this regard by the officials, keeping into considerations the demands of the people of the governorate on the actual need for health services.

The first-day visit included the New Khasab Hospital project where H E Dr Fatima was briefed on the completed stages of the project, listened to a detailed report on work stages and the challenges facing the implementation of the project, and discussed with the officials ways



to solve them.

The visiting delegation included Jamal Salim al Shanfari, Director General of Projects and Engineering Affairs, Ali Abdullah al Shihi, Director General of Musandam Health Services, along with a number of other high officials from the ministry.

The Governorate of Musandam has three hospitals located in Khasab, Bukha, and Daba, in addition to Khasab Polyclinic, and other three health centres

equipped with maternity beds.

Notably, the Ministry of Health is regularly conducting similar visits with the purpose of reviewing the progress of the work in the three healthcare levels of the health institutions (primary, secondary, and tertiary), identifying their needs, and studying the development of the health system infrastructure through direct inspection.

The visits also allow the involvement of health officials and

workers at the visited health institutions to discuss their views and suggestions on enhancing the health work at these institutions.

The second day's programme included a visit to Daba Hospital, its clinics, departments and various wards.

H E Dr Fatima was briefed on the workflow and discussed with the hospital's in-charge officials means to improve health services; urging them to con-

tinue efforts to improve the services provided.

The MoH's Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs Undersecretary also met patients and visitors of the hospital and listened to their suggestions on improving the services in the facility.

This visit was part of the ministry's regular site visits that aim at exploring closely the progress of work at all levels of healthcare of the health institutions.



Health Minister in India for G20 meet

Oman's Health Minister H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti is heading the sultanate's delegation which is currently in India for the G20 Health Ministers' Meeting and the Joint Meeting between the Ministers of Health and Finance in India, stated a release.

The series of meeting, which began on Thursday came to an end on Saturday.

H E Dr Sabti is accompanied by a delegation from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, the release further stated.

Oman is participating in the Health Working Group (HWG) meetings as a hosted country

by the Indian presidency.

The Health Working Group has conducted four meetings during the current year, attended by Omani specialists, and highlighted three priorities namely health emergencies prevention, preparedness and response in the field of Antimicrobial Resistance, availability of Medical supplies, and digital health.

In addition, a joint meeting between the ministers of health and finance will be conducted to review the pandemic risk determinants and their economic impacts, financing the health institutions to ensure their preparedness in health emergencies.

ahlibank's home loan offer starts from 4.5% interest rate

Substantiating its mission to create an unrivalled ability to meet customer needs, ahlibank continues to offer its popular home loan MyHome offer at competitive pricing, with interest rates starting from 4.5% per annum.

Integrated with flexible repayment features, the loan promises customers a hassle-free experience, alongside convenient options and smooth processing service.

Customers planning on home improvement works, renovations or new constructions can avail the easy loan offer that is in sync with industry best practices, ensuring not only quick turnaround time, but also exemplary service that guarantees smooth banking experience for all customers.

As per the loan scheme,

customers of the bank can avail a maximum of RO350,000 for a loan tenor of up to 25 years.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM - head of retail distribution at ahlibank, said, "We have tailored this financial solution to meet our customers' immediate housing requirements, many of whom need a buffer to fulfill their dream home.

"We want to convey a sense of reassurance, as our key objective is to instill a culture of savings and educate people to spend their money wisely, especially when it comes to projects and tasks that are of priority for themselves and their families. We also want to assure all our existing and new customers that the process itself is seamless, with flexible repayment options."

Bank Muscat wins award from Infosys Finacle

In recognition of its initiatives to enhance customers experience, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in Oman, has won the prestigious Infosys Finacle Innovation Award 2023 in the category of Corporate Banking Innovation for its dynamic forex service to corporate banking customers which was successfully launched in January 2023.

Bank Muscat's Corporate Banking offers secure 'best-in-class' solutions and services, which are based on customer feedback and needs as well as global trends.

As part of its unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional customer experience, the Bank's corporate online banking platform recently launched a dynamic forex service. This innovative service empowers the bank's corporate customers to access special exchange rates through the online channel, thereby transforming the entire forex transfer process into a fully digital experience.

With this new service, customers can easily book foreign



exchange rates for large and high-value forex transactions with quick, transparent, and efficient processing.

Moreover, the platform's cutting-edge technology eliminates errors, providing timely processing of transactions and enhancing the reliability of the forex service.

Speaking on the occasion, Wafa Ibrahim al Ajmi, Assistant General Manager - Transaction & Government Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "It is our pleasure to take this opportunity to thank

Infosys Finacle for recognising the bank's innovative dynamic forex service, which was developed to further enhance and confirm on the bank's commitment towards innovation and excellence in customer services.

"Through continuously upgrading and developing its services, Bank Muscat is focused on catering to different sectors' customers. We would like to thank all our customers for their continuous support and confidence in the bank."

Recent innovative services are helping customers speed up their transactions. These additions are derived by the technological advances made available to them through the implementation of cutting-edge technology.

The introduction of the dynamic forex service through the Corporate Online Banking platform has brought numerous benefits, including improved rates for customers, increased transaction volume, and higher exchange income. The service has enabled

customers to obtain better rates for their foreign exchange transactions. Through dynamic forex service, customers can view the exchange rates offered by the bank through the online banking portal and have the option to accept or reject them. This ensures that customers have a clear understanding of the exchange rate offered by the bank.

The bank's customer-centric vision and the adoption of global best practices have resulted in numerous accolades in the past.



ISWK celebrates Independence Day

Indian School Wadi Kabir celebrated the 77th Independence Day with great enthusiasm and pride. The senior school campus was bedecked with festoons and flags of the great nation, and the décor and ambience were perfectly in tune with the celebration of freedom.

The chief guest for the momentous occasion was Janaki Amit Sampat, a well-known health and wellness advisor in the Sultanate of Oman.

The event was graced by the presence of Alkesh Joshi, honorary president of the school

management committee and other members; besides the members of the Education Cell, parents, students and special invitees.

The ISWK students gave a guard of honour to the chief guest and other distinguished guests. India's national anthem was played by the school band, filling the air with a patriotic fervour. The captivating cultural programme commenced with a dance drama titled *Spirit of Freedom* by the students of ISWK Cambridge International.

A soulful rendition of the patri-

otic song *Dhuna Dhanya Pushphe Bhora* by the Hindustani Music Choir of ISWK was greatly appreciated by the gathering. *Azadi ke rang, swatantrata ke sang* was an enthralling dance performance showcased by the students of Nursery to grade II. The tiny tots of the primary wing presented a dance performance with a live choir titled *Sholay - the power of our youth*. The event concluded with a dance performance titled *Jai Hind ki Sena* by the students of the senior wing who performed the famous Bihu dance of Assam with elegance and finesse.

ISM marks Independence Day with grandeur

As the sun rose on August 15, the vibrant nation of India came alive with an overwhelming sense of pride and patriotism as it commemorated its 77th Independence Day. This was indeed a momentous occasion for the multitude of Indian diaspora in Oman.

In tune with its tradition, Indian School Muscat celebrated the Independence Day with grandeur, reverence and patriotic fervour. The event was a vibrant showcase of unity, diversity, and the rich cultural heritage of India, highlighting the significance of this historic day.

The auspicious occasion commenced with the rendition of India's national anthem led by the school choir.

The chief guest on this special day was Sharafdeen Yoosaf, Convener, Indian School Muscat management committee. The members of the school management committee, principal Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan, vice



principals and other dignitaries attended the function.

The head boy extended a cordial welcome to the august gathering. Commemorating the sanctity of the day, chief guest Yoosaf read out the excerpts from the address of the President of India to the nation on the eve of 77th Independence Day.

He extended his warm wishes to everyone on this solemn occa-

sion. The programme was marked by various cultural performances that enthralled the audience.

The melodious rendition of the patriotic song, *Mera Bharat Mahan*, which was sung in eight different languages stirred emotions and evoked a sense of pride among the attendees.

The atmosphere was charged with a sense of patriotism and

solidarity, as the digital presentation titled *Veer Gatha* unfolded in front of the audience. The highlight of the cultural extravaganza was a ballet *Lehra Do*, which served as a poignant reminder of the countless sacrifices made by freedom fighters who dreamt of an independent India.

The celebration at Indian School Muscat left everyone with a sense of pride and unity.

Russia attacks city centre in Ukraine

The missile strike came hours after Vladimir Putin met Moscow’s top army commanders

Chernihiv, Ukraine - A Russian missile strike on Ukraine’s northern city of Chernihiv killed seven people and wounded dozens on Saturday, authorities said, hours after President Vladimir Putin met Moscow’s top army commanders.

Chernihiv, 150km (90 miles) north of Kyiv towards Belarus, has been largely spared from major attacks since the first months of Russia’s invasion as fierce fighting rages in the east and south.

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

The strike came after Putin held talks with top Russian generals in a rare trip to operational hub Rostov-on-Don and as his Ukrainian nemesis, Volodymyr Zelensky, visited Sweden for talks with Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. “The number of dead has increased to 7. Ninety wounded people sought medical help” with 25 in hospital, Ukrainian Interior Minister Igor Klymenko said on Telegram of the Chernihiv attack.

Viacheslav Chaus, head of the Chernihiv region’s military administration, said on Telegram that a child was among the dead.

Zelensky said the attack hit ‘the centre of the city’ in a square that houses a ‘polytechnic university, a theatre’.

“An ordinary Saturday, which Russia turned into a day of pain and loss,” he said after his arrival in Sweden.



A local resident stands next to a damaged car at the site of a missile strike in Chernihiv, on Saturday (AFP)

There was smoke, screams, people were running, crying, moaning. We ran to the shelter when everything happened and sat there

IRYNA

He posted a video from the scene showing debris around a large Soviet-era building, with parked cars partially destroyed, smashed roofs and

windows blown out.

AFP reporters saw fire trucks outside the Taras Shevchenko Drama Theatre and Music Academy, which suffered some

damage. Some nearby buildings also sustained minor damaged.

Putin meets military top brass

“There was smoke, screams, people were running, crying, moaning. We ran to the shelter when everything happened and sat there,” Iryna, a 24-year-old bartender in Chernihiv, told AFP. “I’m still a little in shock, because this hasn’t happened in a long

time, everyone has relaxed a little. But now we will probably be going down to the shelter.”

Until the war is over, ‘we have no options. Either accept or go abroad’, added Viktoriya, 40, who manages a coffee shop.

Hours earlier, the Kremlin said Putin had travelled to the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don, Moscow’s hub for its operations in Ukraine, to meet his top generals in a rare trip

close to combat zones.

Moscow gave no details of when the meeting took place, but footage released by state media indicated it was at night.

Putin ‘listened to briefings by the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov, commanders of directions and other senior officers of the group’, the Kremlin said.

