



'Oman believes in spirit of global cooperation, shared responsibility'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, represented Oman at the 18th G20 Summit in New Delhi. Inaugurated on Saturday, the summit witnessed the presence of prominent global leaders and heads of government.

Upon arrival, Sayyid Asaad was welcomed by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In his keynote address, Sayyid Asaad conveyed greetings from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and expressed gratitude for the achievements under the Indian presidency.

"We welcome the Indian presidency's theme for this year's edition of the G20, 'One Earth, One Family, One Future', and stress the importance of joint action, not only for the preservation and protection of the Earth, but for the progress and prosperity of all humanity," he said.



"The Sultanate of Oman believes in the spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility, and is committed to these in pursuit of public benefit.

"Therefore, we in Oman realise our role and responsibility, and affirm our commitment to the visions of the international community and its many initiatives in order to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement, to name a few.

"In conclusion, we look forward to continuing and strengthening



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomes Sayyid Asaad to the 18th G20 Summit in New Delhi on Saturday (AFP)

G20 participation opens avenues for Oman in many fields: Khimji

Muscat - The invitation to Oman as guest of honour at the 18th G20 summit is a significant stride in enhancing its ties with G20 member states. According to a senior Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) official, this participation opens avenues for collaboration in diverse areas including tourism, health, agriculture, renewable energy, education and digital transformation.

Pankaj Khimji, MoCIIP's Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation, emphasised the summit's role in offering Oman a firsthand understanding of global decision-making across economic,



Pankaj Khimji

financial and political landscapes. He added that engaging with decision-makers from developed nations offers insights into achieving sustainable development milestones.

"This global platform allows us to discern international future trends, skill sets and policy directions. We aim to evaluate

their alignment with Oman's policies and to explore innovative sustainable strategies," Khimji said.

He informed that Oman has been active throughout the year, attending over 200 meetings, including nine ministerial level. These engagements provided insights into global trends, underscoring the importance of leveraging these insights to align with Oman Vision 2040.

Khimji noted the appreciation shown by the G20 working groups towards Oman's initiatives in sectors like agriculture, mining and tourism, especially its efforts in clean energy and green hydrogen.

ening cooperation and partnership with all G20 countries in all fields that benefit everyone.

"We cannot fail to express our thanks and appreciation to the Republic of India, its efforts to prepare well for this summit and for the warm reception and hospitality."

This year's G20 discussions revolve around sustainable devel-

opment and means to distribute economic growth equitably between nations. Key topics include green development, climate change impacts and the European Union's environmental initiatives. Discussions on loans for developing nations, debt restructuring, cryptocurrency regulations and geopolitical concerns are also on the agenda.

The summit will culminate with a declaration from G20 leaders, reflecting their dedication to the priorities deliberated during various ministerial and working group sessions.

The special invitation for Oman to participate in the G20 meet reaffirms the depth of relations and strong bond between India and Oman.

Wide-ranging trade plan linking EU-Mideast-India launched



Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman (L), India's Narendra Modi (C) and US' Joe Biden attend a G20 session in New Delhi on Saturday (AFP)

New Delhi, India - A broad alliance of states on Saturday unveiled ambitious plans to create a modern-day Spice Route linking Europe, the Middle East and India, boosting trade ties with potentially wide-ranging geopolitical implications.

The United States, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates and others launched the initiative to link railways, ports, electricity and data

networks and hydrogen pipelines on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in New Delhi.

Although heavily trade-focused, the scheme could have wide-ranging implications - including developing contacts between long-time foes Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Signatories hope it can help integrate India's vast market of 1.4bn people with countries to the west, offer a counterbalance to

lavish Chinese infrastructure spending, boost Middle Eastern economies and help normalise relations between Israel and Gulf Arab states.

"This is a real big deal," said US President Joe Biden at the launch event, calling the plan "historic".

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the so-called India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor was "much more than just a railway or

a cable".

"It is a green and digital bridge across continents and civilisations," she said.

One proposed project would link railway and port facilities across the Middle East - including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel - potentially speeding trade between India and Europe by up to 40%.

AFP

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H M ISSUES ROYAL DECREE ON CIVIL AVIATION

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 62/2023 on Thursday amending some provisions of the Civil Aviation Law.

Article 1 states that the amendments attached to this decree will be applied to the Civil Aviation Law. **Article 2** cancels all that contradicts the attached amendments or contravenes their provisions.

Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication.

04



OQGN intends to float IPO on MSX

Muscat and Salalah airports receive top global awards

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat International Airport has been recognised as the best Middle Eastern airport in the 15mn to 25mn passengers category, while Salalah Airport not only ranked among the best for terminals handling around 2mn passengers, but also bagged awards for Most Dedicated Staff, Easiest Airport Journey and Cleanest Airport in the region.