AFP

Palestinian dies after shooting by Israel forces

Nablus, Palestinian Territories - A Palestinian man shot by Israeli forces during a raid this week in the occupied West Bank died on Saturday, the official Palestinian news agency and a health worker said.

Mohammed Abu Asaab was ‘seriously injured in the head’ on Wednesday in Balata refugee camp on the outskirts of the northern West Bank city of Nablus, and on Saturday succumbed to his wounds, news agency Wafa reported.

It said Abu Asaab was hit during clashes that erupted when Israeli ‘undercover forces’ surrounded a house in the camp.

The Israeli army did not immediately respond to a request for comment from AFP.

An official at Al Najah hospital in Nablus, speaking on condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media, told AFP that Abu Asaab, a resident of Balata, had died ‘as a result of wounds sustained at dawn last Wednesday during the occupation (Israeli) forces’ storming of the camp’.

An AFP correspondent in Nablus said Abu Asaab’s death was also announced over mosque loudspeakers throughout the city.

His death brought to 218 the number of Palestinians killed in violence this year linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Some 28 Israelis, one Ukrainian and one Italian have also been killed, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources on both sides.

AFP

Egypt’s Sisi pardons jailed activist Ahmed Douma

Cairo, Egypt - Egyptian activist Ahmed Douma, a leading figure of the country’s 2011 uprising who has spent the last decade behind bars, has been granted a presidential pardon, lawyers said on Saturday.

‘President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi... has used his constitutional powers’ to pardon several prisoners including Douma, said lawyer Tarek Elawady, a member of the presidential pardons committee. Prominent rights lawyer Khaled Ali meanwhile said on social media he was waiting outside Badr prison on Cairo’s outskirts for the activist’s release.

A court in 2019 had sentenced Douma to 15 years in prison on charges of clashing with security forces in the capital two years earlier, commuting a previous 25-year sentence handed down in 2015.

Egypt’s top appeals court later in 2019 upheld the 15-year sentence, which also included a fine of six million Egyptian pounds (US\$372,000 at the time).

Douma, now 37, was a leading activist in the 2011 uprising that toppled former president Hosni Mubarak. The activist published in 2021 a collection of poems titled ‘Curly’, written



Ahmed Douma (AFP)

while he was held in solitary confinement.

The collection was displayed at that year’s Cairo International Book Fair but was quickly pulled for ‘security reasons’.

In one of his poems from prison, Douma writes: “There’s no time for depression, no opportunity for sadness, the flood is raging.” He was arrested in a crackdown following the 2013 military ouster of Mubarak’s successor, Islamist Mohamed Morsi.

Sisi, a former army chief who spearheaded Morsi’s ouster, has been accused of leading a relentless crackdown on both

pro-democracy campaigners and Islamists.

Key activists from the revolution remain behind bars, including British-Egyptian pro-democracy blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah, who has spent the better part of the past decade behind bars.

While rights defender Hosam Bahgat welcomed the news of Douma’s imminent release, he said the decision was made ‘without any transparency or understanding of why some people were selected and others were ignored’.

The president has pardoned numerous prominent figures over the past year, but critics have charged that more people have been arrested in the meantime.

Since April last year, authorities have released 1,000 political prisoners amid much fanfare, but detained almost 3,000 more, according to Egyptian rights monitors.

Sisi in July pardoned researcher Patrick Zaki a day after he received a three-year sentence, as well as rights lawyer Mohamed al-Baqer who was arrested in 2019 while attending an interrogation of Abdel Fattah, his client at the time.

AFP

PEACOCK DANCE



Dancers perform the Sundanese peacock dance in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, on Saturday (AFP)

ECOWAS ready for armed intervention in Niger

Accra, Ghana - West African military chiefs said on Friday they were ready for an armed intervention in Niger after a coup ousted President Mohamed Bazoum last month, but a diplomatic mission was possible over the weekend to keep talks open.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has agreed to activate a ‘standby force’ as a last resort to restore democracy in Niger after generals toppled and detained Bazoum on July 26. ECOWAS defence chiefs met this week in the Ghanaian capital Accra to fine-tune details of a potential military operation to restore Bazoum if ongoing negotiations with coup leaders fail.

“We are ready to go any time



Volunteers gather in Niamey on Saturday, to be registered as civilian auxiliaries to potentially mobilise in support of the armed forces (AFP)

the order is given,” said Abdel-Fatau Musah, an ECOWAS commissioner for political affairs and security.

“The D-Day is also decided.” But the leaders also say they still favour dialogue and that

ECOWAS could send a diplomatic mission to Niger on Saturday. “Tomorrow there is the possibility of an ECOWAS mission going into Niger to continue to pursue the peaceful path to restoration of constitutional

order,” he said. “We are ready to resolve the issue peacefully but it takes two to tango.”

ECOWAS leaders say they have to act after Niger became the fourth West African nation since 2020 to suffer a coup, following Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea.

The Sahel region is struggling with growing militant insurgencies linked to Al-Qaeda and Islamic State. Frustration over the violence has in part prompted the military takeovers.

ECOWAS troops have intervened in other emergencies since 1990, including civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Ivory Coast, Benin and Nigeria are expected to contribute troops to a Niger mission.

AFP

Suspect in shrine bombing dead in Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon - A man suspected of involvement in an attack last month on a Shiite shrine in Syria died following a Hezbollah pursuit late on Friday south of the Lebanese capital, the Iran-backed group said.

Wissam Dalla, a Syrian in his early twenties, ‘threw himself

from the seventh floor’ of a building where he had been staying with relatives ‘after learning his location had been discovered’, Hezbollah said in a statement sent to AFP.

Dalla was ‘responsible for the explosion in the Sayyida Zeinab area’ south of the Syrian

capital last month, the Shiite Muslim group added.

AFP was unable to independently confirm the allegations against Dalla.

Lebanese security forces played no role in the incident, a security source told AFP.

AFP



This file photo shows Thaksin Shinawatra gesturing while being interviewed in Hong Kong on March 25, 2019 (AFP)

Ex-PM Thaksin set to return to Thailand

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra is set to return to the kingdom on Tuesday, the same day as a key parliamentary vote could end a political deadlock, his daughter said.

The 74-year-old billionaire was ousted in a 2006 military coup and has spent 15 years in self-exile.

Thaksin has long said he wanted to return home but faces multiple criminal charges that he says are politically motivated. "On Tuesday, August 22, 9am I will pick up my father Thaksin at Don Muang Airport," his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who is one of the Pheu Thai Party's candidates for prime minister, said on Instagram. Thaksin later said he was definitely coming home this time.

"I don't want to offend people. I want everyone to love each other. I want the country to be peaceful," he told BBC Thai on Saturday. "I'm old, I miss my grandchildren, I want to be with my family."

His return will coincide with

an afternoon vote on whether to approve Srettha Thavisin - from the Thaksin-linked Pheu Thai Party - as prime minister and end months of political uncertainty since a May general election. To become premier, Srettha needs to muster a majority across the lower house of 500 elected MPs, and the 250-member senate that was hand-picked by the kingdom's last junta.

The progressive Move Forward Party (MFP) won the most parliamentary seats in the election but the senate blocked its leader from becoming prime minister, after being spooked by a controversial policy to reform the kingdom's harsh royal insult laws.

Pheu Thai came second in the race and has been trying to form a government.

While he's long been a divisive figure, political analysts don't expect Thaksin's presence to kick off protests. "I think Thai people have moved on from Thaksin," Verapat Pariyawong, a political analyst, told AFP.

Wildfires threaten Canada cities as far north evacuated

Kelowna, Canada - Wildfires bore down on two Canadian cities on Friday, with firefighters in the west bracing for another 'scary' night as stunned refugees from the far north began arriving at shelters after their entire city was evacuated.

The two fronts in British Columbia and the Northwest Territories are just the latest in a summer of devastating wildfires across the country that have forced tens of thousands from their homes and left millions of acres scorched.

The blazes have caused 'terrible loss', Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters after meeting evacuees from Yellowknife, capital of the Northwest Territories, as they arrived in Edmonton, Alberta, hundreds of miles to the south with no idea when they may return home again.

Meanwhile the premier of western British Colombia, David Eby, declared a state of emergency there late on Friday.

The announcement came as the fire burning west of Kelowna, a town of 150,000 people in the Okanagan Valley, exploded a hundred fold in size to 6,800 hectares over the past day. Officials described firefighters being forced to pull back and some becoming trapped behind lines while making 'heroic efforts' to rescue residents. "We fought hard last night to protect our community," local fire chief Jason Brolund told a briefing on Friday.

"A significant number of structures were lost," he said, but no injuries or fatalities were reported.



The Crater Creek fire burns in the background of Keremeos Village in British Columbia, Canada, on Friday (AFP)

We fought hard last night to protect our community... number of structures were lost. It was like 100 years of firefighting all at once, in one night

JASON BROLUND

"It was like 100 years of firefighting all at once, in one night," he said, adding that he expected 'another scary night tonight' under an eerie glow of the fires.

Thousands of households on Kelowna's west side were ordered evacuated or told late on Thursday to be ready to leave at a moment's notice.

"The situation is unpredictable right now and there are difficult days ahead," Eby told a

news conference.

'Empty'

In the far north, Yellowknife was a ghost town late on Friday after ordering its entire population to leave by the afternoon - the largest ever evacuation from the region.

Most of its 20,000 inhabitants left by car, snaking along the lone highway connecting the remote capital of the Northwest Territories to southern Al-

berta province.

The nearest evacuation center is 1,150km (700 miles) away, in Alberta, where several sites have been set up.

Almost 4,000 people flew out, officials said, with a pilot on one of the relief flights telling Canadian media that the lake-side city was 'pretty empty'.

Among the exhausted evacuees being ferried to hotels was Byron Garrison, 27, who landed in Calgary late on Friday with his girlfriend and a friend, carrying only a small bag with two changes of clothes.

The three looked tired, and scared. "I feel lost because I don't have any idea what is going to happen now," Garrison told AFP. "We don't know what we'll do now."

It was a sentiment echoed by Katel Koumhawa, originally from Cameroon, who moved to Yellowknife earlier this year.

He made the long drive from the northern city to Calgary to save his car from the flames.

He and his family are 'happy' they have been saved, he told AFP. But 'we don't know about tomorrow', he added. "About our lives, our jobs. You don't know if everything will be the same tomorrow."

Yellowknife has not been abandoned: crews remained to erect defenses as the flames approached, while water bombers have been seen flying low over the city and the Canadian military is also helping out.

Several towns and Indigenous communities had already been evacuated. The flight from Yellowknife means half the population of the near-Arctic territory has been displaced.

The confusion and terror of the fires and evacuations have been compounded by Meta's blocking of Canadian news on Facebook and Instagram.

The decision - made earlier in response to a new law requiring digital giants to pay publishers for articles - has complicated wildfire information sharing.

Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge on Friday called the ban 'reckless' and demanded Meta lift it 'for the safety of Canadians facing this emergency'.

Canada is experiencing a record-setting wildfire season, with official estimates of over 14.0mn hectares already burned.

AFP

CAPTIVATING VISITORS



People look at an art installation created by American artist Brian Donnelly, also known as Kaws, at the Prambanan Temple, one of the largest Hindu temples in Southeast Asia and a UNESCO World Heritage, in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on Saturday (AFP)

Japan PM to visit Fukushima plant before water release

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he will visit the Fukushima nuclear plant on Sunday, ahead of the discharge of treated water which is scheduled to begin by the end of summer.

Tokyo's plan to release treated water from the tsunami-hit nuclear plant into the sea over the next few decades has raised concerns in neighbouring countries, prompting China to ban some food imports and sparking protests in South Korea.

Kishida, who was in Washington for a trilateral summit with US President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, told Japanese reporters he would visit the plant on Sunday following his return to Japan.

"The release of treated water is an issue that cannot be postponed in order to make steady



Japan PM Fumio Kishida (AFP)

progress with decommissioning and the reconstruction of Fukushima," he said.

Kishida said the government was at 'the final stage' of making a decision but declined to comment on the exact timing of the release.

The prime minister said he hoped to meet 'at some stage' with the head of Japan's fisheries cooperative federation, which has been against the release plan.

The discharge will reportedly begin as early as the end of this month.

Last month, plans to release treated water from the plant cleared their final regulatory hurdle, with the endorsement from the UN nuclear watchdog.

Some 1.33mn cubic metres of groundwater, rainwater and water used for cooling have accumulated at the plant, where several reactors went into meltdown after the 2011 tsunami overwhelmed cooling systems.

Storage space is running out, but plans by Japan and plant operator TEPCO to release the water into the sea have run into local and regional opposition.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said the discharge would have 'negligible' effects on the environment and was in line with water releases from nuclear plants elsewhere.

AFP

Morocco king at 60: Diplomacy a priority as inequalities persist

Rabat, Morocco - Morocco's King Mohammed VI is set to celebrate his 60th birthday on Monday away from the public eye, as challenges abound almost a quarter century after he ascended the throne.

The monarch is credited with effectively maintaining stability in a volatile region - in part through suppressing criticism - as well as modernising the economy and pursuing assertive diplomacy.

But his efforts have fallen short in addressing the profound inequalities that continue to plague Moroccan society.

In his latest speech on July 30, the king called for 'achieving new milestones on the path of progress and creating projects of greater scope, worthy of the Moroccan people'.

Since his coronation following the death of his father Hassan II on July 23, 1999, the monarch has retained a firm grip on economic policy, foreign affairs, and defence and security in his North African nation.

"While his father was greatly present on the political stage, Mohammed VI's style is different. He prefers to silently steer



This file photo shows Prince Sidi Mohamed while being installed as King Mohammed VI in the royal palace of Rabat on July 23, 1999 (AFP)

the ship while controlling the levers of power," said political analyst Mohamed Chiker.

King Mohammed has led major infrastructure and business projects over the years.

They include the Tanger Med industrial port, the gigantic Noor solar power plant and the Tanger-Casablanca high-speed rail line, alongside developing Morocco's automotive and aerospace industries, and more recently, so-called green hydrogen projects and the 'Made in Morocco' label. And in an effort to boost Moroccan soft power

abroad, he took the initiative to partner with Spain and Portugal in a joint bid to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

Western Saharan 'prism'

On the international stage, Mohammed VI has diversified partnerships that were once primarily focused on former colonial ruler France and other European countries, embracing a more prominent role on Morocco's continent since its return to the African Union in 2017.

Western Sahara has remained

the king's top foreign policy priority, repeatedly dubbing the former Spanish colony under dispute as 'the prism through which Morocco views its international environment'.

Since 1975, a low-intensity conflict over the contested territory has pitted Rabat against Sahrawi separatists of the Algeria-backed Polisario Front.

Morocco has secured Spain's support for an 'autonomy plan' that would place the vast mineral-rich desert region under Rabat's sole sovereignty.

AFP

Major hurricane heads toward northwest Mexico, California

Cabo San Lucas, Mexico - Mexico prepared on Friday for a powerful Pacific hurricane that triggered a warning of 'potentially catastrophic' flooding in a northwestern tourist region and the neighboring US state of California.

Hurricane Hilary threatened to bring strong winds, flash floods and 'life-threatening' surf and rip current conditions, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

"We've already had to live through similar experiences. We know what can happen to us. We must be prepared with food, canned goods and candles," Marlen Hernandez, a 30-year-old restaurant worker, told AFP.

Hilary's maximum sustained winds reached about 145 miles (230km) an hour before slowing slightly on Friday, according to the NHC.

It was a Category Four hurricane - the second-most powerful on the Saffir-Simpson scale of one to five.

'Life-threatening and potentially catastrophic flooding' was likely over much of Baja California and southern California this weekend and early next week, the NHC warned.

Residents and workers in Cabo San Lucas put up protective boarding, laid sandbags and stored furniture in preparation, as large waves crashed ashore.



Rain and gusts of wind reach Cabo San Lucas, Mexico on Saturday (AFP)

both Mexican and foreign tourists.

"We are a little scared and trying to stay positive," Katrina Morgan, a tourist from the United States, said in the Mexican resort of Cabo San Lucas on the Baja California peninsula.

Hilary was located about 285 miles southwest of Cabo San Lucas on the southern tip of Baja California, the NHC said.

"On the forecast track, the centre of Hilary will move close to the west coast of the Baja California peninsula over the weekend and reach southern California by Sunday night," it forecast.

A hurricane warning was issued for a stretch of coastline in Baja California from Punta Abreojos to Cabo San Quintin, and a hurricane watch north from there to Ensenada.

Across the border, an unusual tropical storm watch was in effect from the California/Mexico border to Point Mugu in Ventura County, as well as for Catalina Island, according to the NHC.

"Fluctuations in intensity are likely through tonight," it predicted. "Weakening is expected to begin by Saturday, but Hilary will still be a hurricane when it approaches the west coast of the Baja California peninsula on Saturday night and Sunday. Hilary is expected to weaken to a tropical storm by late Sunday before it reaches southern California," the NHC added.

The storm brought rain and rough seas to areas along Mexico's southwestern Pacific coast, including the tourist resort of Acapulco.

In the United States, 'rainfall amounts of three to six inches, with isolated amounts of 10 inches, are expected across portions of southern California and southern Nevada. Dangerous to locally catastrophic flooding will be possible,' the NHC said.

AFP

Spain: More evacuations as 'severe' weather fans vast Tenerife wildfire

The wildfire prompted residents to flee their homes in the holiday island

La Orotava, Spain - Stronger winds and higher overnight temperatures caused a vast wildfire raging out of control in Tenerife to spread, prompting more residents to flee their homes in the northern sector of the Spanish holiday island, officials said on Saturday.

The huge blaze, which broke out late on Tuesday in a mountainous northeastern area of the island, is the 'most complex fire' to hit Spain's Atlantic Canary Islands in more than 40 years, the authorities say.

"The fire is beyond our capacity to extinguish it, maybe not in all sectors, but in a large part of the sectors," said Pedro Martinez, who is in charge of efforts to quench the blaze, saying efforts to tackle the flames were being hampered by the huge clouds of smoke and the wind.

"Weather conditions last night were frankly severe... meaning the fire spread, mainly along the northern slopes," Canary Islands leader Fernando Clavijo told reporters, pointing to 'much stronger winds, temperatures much higher than expected



This photo taken on Saturday night shows the fronts of the forest fire on hills above houses, in the Guimar valley on the Canary Island of Tenerife (AFP)

and lower relative humidity'.

By Friday night, the fire had forced more than 4,500 people to flee although there was no update on how many people had been affected by the early morning evacuations in five municipalities. "The fire and the weather have changed and we've had to evacuate five municipalities in northern Tenerife," said Manuel Miranda, the islands' head of emergencies on X, the social network formerly known as Twitter,

pointing to 'the danger and the proximity of the fire'.

The latest evacuations came as forecasters warned that high temperatures and strong gusts of wind over the weekend would complicate efforts to tackle the blaze.

The fire, which has a perimeter of 50km (30 miles), has so far destroyed 5,000 hectares (more than 12,300 acres) of land with 225 firefighters engaged in overnight efforts to control the

The huge blaze, which broke out in a mountainous northeastern area of the island, is the 'most complex fire' to hit Canary Islands in more than 40 years

flames. The area affected by the fire equates to nearly 2.5 per cent of Tenerife's surface area, which stretches 203,400 hectares.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska was due to visit the fire control centre on Saturday along with Tourism Minister Hector Gomez, while Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is due to fly in on Monday, officials said. By Friday night, the blaze had affected 10 municipalities on Tenerife, the largest of the seven islands that make up Spain's Canary Islands. Another 1,700 people have been ordered to stay inside their homes.

On Friday, there had been a 'favourable evolution' after a night in which the flames advanced more slowly and predictably and the winds had eased. That followed two days in which the behaviour of the fire was 'highly unusual', complicating efforts to control it.

AFP

N Korea lashes out at UN, calls defectors 'scum'

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea on Saturday lashed out at the UN for accusing the Pyongyang regime of widespread systematic human rights violations and called North Korean defectors who had escaped from hardships 'human scum', according to state media.

The name-calling came after the nuclear-armed state was held accountable at the UN Security Council meeting on Thursday for spending heavily on its nuclear arms programme while its people go hungry and lack basic necessities.

Ilhyeok Kim, a North Korean defector, told the council that he had been forced at a young age to work in fields without compensation, and that the grain they grew all went to the military.

"The government turns our blood and sweat into a luxurious life for the leadership and missiles that blast our hard work into the sky," he said. "The money spent on just one missile could feed us for three months."

But the meeting was an 'insult and infringement' to the spirit of the UN Charter, an unnamed spokesman of the Korea Association for Human Rights Studies said in a statement.

AFP

British nurse found guilty of murdering 7 newborn babies

London, UK - A British nurse was found guilty on Friday of murdering seven newborn babies and trying to kill six others at the hospital neonatal unit where she worked, becoming the UK's most prolific child killer.

Lucy Letby, 33, had been on trial since October last year, accused of either injecting her sick or premature young victims with air, overfeeding them with milk or poisoning them with insulin.

The victims' families said in a joint statement read outside Manchester Crown Court in northern England said: "Justice has been served."

But they cautioned: "This justice will not take away from the extreme hurt, anger and distress we have all had."

The jury, some of whom were in tears after they were discharged, deliberated for 22 days, returning their first guilty decisions on August 8, which could not be reported until Friday because of a court order.



Lucy Letby (AFP)

Letby fought back tears in the dock after the initial verdicts were read out. She was not in court on Friday to hear the jurors' final determinations.