These accolades were presented at the Airport Service Quality Awards in Incheon, South Korea. Organised by Airports Council International in collaboration with travel technology firm Amadeus, winners were chosen from passenger feedback gathered at the terminals.

In recent years, Muscat International Airport has experienced a significant uptick in passenger numbers. This rapid growth has propelled the airport to the forefront, garnering numerous awards across the aviation, tourism and travel sectors. Notably, the airport is designed to eventually expand and serve



over 56mn passengers, anticipating future travel needs to and from Oman.

Commenting on the achievement, Saud Nasser al Hubaishi, Executive Vice-President of Muscat International Airport and Acting Chief of Operations at Oman Airports, said, "This recognition is a testament to the collective efforts of all entities at both airports." He emphasised the need to maintain this momentum, especially given the resurgence in travel post the COVID-19 downturn.

By May 2023, passenger traffic at Oman's airports surged by 71.5%, with over 5.2mn travellers - a record - compared to over 3mn recorded in May 2022.



MOROCCO QUAKE KILLS OVER 1,000; OMAN CONDOLES

Over 1,000 people were reported dead in Morocco's deadliest earthquake in decades which caused widespread damage. The 6.8-magnitude quake struck a mountainous area 72km southwest of Marrakesh at 11:11pm on Friday. Oman expressed its sympathy with the government and people of the Kingdom of Morocco following the earthquake. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman expressed condolences to the families of the victims and its wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured (AFP)

Our Correspondent

Muscat

In its efforts to enhance the literacy level in the sultanate, the Ministry of Education conducted a project called Learning Village during the 2022/2023 academic year in Jabal Akhdar, Dhakhliyah.

Spearheaded by the Directorate General of Education in Dhakhliyah, the project, which aims to directly combat illiteracy, offered 14 classes benefiting 78 learners, a majority of whom were over 40 years old. These learners were under the guidance of 14 dedicated educators.

According to Hilal bin Ali al Riyami, head of the Lifelong Learning Department at the directorate, the Learning Village project has designed innovative programmes catering to residents across various villages in the wilayat.

tional methods, the project seeks to heighten awareness around the importance of eradicating illiteracy and its impact on personal, academic and community lives. Riyami emphasised

that such initiatives showcase Oman's unwavering commitment to addressing illiteracy.

He further outlined the project's multifaceted goals: eliminating foundational illiteracy

among village residents; fostering economic, social and environmental consciousness within a set timeframe; ensuring the local community actively participates in collaborative efforts

and volunteerism; and uplifting and empowering women to play a more significant social role.

Faisal Said al Hinaï, Director of Special Education and Lifelong Learning Department in Dhakliyah, highlighted the progress made in the last five years. The directorate launched 149 literacy classes, making 950 individuals literate through 108 classes from 2018 to 2022, partnering with 81 schools in the process.

Hinai added that for the academic year 2022/2023 alone, 41 literacy classes were introduced. These included the Learning Village in Jabal Akhdar's Al Hayl village. Collectively, these classes engaged 301 students guided by 53 educators. There were 123 learners in 20 Grade 1 classes, 79 in nine Grade 2 classes, and 99 Grade 3 learners who successfully overcame illiteracy in 12 classes. The programme collaborated with 20 local schools in 2022/2023.



Our Correspondent

Muscat

In a move to advance healthcare training and employment, the Ministry of Health (MoH) signed a cooperation programme with the Ministry of Labour (MoL) on Thursday. The collaboration aims to train and subsequently employ over 600 nursing and allied medical professionals.

Dignitaries present at the signing included H E Dr Fatma Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs, and H E Sayyid Salim Musallam al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources Development in MoL.

The objective of this programme is to elevate the skills of Omani individuals holding bachelor's degrees and diplomas. It is

designed to prepare them for roles in nursing and allied medical fields in government health institutions. A unique feature of the programme is the combination of training directly linked to employment opportunities.

Highlighting the importance of the programme, H E Dr Fatma emphasised the role of MoH in closely overseeing the training regimen, ensuring its timely execution. Moreover, the ministry will evaluate trainees regularly and coordinate feedback with MoL.

On the occasion, H E Busaidi spoke about the government's dedication to both improving the health sector and creating avenues for the youth, and affirmed MoL's commitment to financially back training grants for nursing and allied healthcare professionals.

Our Correspondent

Salalah

In a groundbreaking development for Oman, Salalah Airport launched a trial cargo flight connecting it directly with Port of Salalah on Thursday. This marks the sultanate's first integrated operation to bridge sea shipments with air services.

This initiative, a brainchild of Oman Airports company, aims to strengthen the logistics synergy between the country's



said, "Today's flight heralds a pivotal moment for sea and air freight in the sultanate. Our collaboration with strategic partners is set to unlock vast business potentials."