They eventually acquitted her of two counts, and could not reach decisions on six others. Prosecutors have asked for 28 days to consider whether to seek a retrial on those charges.

'Betrayal'

Letby will be sentenced on Monday and has reportedly told her lawyers she will not attend court to hear her fate but she faces the

prospect of never being released from prison.

The nurse was arrested following a string of deaths at the neonatal unit of the Countess of Chester Hospital in northwest England between June 2015 and June 2016.

Described by the prosecution as a 'calculating' woman who used methods of killing that 'didn't leave much of a trace', Letby had repeatedly denied harming the children.

"Time and again, she harmed babies, in an environment which should have been safe for them and their families," said senior prosecutor Pascale Jones, calling the killings 'a complete betrayal of the trust placed in her'.

The court was told that colleagues raised concerns after noticing that Letby was on shift when each of the babies collapsed, with some of the newborns attacked just as their parents left their cots.

AFP

Mosques investigated in Pakistan riots

Lahore, Pakistan - A Muslim cleric is among a dozen people being investigated for using mosque loudspeakers to order protests against alleged blasphemy by Christians which erupted into mob violence in Pakistan earlier this week, a senior police official said.

More than 80 Christian homes and 19 churches were vandalised when hundreds rampaged through a Christian neighbourhood in Jaranwala in Punjab province on Wednesday.

Reports that a Quran had been desecrated were broadcast from mosques, with one cleric telling his followers it was 'Better to die if you don't care about Islam'.

"That cleric should have understood that when you gather people in such a charged environment... in a country in which people were already very sensitive about (blasphemy) it is like adding fuel to fire," Punjab police chief Usman Anwar told AFP during an interview in Lahore on Friday.

"He's not saying that go and



Civil society activists and members of the Christian community take part in a protest to condemn the attacks on churches, in Karachi on Friday (AFP)

burn their houses. But when the mob gathers, it's really impossible to control that."

He said the cleric was one of 12 people who were being investigated for using mosque loudspeakers, while more than 125 people have been arrested linked to the vandalism that followed, thanks to the use of facial recognition technology, mobile phone geo-fencing and data gathered from social media.

At its peak, more than 5,000 people had poured into the neighbourhood from other districts, with smaller mobs spreading to narrow alleys where they ransacked homes.

Christians who fled in their hundreds have criticised police for failing to protect their property, with some sheltered by their Muslim neighbours.

"If police had started baton charging, or attacking (the mob) or tear gassing that would have resulted in multiple injuries or deaths. And that is what we were avoiding at that time. That would

have aggravated the situation that would have spread in all the country," Anwar said.

Negotiations with religious leaders led to calls for calm, he added.

Thousands of churches guarded

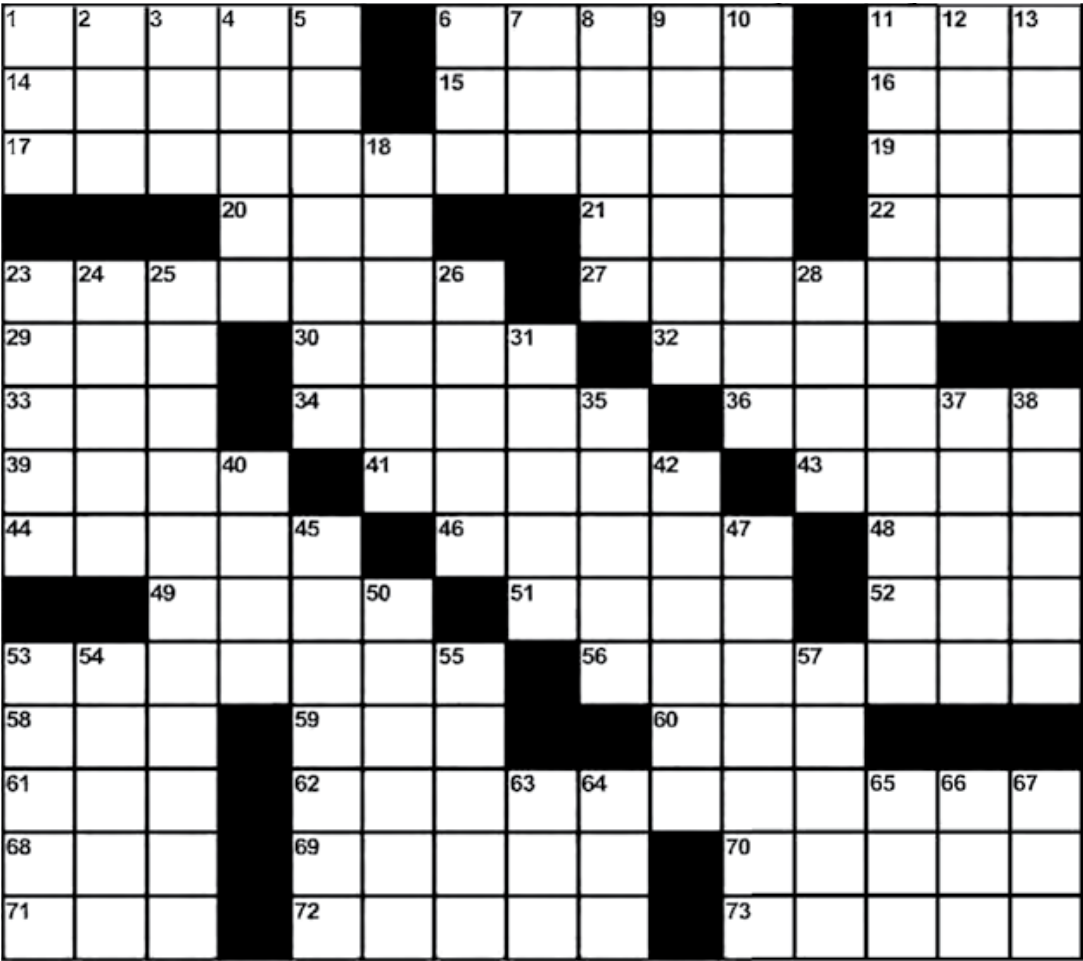
Two Christian brothers have been arrested for blasphemy, after torn pages of the Quran with offensive words scrawled across them were stuck to the walls of a mosque in Jaranwala in the early hours of Wednesday morning. Anwar said he personally interrogated the pair to avoid the possibility of accusations of torture.

On Friday, 3,200 churches were guarded by police across Punjab province to provide reassurance to the Christian community, Anwar said, adding that he would travel to Jaranwala on Sunday to show solidarity.

Christians, who make up around two per cent of the population, occupy one of the lowest rungs in Pakistani society,

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1) Put on the back burner

6) Find fault

11) "Top Gear" aier

14) Clio's sister muse

15) Dress style with a flare

16) "Who...you kidding?"

17) Wet stopper

19) Little guy or little amount

20) Common grain unit

21) Display fallibility

22) Fasten with rope

23) "Family" member

27) Gets back in business

29) Roth plan

30)Likeadentalschoolexam?

32) Definitely not a slacker

33) Do a portrayal

34) Bit of gossip

36) "You never know..."

39) Damon of films

41) Teapot part

43) Practice boxing

44) Muhammad's religion

46) Relative of "thud"

48) "Long...and far away ..."

49) Biblical birthright seller

51) Heat-cracked

52) Cape color in a big ring

53) Committing a computer

cnme

56) What champagnes do

58) Last name among Boston hockey legends

59) Majors worth \$6 million

60) Valuable rock

61)Formofflatteringpoetry

62) Place to take one's cuts

68) Unharden a garden

69) Autumn bloom

70) Sky supporter of myth

71) Ancient flood insurance

72) Crystal-lined cavity

73) Garden mix

DOWN

1) Cotillion star, informally

2) Period of history

3) Far from slim

4) Body of beliefs

5) Pitcher's "cuff"

6) Vehicle making pick-ups

7) Monte Rosa is one

8) More repulsive

9) Made tough by habitual

exposure

10) What limos provide

11) Section of the Big Apple

12) Organ with ideas

13) Formally gives up

18) Where we all began

23)It'sinFlorida

24) Dangerous whales

25) City known for cereal

26) Some accessways

28) TV-dinner veggies

31) Some aerial maneuvers

35) Essentials for all sports

37) Bread roll

38) Crumble to the sea

40) Kind of force

42) Atlantic game fish

45) Postal worker's burden

47) Riot queller

50) Anxiety

53) Uproarious commotion

54) Intense passion

55) Affect

57) Right-hand page, in printing

63) Danson of TV shows

64) Feeling of anger
- NOTE PAD

AND REGRET VAST
DOE ARRIVE ALTO
DOS TROPICALS SUN
SKI RATEL LOONY
GOAT TAR
SANDCASTLES CPA
EVADE COOL SLAM
TATE PUPAE HOPE
TIER OBIT CASAS
OLD BEACH TOWELS
ART OHMS
ALIBI ETAPE HAT
BODY OF WATER ARE
IDES DECOKE VEX
TEAS AROMAS EAT
- YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE
- ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Positive energy is swirling all around you today, protecting you from any bad mojo and keeping a bright smile on your face all day long. Get ready for some unexpected flirtation and a few sweet tokens of appreciation to come your way. They are someone's way of getting you to finally notice them and spend a little more time with them. This is a banner day if you're in the mood for romance, even the harmless and platonic kind. No one's taking themselves too seriously, which is always a good thing.
- LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Thinking ahead can be daunting. There's no such thing as a crystal ball, and sometimes when you plan too narrowly, you end up making dangerous assumptions. To avoid the pitfalls of forecasting your life, don't get too tied up in time frames. Just think about what you want in your life and go about getting it. Recent bad habits are preventing you from expecting the best of yourself, so add more discipline to your life and say no more often. Perfection isn't the goal. Happiness is.
- SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
Sometimes too much talking can get in the way of truly understanding something. Philosophizing is fine, but unless you dig in deep and really try to see a problem from the inside out, you're never going to make any progress. You don't need research or planning. You need real-world experience! So if you're contemplating a change but aren't sure which way to go, take a trial run in one direction and see how it goes. You can always change your mind later.
- TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20
The indecisive energy around you could cause you to delay some plans. But the good news is that a delay might be a very good thing, so try not to get too frustrated about it. It's out of character for you to be inflexible anyway, so frustration shouldn't be an issue. This day calls for you to act more spontaneously than usual, but you've been waiting for the chance to fly by the seat of your pants anyway. You'll learn that change can be messy, but it can also be a very positive thing.
- VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
A friend is about to take a big risk, and you're worried. And torn. You want to keep them from making a mistake, but you don't want them to think you don't believe in them. Just try to do your best to help them see things more conservatively. Alert them to the downside of their idea and what could happen. Ask if they're ready for a worst-case scenario. They'll know you're speaking from a place of caring and not judgment. Just remember that in the end it's still their call.
- CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Your intellectual abilities might fail you temporarily today, but it will be more amusing than embarrassing. There's no need to worry that you're losing your smarts. You aren't. Okay, they might be going away for a while, but only because you could use a fresh perspective on things. You've been overthinking your life a bit too much, which has been keeping you from making a certain decision because you fear it could fail. You need to start thinking more with your heart.
- GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21
We all tend to avoid whatever is unpleasant or scary. It's human nature! You, though, being so exceptionally brave, don't indulge in that nearly as much as most people. So when that delicate issue that has stayed unresolved rears up again today, you force yourself to face it, no matter what your friends say. People will think that if you don't fight back then what they are hearing must be true.And it's the right thing to do. Be proud of yourself!
- LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
You'll be able to replace bad energy with good energy today. Your ability to end arguments and be the peacemaker is stronger than ever. That means it's a great day to lead a group, be a part of a negotiation, or help two bickering friends come to a compromise. People will be amazed by what you can do, and you can expect to get a lot of glowing compliments about your diplomatic skills. Don't forget to pat yourself on the back once or twice. You deserve it.
- AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You're attracted to someone's unique energy today. They have a way of looking at the world that you admire. It's time to get to know them a little bit better. Find out if they're free for lunch or afternoon coffee. Don't be coy about why you want to get to know them better. Admit that you just like who they are. They'll be flattered, and most likely they'll return the compliment. You two have a lot in common, and it's time you both learned what they are.
- CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22
The energy around you today is going to be a bit out of whack, which could create some misunderstandings here and there. But even though your harmless communication may be misinterpreted as something more aggressive, no big drama will result. The people you're dealing with now know you well enough to know you don't mean any harm, and they're willing to cut you some slack. Wherever you go, you'll be among friends today. It's all safe and mellow.
- SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Take one last look at the fine print before you sign documents today. You can't take anything for granted right now. It's not that people are trying to trick you; it's just that you need to get more proactive about evaluating what you associate with. Taking shortcuts will only get you lost. There is just too much uncertainty in the world for you to assume that something is on the up-and-up just because someone says so. Be more cynical for the next few days.
- PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Despite all the fun stuff that's going on in your life right now, you need to resist the urge to share too much about it with everybody. It's best to be humble and play it cool right now. Monopolizing the conversation isn't your style anyway, and giving out too many details could cause someone to get overwhelmed and lose interest in hearing more. Why not wait for people to ask you a few questions to learn what they need to know? Don't do all the work for them.
-
- TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE
01. In July 2009, why did Russian physicists begin trying to synthesize Ununseptium?

A. The Ununseptium mines are running out of ore

B. It was an undiscovered chemical element

C. It is a cheap chemical that can be used to cure AIDS

D. A proposed trade embargo by China
02. What does a contestant using a longbow need?

A. A good breakfast

B. Good boots

C. A decorated quiver

D. Strong arms
03. The Guarani Aquifer lies under Paraguay, Brazil, and what other country or countries?

A. Venezuela, Guyana and Suriname

B. Bolivia and Peru

C. Colombia

D. Argentina and Uruguay
- Answers: 1. B 2. D 3. D
- KIDS COLOURING
-
-
- BOGGLER
-
- 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
-
- 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
-

BONMATI TO CAICEDO: Women's World Cup players of the tournament

Sydney, Australia - Ahead of the Women's World Cup final on Sunday between England and Spain, AFP Sport picks its five best players of the tournament:



Aitana Bonmati (Spain)
With Alexia Putellas struggling to re-cover full fitness after a serious knee injury, Spain needed others to step forward if they were to emerge as genuine contenders to win the World Cup.
Bonmati, her teammate at Barcelona, did exactly that.

The 25-year-old scored a superb goal against Costa Rica and produced two more exceptional finishes in the 5-1 demolition of Switzerland, a game in which she also provided two assists in a masterful performance from midfield.

Bonmati was one of three players who returned to the Spain fold for the World Cup after being among the 15 rebels who announced last September they did not want to be considered for selection. Her performances have been so good that she must now have a serious chance of succeeding Putellas and winning this year's Ballon d'Or.



Alex Greenwood (England)
European champions England have not always sparkled but they reached Sunday's final thanks in part to their sturdy defence.

The 29-year-old Manchester City defender Greenwood has played a key part in keeping the Lionesses watertight while also contributing to their passing game out of defence.
England kept clean sheets with 1-0 wins in the group phase over Haiti and Denmark, and just about kept out Nigeria over 120 minutes to salvage a 0-0 draw and squeeze into the quarter-finals 4-2 on penalties. Something of an unsung hero, the centre-back Greenwood proved as reliable in the shootout as she has been in defence, holding her nerve to score from the spot against Nigeria.
Not just solid and unflappable when defending, Greenwood's passing ability, especially in tight spaces, has also been eye-catching. Probably the best centre-half at the tournament.



Linda Caicedo (Colombia)
The 18-year-old Real Madrid attacker brought her rare talents to a global audience for the first time.
She scored on her World Cup debut against South Korea, albeit with a helping hand from a goalkeeping howler, and netted again in a famous 2-1 win over Germany.

It was one of the goals of the tournament. Caicedo received the ball in the German box, beat two players and bent the ball into the opposite top corner.
The teenager, who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer at 15 but made a full recovery, was though at the centre of another health concern. She went down in training clutching her chest and in the Germany win also seemed to struggle with her breathing. Medical tests gave her a clean bill of health.



Hinata Miyazawa (Japan)
Japan bowed out 2-1 to Sweden in the quarter-finals but there is every chance that Miyazawa will win the golden boot for top scorer at the tournament.
The 23-year-old tops the charts with five goals, two of them coming in a 4-0 thumping of Spain in the group phase.
The attacking midfielder, who plays her football in Japan's domestic league, also got an assist in that game.
What is even more impressive is that Miyazawa had never been prolific in front of goal prior to this for club or country.
But coach Futoshi Ikedo found a way to get the best out of her, Miyazawa often running at pace from deep on the counter-attack, then keeping her head to do the rest in front of goal.



Amanda Ilestedt (Sweden)
The 30-year-old defender, who signed for Arsenal just before the tournament from Paris Saint-Germain, became a surprise contender to win the golden boot as she scored three times in Sweden's first two games at the World Cup and then netted a fourth goal in the 2-1 win over Japan in the quarter-finals.
Ilestedt was a constant threat in opposition boxes at set-pieces as Sweden made it to a third semi-final in the last four World Cups. She also formed a formidable centre-back partnership with Magdalena Eriksson as Sweden went more than seven hours without conceding before Japan scored against them.
But it was her goal-scoring prowess that really made a mark and at one point prompted a reporter to ask if she had considered asking her coach if she could play up front.
"I already did," she joked before insisting she was happier as a centre-half.



Spain (left) and England (right) will be hoping to make history at the Women's World Cup final in Australia on Sunday (AFP)



HISTORY BECKONS

England and Spain one win away from World Cup glory

Sydney, Australia - A Women's World Cup that has broken records on and off the pitch will reach a suitable climax on Sunday when England or Spain are crowned champions for the first time.

About 75,000 fans will pack Stadium Australia in Sydney for the final of a World Cup that began with 32 teams, compared to 24 four years ago, and saw many of the favourites fall early.
Germany bowed out in the group phase together with Brazil, Italy and Olympic champions Canada, then holders the United States followed them out the trapdoor in the last 16 - their earliest exit ever.
South Africa, Jamaica and Morocco all reached the last 16 for the first time, and Colombia made a maiden quarter-final appearance before a 2-1 defeat to

Having the chance as a coach or a player to make it to two finals is really special. I never take anything for granted, but it's like I'm living in a fairytale or something

SARINA WIEGMAN

England.
The exploits of the lower-ranked sides are evidence that the gap has closed significantly in international women's football, but in the end, it is two of the leading sides who will contest the final.
'Fairytale' for Wiegman
Sarina Wiegman's England are European champions and came into the World Cup as favourites along with the United States.
But like Spain, England have

never reached the World Cup final before.
The two teams met in the quarter-finals of last year's European Championship, with Wiegman's Lionesses winning 2-1 in extra time and going on to beat Germany in the final for their first major title.
On that occasion, England had the backing of fervent home support, a luxury they will not have this time. If anything, Australian fans at the final are likely to cheer for Spain.
The anticipated sell-out crowd at Stadium Australia will bookend a tournament that is the best-attended in Women's World Cup history.
Wiegman has a world-class squad to call upon, but it is the coach herself who is arguably England's biggest asset.
She is the standard-bearer for woman coaches, having won the Euros with her native Netherlands and then repeating the feat with England.
Described by her players as calm but direct, Wiegman took the Dutch to the World Cup final four years ago, where they lost 2-0 to the United States.
"Having the chance as a coach or a player to make it to two finals is really special," the 53-year-old said after her side defied a partisan crowd to defeat co-hosts Australia 3-1 in Wednesday's semi-final.
"I never take anything for granted, but it's like I'm living in a fairytale or something."
Wiegman is already hugely respected in her adopted country but now she is one victory away from joining Alf Ramsey, who took England to the men's title in 1966, in winning a World Cup for England.
Spain have defied turmoil off the pitch to make their own history.
Their preparations were clouded by a dispute with 15 players who last year said they no longer wanted to be considered for selection.
Coach Jorge Vilda and his strict personality were chief among a litany of complaints, but here they are, missing 12 of the 15 but on the cusp of world domination.
AFP

England must play 'game of our lives' in World Cup final, says Millie Bright

Sydney, Australia - Skipper Millie Bright said that England will need to play "the game of our lives" to beat Spain in Sunday's Women's World Cup final.
When the Lionesses kick off at Stadium Australia in Sydney they will attempt to do what no England side, men or women, has managed since 1966 - win the World Cup. Bright said the European champions must treat it as just another game, but admitted there was no escaping the enormity of the occasion for the country, the team and the players. Like Spain, England are into the final for the first time.
"We know how passionate our nation is back home and how much they want us to win," Bright said on Saturday.



Millie Bright

I've always said it's 'we' not 'me' and I think it will be the biggest moment in our careers

MILLIE BRIGHT

"But for us there is a process, we have a game plan to execute and we need to play the game of our lives."
Sarina Wiegman's side has grown through the World Cup, combining defensive resilience with ruthlessness in front of goal.
While Wiegman and Bright were keen to take the pressure

off, the captain admitted it was "massive for the team" and her personally.
"I've always said it's 'we' and not 'me' and I think it will be the biggest moment in our careers," she added. "I always say 'our' careers and 'we' because it is a team. It's a dream come true being in a World Cup final, there's no words to describe it."
England are boosted by the return of potent attacker Lauren James, who missed England's last two games after being sent off against Nigeria.
Wiegman was coy about what role James could play and sounded a warning about the threat posed by a Spain side who have passed their opponents into submission at times.

Spain's Vilda refuses to bite on eve of World Cup final

Sydney, Australia - Coach Jorge Vilda repeatedly refused to comment on the eve of Sunday's Women's World Cup final about the turmoil between him and some Spanish players.
Spain will play their maiden World Cup final when they face England and will do so without a dozen players who last year said they did not wish to represent their country, primarily because of Vilda. Asked at a press conference in Sydney on Saturday about relations between him and some players, Vilda replied: "Next question, please."
Fifteen players ruled them-



Jorge Vilda

selves out over numerous issues, the main one being their objection to the 42-year-old Vilda, including about his strict personality and training methods. Vilda ended up calling three of the mutineers up for the World Cup and they have played a key part in Spain reaching Sunday's final.
When a second reporter tried a similar line of questioning, Vilda replied: "What we want to do tomorrow is to be the best in the world and we'll do this by winning the final."
Vilda did open up a bit more when asked about training and

whether he listened to his players. "From the very beginning the players have been united, they have been working a lot," he said.
"I believe that today will be the 65th training session and all of them have come out very well."
"The training sessions, the games, everything that's happened outside has been extraordinary. They will have memories for the rest of their lives."
Spain and England met last summer in the quarter-finals of the European Championship, with the Lionesses squeezing through 2-1 in extra time in a tight game.

SWEDEN TAKE THIRD PLACE

Fridolina Rolfo and Kosovare Asllani on target as Scandinavians spoil Australia's World Cup party

Brisbane, Australia - Sweden scored either side of half-time to spoil Australia's party and claim third spot at the Women's World Cup with a 2-0 win in Brisbane on Saturday.

In front of a crowd of nearly 50,000, Sweden took the lead with a 30th-minute penalty by Fridolina Rolfo and doubled their advantage with a powerful strike from Kosovare Asllani just after the hour.

Ranked third in the world, this is the fourth time that Sweden have finished third at the tournament. They fully deserved their win against the hosts, dominating the midfield and keeping talismanic Australian striker Sam Kerr relatively quiet.

Australia's other dangerous attacker, Mary Fowler, had a night to forget as she struggled physically against the size and power of the Swedish defenders.

By contrast, Sweden striker Stina Blackstenius caused havoc among the Australian defence during her 63 minutes on the



Swedish players celebrate with their bronze medals after beating Australia in the third place play-off match in Brisbane on Saturday (AFP)

pitch and had a hand in both goals. The Swedes opened the match with far more intent than the Matildas and dominated for most of the first period.

Playing a bit like England in their 3-1 semi-final win over the Matildas on Wednesday, the Swedes slowed the ball down and controlled the midfield.

Australia only really looked dangerous on the transition and

for much of the time they seemed to be chasing shadows, struggling to get any meaningful possession. The Swedes had a golden chance to take the lead in the first 60 seconds when Blackstenius shot low across goal.

Australian goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold, who had another excellent night, parried the ball away and Ellie Carpenter did well to clear from in front of an

open goal.

The Matildas didn't have their first shot until the 24th minute when a Hayley Raso drive drew a good save from Sweden keeper Zecira Musovic.

But minutes later Sweden took the lead when VAR ruled that Clare Hunt had clipped Blackstenius's heel after yet another dangerous run into the box from the Swedish striker. Australian coach

Tony Gustavsson made an attacking change on the 60-minute mark, bringing on Emily van Egmond and Cortnee Vine, but it was Sweden who continued to control the match.

They went some way to silencing the sell-out crowd when Blackstenius laid a ball across goal for Asllani, who smashed a powerful strike past a diving Arnold.



Soumaila Sidibe

Superb Sidibe goal sets up Etoile Sahel win in Algeria

Johannesburg, South Africa - A superb solo goal from Soumaila Sidibe set up Etoile Sahel of Tunisia for a 2-0 victory at CS Constantine of Algeria on Friday as 2023-2024 CAF Champions League qualifying kicked off.

The Guinean received possession halfway inside the Constantine half and dribbled past several Algerians before beating goalkeeper Kheiredine Boussouf from close range. Hamza Jelassi sealed success for the visitors by converting a penalty eight minutes into added time in northeast Algeria.

Etoile are seeking a second Champions League tile after a stunning 3-1 away triumph

over Al Ahly of Egypt in the second leg of the 2007 final.

They are the only winners of all five CAF club competitions. Apart from the Champions League, they boast two victories each in the Confederation Cup, Super Cup, Cup Winners Cup and CAF Cup.

This is the 16th appearance of the Tunisian outfit in the Champions League. If they complete an aggregate victory next weekend will face ASKO Kara of Togo or FAR Rabat of Morocco.

Some of the gloss was taken off the Etoile victory when spectators wearing their club colours broke chairs and threw flares in the stadium. AFP

'Very, very smart': Tuchel toasts Kane's 'impressive' Bayern debut



Bayern Munich's Harry Kane celebrates after scoring against Werder Bremen on Friday (AFP)

Bremen, Germany - Bayern Munich manager Thomas Tuchel lavished praise on English striker Harry Kane after his Bundesliga debut ended in a 4-0 away win at Werder Bremen on Friday.

Tuchel, who was instrumental in bringing the England captain to Munich, lauded the striker who scored one and set up another in his first Bundesliga match.

"He had a constant influence," the former Chelsea manager said, "he's simply very, very smart."

"He knows what he's doing and he's unbelievably precise."

Kane laid on a goal for Leroy Sane after just three minutes, before getting on the scoresheet himself midway through the second half to wrap up the win.

"Also in training, the style and way in which he does

things on the field, how much desire he has to training, how much pleasure he shows and the quality that he has, it's absolutely top, he's impressive."

Kane arrived as both Tottenham and England's top goalscorer but Tuchel said the striker's creativity and link-play shone through.

"He makes every player around him better because of his awareness. "It was a very, very good debut."

Kane, who was subbed off to applause with five minutes remaining, said he had a "very happy start to the new season with his new club."

"The early goal obviously helped" Kane said, admitting "we could have played a few actions to decide the game earlier."

"We defended better. The clean sheet also makes me very happy."

AFP

Masterful Messi aims to end magical month with Inter Miami's first trophy

Nashville, United States - Lionel Messi could clinch his first trophy with Inter Miami, just four weeks after making his debut for the club, when his team face Nashville in the final of the Leagues Cup in Tennessee on Saturday.

The Argentine World Cup winner has had a transformative impact on the club, scoring nine goals in six games, as they have marched through the new summer tournament, which also includes Mexican Liga MX clubs.

Now he has the chance to quickly get some American silverware to add to the huge collection of trophies he has gathered with Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and the Argentine national team.

"It would be great, incredible for me, for the fans, and for the club itself. The club is trying to grow and investing a lot, with major changes to put together a team, and winning titles helps a lot," Messi said.

"It's a very young club...it would be beautiful for everyone," he added.

With a goal from Messi in every game and open, attacking football from Miami, the seven-times Ballon d'Or winner has turned a competition which could have been a mid-season curiosity into must-watch action for broadcasters Apple TV.



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring against Philadelphia Union on Tuesday (AFP)

He has also inspired a turnaround in fortunes for Miami which has been faster and more impactful than even the most optimistic Miami fan expected.

When Messi arrived in South Florida he joined a club rooted to the bottom of the standings in Major League Soccer's Eastern Conference and with the worst record of any of the 29 clubs in the league.

But with the Spanish pair of former Barcelona team-mates Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba also joining him at the club, Miami have been unstoppable.

Only once in the six games in the tournament did Miami fail to win - a comeback 4-4 draw at Dallas which ended in victory after a penalty shoot-out.

In the semi-final, the team showed just how radically they have improved, by winning 4-1 at Philadelphia, last season's MLS runners-up who had been unbeaten at home in their last 15 games.

Not invincible

Mexicans Cruz Azul along with MLS's Atlanta United, Orlando City and Charlotte, have all fallen against the new Miami, but full-back DeAndre Yedlin said there is no question of the team, now coached by Argentine Gerardo "Tata" Martino, being unbeatable.

Marseille struggle to a point against 10-man Metz

Metz, France - Three days after going out of the Champions League, Marseille struggled to a 2-2 draw at Metz in French Ligue 1 on Friday, despite playing with an extra man for more than 30 minutes.

Marseille took a 14th-minute first goal for the club, a low shot at the near post.

The visitors appeared to be heading for victory when Metz centre-back Ababacar Lo was

sent off for planting his studs on Iliman Ndriaye's ankle in the 59th minute.

Yet Metz, newly promoted to Ligue 1, scored twice in the next 12 minutes.

Cheikh Sabaly levelled with a

65th-minute shot that deflected off Marseille midfielder Valentin Rongier (65th) and past goalkeeper Pau Lopez.

Georges Mikautadze volleyed Metz ahead after a 71st-minute corner.

Marseille dominated and levelled when Vitorinha, on as a substitute in the 75th minute, found space in the area and fired home a low, diagonal shot in the 82nd minute.

AFP



India's Jasprit Bumrah (second from right) celebrates after taking a wicket against Ireland on Friday

BACK WITH A BANG

Bumrah strikes on return as India edge Ireland in 1st T20

London, United Kingdom - Jasprit Bumrah marked his first India appearance in nearly a year with two wickets as the tourists defeated Ireland by two runs during a rain-affected opening Twenty20 international in Dublin

on Friday.

India sped to 45 without loss in six overs in pursuit of a target of 140 and, even though Craig Young then took two wickets in two balls, they were still narrowly ahead on the Duckworth-Lewis-

Stern method when a lengthy shower prevented any further play at Malahide.

The 29-year-old Bumrah, returning from back surgery and captaining India in the three-match series in the absence of Rohit Sharma, led from the front by dismissing Andy Balbirnie and Lorcan Tucker in the opening over.

Balbirnie got a thin inside edge

into his stumps while Tucker's attempted ramp merely lobbed to wicketkeeper Sanju Samson, with Bumrah - one of the world's leading pacemen when fully fit - taking an encouraging 2-24 from his maximum four overs.

Ireland stumbled to 59-6 after losing the toss, with Prasidh Krishna and Ravi Bishnoi also taking two wickets against a largely second-string India.

Barry McCarthy's aggressive 51 not out from just 33 balls helped take Ireland to 139-7, with the number eight hitting four fours and as many sixes.

In reply, Yashasvi Jaiswal ended the powerplay with a huge pulled six off Josh Little.

That hit proved the difference after Young dismissed Jaiswal (24) and Tilak Varma with successive deliveries.



Ben Stokes

'Me, me, me': Paine mocks Stokes' World Cup backflip

Sydney, Australia - Former Australian Test captain Tim Paine has blasted England skipper Ben Stokes' decision to come out retirement for the World Cup as about "me, me, me".

Stokes quit the ODI format 13 months ago due to a demanding workload as a multi-format player and amid concerns about a chronic left knee injury. But he changed his mind during the week ahead of England's defence of their 50-over men's World Cup title in India in October.

Paine, who led Australia between 2018 and 2021 before being forced to stand down after a scandal over lewd messages to a female colleague, was unimpressed.

"Ben Stokes coming out of one day retirement, I found that interesting," he said on SEN sports radio late Friday. "It was a bit of, 'Me, me, me', there isn't it?"

"It was, 'I'll pick and I'll

choose where I want to play and when I want to play', and, 'I'll play in the big tournaments'. "The guys who played for 12 months, 'Sorry, thanks. But can you go and sit on the bench because I want to play now.'"

All-rounder Stokes, 32, did not bowl at all during the last three Tests of the recent drawn Ashes series against Australia, and looks set to play the World Cup as a specialist batsman only. His return came at the expense of Harry Brook, which was also questioned by Paine, who retired from all cricket in March. "Harry Brook or Ben Stokes? As a bat. It would be very close, very, very close."

England national selector Luke Wright said the decision to include Stokes in their 15-man squad was down to "it's a World Cup we want to win and we feel like we are better, and have more chance, with Stokesy than we haven't".

Man City would be 'killed' for Chelsea spending says Guardiola

Manchester, United Kingdom - Pep Guardiola has claimed Manchester City would be "killed" if they spent as much money on new signings as Chelsea have over the last 12 months.

City's spending since Sheikh Mansour's takeover in 2008 has repeatedly come under scrutiny, with the club facing 115 Premier League charges for alleged breaches of financial regulations.

But Guardiola is adamant their approach had always been prudent, in contrast to the wild spending by Todd Boehly's ownership group at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea have splashed out nearly £1 billion (\$1.2 million) since the start of last summer.

City have signed Josko Gvardiol and Mateo Kovacic in this window for a combined £100 million, yet Guardiola was quick to show irritation over the astronomical sums paid by Chelsea.

"I couldn't sit here if we spent what Chelsea spent in the last two transfer windows - you would kill me," Guardiola told re-



Pep Guardiola

We wanted (Harry) Maguire and didn't buy him because we didn't want to pay. We wanted (Marc) Cucurella and didn't pay. We wanted Alexis Sanchez and didn't pay

PEP GUARDIOLA

porters on Friday.

"You will kill me. That is for sure. We'd be under scrutiny like you couldn't imagine. When people say just Manchester City and Pep Guardiola buy players, I didn't know I had a lot of money in my pocket to buy all the players I have. "We have to see what happens in the market and if we can do it and to pay what we believe is fair.

"We wanted (Harry) Maguire and didn't buy him because we didn't want to pay. We wanted (Marc) Cucurella and didn't pay. In the end, we will pay what is fair to do it. Otherwise, we have the academy."

Guardiola tried to insist he was not criticising Chelsea, but the Catalan clearly feels a sense of double standards.

"They can do what they want," he added. "I don't criticise Chelsea for one second. I'm saying, if we do it, we are dead, all around the world. They can do whatever they want."

Liverpool beat Bournemouth, Brighton go top of Premier League

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Liverpool shrugged off a red card for Alexis Mac Allister on his Anfield debut to beat Bournemouth 3-1 on Saturday as Brighton thrashed Wolves 4-1 to go top of the Premier League.

Bournemouth had lost 9-0 on their visit to Anfield a year ago but could not have wished for a better start.

The Cherries had the ball in the net within seconds but Jaidon Anthony's tap-in was ruled out for offside.

Trent Alexander-Arnold's move into a midfield role resulted in a strong finish to a disappointing season for Liverpool last term, but he was guilty of giving the ball away for Antoine Semenyo's opener after only three minutes. Liverpool needed some inspiration to kickstart their season after a 1-1 draw at Chelsea last weekend.

Luis Diaz provided it as he flicked up Diogo Jota's cross and then acrobatically fired an overhead kick into the bottom corner. Jurgen Klopp's men led nine



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah scores against Bournemouth

minutes before half-time, but Mohamed Salah needed a second opportunity to tap in the rebound after Neto had saved his penalty.

Seagulls continue to soar under Roberto De Zerbi despite seeing their best players picked off by the Premier League's elite.

Kaoru Mitoma may be the next big-money departure and the Japanese international

opened the scoring in stunning style at Molineux as he slalomd past four Wolves defenders before producing a classy finish.

Wolves had thoroughly outplayed Manchester United despite losing 1-0 at Old Trafford on Monday. But they had no answer to Brighton's speed of passing and movement as the visitors scored three times in the first 10 minutes of the second half.

Djokovic eases past Fritz to join Alcaraz in Cincinnati semifinals

Cincinnati, United States - Novak Djokovic crushed Taylor Fritz while Carlos Alcaraz had to push hard to get past Max Purcell Friday as the top two seeds reached the semi-finals at the ATP/WT A Cincinnati Open.

Tournament number two Djokovic showed no mercy against Fritz, hammering the top American 6-0, 6-4 to improve to 7-0 against him.

World number one Alcaraz rallied to hold off Australian qualifier Purcell 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

After pocketing the opening

set against Fritz in a mere 21 minutes, two-time tournament winner Djokovic was broken to start the second set as a backhand landed long.

The 23-time Grand Slam champion regained the break in the eighth game when Fritz drove a forehand into the net. Djokovic broke again two games later, securing the match on his first match point after just 62 minutes.

"I managed to get out of the blocks with a flawless start," the Serb star said. "I started the sec-



Novak Djokovic returns a shot to Taylor Fritz during their quarterfinal match at Western & Southern Open on Friday (AFP)

ond set poorly, handing him the break.

"But from 2-4 down I played four solid games, overall it was a great performance. I've played three good matches here so far, every day I raise the bar a bit higher.

"I'm feeling better on court. I hope the same trajectory can continue," added Djokovic, who next faces German Alexander Zverev.

Zverev, the 2021 Cincy champion, beat France's Adrian Mannarino 6-2, 6-3 to reach his

first Masters semi-final since Rome last year - before a horror ankle injury in Paris ended his 2022 campaign.

Alcaraz, meanwhile, was caught off-guard by 70th-ranked Purcell, dropping the first set in 44 minutes.

Alcaraz steadied the ship to force a third, struggling through an exchange of service breaks before breaking for a 5-4 lead and serving out the victory.

Alcaraz booked a semi-final clash with Poland's Hubert Hurkacz, who needed seven

match points to finally put away Australian Alexei Popyrin 6-1, 7-6 (10/8).

In the WTA draw, top-seeded Iga Swiatek proved to be a quick learner as she ousted Marketa Vondrousova 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 in a battle of Grand Slam champions.

Swiatek, the reigning US Open and French Open champion, said she applied the lessons from her first-set struggles in the second to sweep past Wimbledon winner Vondrousova.



Ducati Lenovo Team Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia waves after the end of the qualifying session on Saturday (AFP)

World champion Bagnaia wins MotoGP sprint race

Spielberg Bei Knittelfeld, Austria - World champion Francesco Bagnaia dominated the sprint race at the Austrian MotoGP on Saturday to increase his lead in the world championship.

Brad Binder (KTM) came in second with Jorge Martin (Ducati-Pramac) completing the podium at Spielberg's Red Bull Ring circuit.

Bagnaia's fourth sprint win of the season lifted him 46 points clear of Martin ahead of Sunday's main event, the 10th round of the 20-race season.

"The plan was to push hard from the start.

"It was tough but we managed to be in front in first lap. I'm very happy but tomorrow is another story," said the pole-sitting Ducati factory rider.

Bagnaia on pole

Bagnaia will start on pole for the Austrian MotoGP after Ducati's series leader topped qualifying at the Red Bull Ring circuit on Saturday.

urday. Joining the Italian, who leads the championship by 41 points, on the front row for Saturday's sprint and Sunday's main event are Maverick Vinales (Aprilia) and Brad Binder (KTM).

This was Bagnaia's fifth pole out of 10 this season and the 16th of his career.

Binder's Australian KTM teammate Jack Miller, Alex Marquez (Ducati-Gresini) and Luca Marini (Ducati-VR46), fill the second row. South African Binder made the front row hours after signing a new contract with Austrian factory team KTM at their home track until 2026.

Bagnaia leads the 2023 championship from Jorge Martin (Ducati-Pramac) who could manage only 12th to start from the fourth row.

Marco Bezzecchi, third in the standings and who set a new track record in practice on Friday, posted the seventh fastest time in qualifying to occupy the third row.

WALK OF GLORY

Spain's Martin wins first gold of Budapest World Athletics Championships

Budapest, Hungary - Spain's Alvaro Martin won the men's 20km race walk to claim the first gold of the World Athletics Championships in Budapest on Saturday as a host of hot favourites negotiated their qualifying rounds.

The two-time European champion clocked 1hr 17min 32sec for the victory on the streets of the Hungarian capital in a fast race that saw five of the first six finishers break national records.

"I was fourth at the last Olympic Games, I missed the bronze which motivated me to work hard," Martin said.

"In Tokyo, I felt when I was in the fourth position that I could win a medal. Unfortunately, it did not happen and that is why this gold medal is next step towards the next Olympic Games" in Paris next year.

The race walk was delayed for two hours because of a heavy storm and the opening day's action at the National Athletics Centre was put back an hour.

Sifan Hassan kicked off her audacious bid for a world treble by safely negotiating the opening round of the 1500m.

The Dutch runner completed an unprecedented triple at the Tokyo Olympics by winning gold medals in both the 5,000m and 10,000m and a bronze in the 1500m.

She is down to race all three once again in Budapest and will be back in action in the final of the 10,000m later Saturday.

'Keep fighting'

Also safely through into Sunday's



Spain's Alvaro Martin celebrates after winning the men's 20km race walk final at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest on Saturday (AFP)

In Tokyo, I felt when I was in the fourth position that I could win a medal. It did not happen and that is why this gold medal is next step towards the next Olympic Games

ALVARO MARTIN

1500m semi-final (with the final on Tuesday) was Faith Kipyegon, who has enjoyed a stunning season in which she has set three world records.

The Kenyan is also entered in the 5,000m, with qualifiers over that distance to be raced on Wednesday and the final set for

the penultimate day of action on August 26. Reigning world shot put champion Ryan Crouser, suffering with blood clots in his lower leg, also sailed through qualification, going out to 21.48m on his first attempt.

"The last 20 days have been some of the most frustrating and

stressful of my life," he said on Instagram.

The fancied Polish duo of Pawel Fajdek and Wojciech Nowicki moved into the final of the men's hammer throw.

Fajdek is seeking a sixth successive world gold that would see him match the record number of titles won in a single event achieved by Sergey Bubka in the pole vault between 1983-97.

But it is Olympic champion Nowicki who is the clear world No.1 in the event at the moment.

With double Olympic champion Nafissatou Thiam of Belgium out injured and unable to defend her title, American Anna

Hall took charge of the heptathlon after the opening two events, the 100m hurdles and high jump. Hall clocked 12.97sec in the hurdles and registered a best of 1.83 in the high jump for a total of 2,145 points.

US teammates Talyah Brooks (2,136) and Chari Hawkins (2,134) were hot on her tail, with Britain's 2019 world champion Katarina Johnson-Thompson in fourth (2,104).

"The high jump didn't end up as I'd hoped but at this type of event you always have to deal with some kind of adversity," said Hall, a world bronze medalist in Eugene last year.

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

An expert in business development and management, project analysis, economic feasibility study, preparation of marketing and future plans, strategic planning and development of work mechanisms, with more than 26 years of experience in the Gulf. Contact: +968-97629179

An Indian female (Keralite) having an MBA in Finance and SAP-FICO is looking for a job of an accountant. Contact: +968-97894195 sumisumiya501@gmail.com

An Indian male (Keralite) having an BBA in supply chain with logistics with one year experience in logistics is looking for an opening in logistics, administration, sales. Contact: +968-91793559 mammumckenzie13@gmail.com

An Indian male having an MBA with 3.5 years of experience in payroll is looking for an opening in Accounts, HR, Admin. Contact: +968-78829919 Eldhosebabu9745@gmail.com

Experienced instrumentation engineer/QC (Indian) with 11 years of experience in the Gulf is currently looking for new opportunities in oman. Ready to join immediately. Contact: +968-98126927

BIRTHDAY WISHES



SAKET & SMRITI
AUGUST 20

"Double the difficulty, double the laughs, and double the love! The world's greatest twins had a birthday today!"

عيادة فصول السنة للطب الهندي التقليدي
ALL SEASON AYURVEDA CLINIC

The most efficient and authentic Ayurvedic Treatment & Medicine, Yoga, Kalari, Panchakarma, Massage, Dhara etc... Rehabilitation, Beauty therapy & post Delivery Care

Zaher Building, 1st Floor, Flat 8A, Al Khuwair Service Road ,near Al Zawawi Mosque & Burger-king Tel:24475280, GSM: 95371664 , 92504980 , Website:www.siddhayur.com

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
Choose from a wide range of brands & models
PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

SITUATION VACANT
BAHWAN METAL & GLASS ENGINEERING LLC

Required Sales Representative with minimum 2 years of work experience in sales. The candidate should have 1 year working experience in Oman. Having a driving license and a car is a must.

Please send your CV to info@bahwanmge.com
Tel: +96896666685

الكادر المحترف للتجارة
AK AL KADIR Professional Trad

Pest Control and Extermination of Insects and Rooden General Cleaning of Building

Kishan GSM: +96897302738
Naseer GSM: +96897302739
Sultanate of oman/ Muscat/ Al Amarat
alkadript23@gmail.com
Alkadripprofessionaltrad@gmail.com

mai alkaline
pH 9.1 to 9.5
Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water

HYDRATE SMARTLY
Ultra-hydrating
Revitalizing
Energizing
Electrolytes

oman OASIS
800 71 222
9275 5522

CHINA PET FAIR



Furry Tale

Ballgowns, surveillance, and cloning for sale at China pet fair

A shimmering, 1.5m long golden ballgown stood pride of place in a Shanghai exhibition hall Thursday - and for the cool price of US\$13,700, your dog could be the lucky animal to leave Pet Fair Asia wearing it.

The plethora of luxury and sophisticated gadgets on display at the show, the region's largest, is testament to the consumer power of China's expanding class of young, tech-savvy pet owners.

From robot companions to AI-powered health-monitoring wearables, animal welfare is a lucrative industry - and if all else fails, cloning a beloved pet is also an option in China these days.

"If you have a puppy, it's just like your own child," a young dog owner named Song said. "Anyone who has raised one knows... They hold a huge place in your heart."

Pet ownership in China has soared, reaching nearly 100 million households in 2022. Analysts have attributed the growth to younger generations, with Deloitte saying 'changing views on family structure and an increase in single population' were a big reason for the boom.

"Young people are more individualistic, they don't want to sacrifice their whole lives (raising children) like the previous generation, so they hope that by raising an animal they will immediately get that intimacy and warmth... but not spend as much time and energy," said a young woman named Duan visiting the fair on Thursday. And owners spend a lot of money on their furry family.

The US\$13,700 dog dress - which comes with a matching tiara - is hand-embroidered



and designed for a canine wedding, stall manager Sun Chao said, adding they usually got around a few dozen orders a year for such designs.

"The overall economic environment in our country has not been very good, but the pet market is in a league of its own," said Sun. The industry is projected to grow 68% to 81bn yuan (US\$112bn) by 2025, according to iiMedia Research.

'Together forever' with tech
Pet Fair Asia is taking place over several days, with organisers saying its scale this

If you have a puppy, it's just like your own child," anyone who has raised one knows... They hold a huge place in your heart."

SONG

year is unprecedented. It features more than 2,000 exhibitors selling items as varied as tofu cat litter, desiccated treefrog snacks and dog doughnuts and macarons.

In a nod to the region's intense work culture, remote surveillance devices were a common sight, allowing busy owners to monitor their pets from afar.

One US\$169 robot can follow animals around, feed them, amuse them with a laser or broadcast their owner's voice. The next iteration will use artificial intelligence to help interpret the pet's movements and react accordingly. Technology is even being applied

to overcome death.
At Chinese company Sinogene's stall, visitors crowded around a cage of identical frisky terriers wearing harnesses that read 'I am a clone dog'.

The firm is one of the few in the world offering animal cloning services - enabling pets and their owners to be 'together forever', as its tagline states.

A representative named Dai said they had cloned around 500 animals for Chinese customers since they began in 2017, including some for the country's security services.

It costs between US\$30,000 - 60,000 to clone a dog, depending on its breed.

At the beginning, said Dai, the business was met with wariness from consumers. "But with the development of the economy over the years and people's dependence on pets... people have slowly begun to familiarise themselves with and accept cloning," he said.

While most of the show catered to cats and dogs, there were signs that more exotic tastes were beginning to take off.

Eager to appeal to pet lovers with cash to burn, an electric car company led an unimpressed-looking alpaca around as they gave out leaflets and stickers.

In one exhibition hall, a kaleidoscope of snakes squirmed in small plastic takeaway containers, and a small scrum formed around a box full of meerkats.

Meanwhile, a capybara studiously ignored showgoers' overtures as it munched its way through its grass bedding.

AFP



Caprice®

Taste delicious wafer rolls with smooth hazelnut and cocoa cream

feel the roll





People using umbrellas and parasols to seek relief from the heat while walking outside Shinjuku station, as temperatures of 35°C-plus (95°F) have scorched the Japanese capital Tokyo for weeks



A man wearing a vest with battery-powered built-in fans, along with cooling sleeves over his arms

FEELING HOT, HOT, HOT

Japanese turn to wearable tech to beat the heat this summer which recorded the highest temperatures in Japan since 1875

Selling jackets with built-in fans, neck coolers and T-shirts that feel cold, Japanese firms are tapping into a growing market for products to help people handle the summer heat. Japan - like other countries - is seeing ever-hotter summers. This July was the warmest in 100 years, with at least 53 people dying of heatstroke and almost 50,000 needing emergency medical attention. Workman, which makes clothes for construction workers, launched a version of their fan-fitted jackets adapted for the high street in 2020 as demand grew. The mechanism is simple - two electric, palm-sized fans powered by a rechargeable battery are fitted into the back of the jacket. They draw in air to then deliver a breeze - at variable speeds - onto the wearer's body. The jackets retail for 12,000 to 24,000 yen

(US\$82-164). "As the weather gets hotter, people who have never worn fan-equipped clothing before want to find ways to cool down... so more people are interested in buying it," Workman spokesman Yuya Suzuki said. "Just like you feel cool when you are at home with a fan, you feel cool just by wearing (the jacket) because the wind is blowing through your body all the time," he said. **AGEING POPULATION AT RISK** Japanese summers are known to be hot and humid, but this July, Tokyo really sweated. The average temperature was 28.7°Celsius (83.7°Fahrenheit), the highest on record since 1875. Heatstroke is particularly deadly in Japan, which has the second-oldest population in the world after Monaco. More than 80% of heat-related deaths in the past five years

PERSONAL COOLERS



A man wearing a jacket with battery-powered built-in fans to keep cool in the heat as he sits on his motor scooter along a street in Tokyo

have been among senior citizens. "Some people die from heatstroke," said Nozomi Takai of MI Creations, a company selling neck-cooling tubes mainly to factory and warehouse workers. "Individuals as well as companies are putting more and more effort into measures against it every year," Takai said. The gel inside his firm's brightly coloured tubes - priced at 2,500 yen - is cool enough to use after 20 minutes in the fridge. Wearing it on the neck will considerably cool the whole body for about an hour, she said. Takai's company joined an expo this year on measures against extreme heat in Tokyo to showcase new products that



help users stay cool in the scorching heat. At another booth, Tokyo-based company Liberta had a series of clothing including T-shirts and arm sleeves using prints that make users feel cool - especially when they sweat. The prints use materials such as xylitol that feel cool when reacting with water and sweat, they said. Chikuma, an Osaka-based company, has even created office jackets and dresses equipped with electric fans. "We developed them with the idea that it could be proposed in places where casual wear is not allowed," Yosuke Yamanaka of Chikuma said. Regular fan-fitted clothes can make the wearer look puffy, as they need to be zipped up, and cuffs are tight. But jackets

As the weather gets hotter, people who have never worn fan-equipped clothing before want to find ways to cool down... so more people are interested in buying it

YUYA SUZUKI

developed jointly by Chikuma, power tool maker Makita and textile giant Teijin do not need to be buttoned up, thanks to a special structure that sandwiches the fans in two layers and keeps the cool air in, Yamanaka said.

MEN ADOPTING PARASOLS

Parasols, which are commonly associated in Japan with skin-tone-conscious women protecting against a summer tan, are now proving more popular with men too. Komiya Shoten, a small, luxury umbrella maker in Tokyo, began making parasols for men around 2019 after the environment ministry encouraged people to use them. Before, many male customers thought parasols were for women and they were embarrassed to use them, the owner Hiroyuki Komiya said. "Once you use it, you can't let go," he added. On the busy streets of popular tourist destination Asakusa, Kiyoshi Miya, 42, said he decided to use his umbrella as a parasol. "It's like I'm always in the shade and the wind feels cool," he said. Another visitor, Shoma Kawashima, wore a wearable fan around his neck to stay cool under the blazing sun. "It's so hot, I want to be naked," the 21-year-old said. Gadgets are helpful, but not a solution to rising temperatures, he added. AFP





Scent-sational and long lasting clothes!



All day long

3X Power[®]

fragrance
freshness
softness