Zakariya al Harrasi, Executive Vice-President of Salalah Airport, said, "We are proud to pioneer the first air-sea freight link in Oman. Salalah Airport's facilities, built to global standards, combined with our ports equipped with top-tier handling services, signify our prepared-

ness to make Oman a key player in the global economic arena."

On the operational front, the shipment from Sri Lanka's Colombo port, facilitated by Maersk Logistics, made its way to the Port of Salalah. After reaching Salalah Airport, the shipment underwent requisite procedures through Transom Handling company. Subsequently, Royal Oman Police's specialised team ensured its smooth transition to the final destination.



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Environment Authority (EA) unveiled an initiative called Green Madha in Musandam last week, marking a significant stride towards the sultanate's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

Hosted at Madha Club and graced by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of EA, the event saw participation of various government agencies, private sector leaders, local community members and prominent citizens.

An EA official informed that the initiative targets the enhancement of Madha's environment, leveraging its unique natural makeup and green cover. Given its relative isolation from major industrial activity and pollutants, Madha stands as an ideal location for this project.

The central aim of Green Madha is to bolster environ-



The initiative includes restoration and planting vegetation for wildlife and recycling green waste

DR ABDULLAH
AL AMRI



mental sustainability within the wilayat. Key focus areas include preserving vegetation, monitoring air pollution sources, integrating the circular economy approach, improving waste management, ensuring environmental cleanliness, and advancing environmental services.

The unveiling event also highlighted several environmental projects spearheaded by EA and other stakeholders, including a drive to plant 30,000

trees and a million seeds within the year, establish a model village for livestock breeders, combat invasive plants, and restore aflaj impacted by weather. Other showcased projects included solar electricity generation, municipal waste management, green waste collection, and adoption of modern irrigation methods for green zones.

Addressing the gathering, Amri said that the first goal of

the initiative was to achieve environmental sustainability through diverse projects. These span restoration and planting vegetation for wildlife, expanding dam systems, optimising natural water consumption, recycling green waste, eradicating invasive tree species and more.

He emphasised that the collaborative efforts of various sectors, including contributions of the Namaa Group, the Public

Services Regulatory Authority, be'ah and initiatives by Musandam Municipality, underscore the collective responsibility towards the environment.

Hamad al Maamari, Wali of Madha, stressed on the significance of the Green Madha initiative. Underscoring Madha's rich vegetation and clean environment, he noted that the initiative would further enhance these attributes in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Oman gears up for Asian Games in China

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 19th Asian Games, set to unfold in Hangzhou, China, from September 23 to October 8, will see Oman's sports stars vying for top honours.

On Thursday, Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) confirmed its participation with a 44-member squad, representing athletics, weightlifting, water sports, shooting, beach volleyball and hockey. The announcement came during a meeting at the OOC headquarters, which involved detailed discussions con-



(Supplied photo)

cerning the technical aspects of participation, event schedules, accommodation and crucial health protocols, especially regarding COVID-19.

The selection process for the squad relied heavily on analytics, conformance to OOC's set standards, results of the 2022-2023 season, and continental and international rankings.

The Asian Games are Asia's premier sporting event and trail only the Summer Olympics in global stature. This year's edition promises to be grand, featuring over 12,000 athletes from 45 nations competing in 40 sports.

Oman's delegation

Athletics: The competitions, scheduled between September 29 and October 5, will be held at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Stadium. The team consists of 12 members, including athletes and support staff.

Weightlifting: Four members will represent Oman, with events taking place at the Xiaoshan Sports Centre from September 30 to October 7.

Shooting: Eight participants will compete from September 24 to October 1 at the Fuyang Yinhu Sports Centre.

Water Sports: Two athletes

will take part in events at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Stadium from September 24 to 29.

Sailing: From September 19 to 27; six sailors will compete in events at the Xiangshan Sailing Centre.

Beach volleyball: Oman's team comprises four players and a coach. Matches will be held at the Ningbo Beach Volleyball Centre from September 19 to 28.

Hockey: A 24-member squad will compete at the Gongshu Sports Stadium between September 24 and October 7.

RO20mn agreement to support SMEs and microenterprises

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A financing agreement of RO20mn has been inked between the Omani-Saudi Joint Committee overseeing the Programme for Supporting Medium, Small and Microenterprises and Oman Development Bank (ODB). This move aims to bolster the bank's commitment to foster growth in the SME sector and create more employment avenues for Omani citizens.

With this agreement, ODB seeks to expand its lending portfolio, primarily focusing on development projects spanning multiple industries. The provision of soft loans will not only aid businesses but also assist self-employed individuals and artisans.

The agreement was signed by Zahir Marhoon al Abri, Director General of Treasury and Accounts at Ministry of Finance, representing Oman in



(Supplied photo)

With this agreement, ODB seeks to expand its lending portfolio, primarily focusing on development projects spanning multiple industries

the committee, Said Mohammed al Qahtani, representing the Saudi side, and Hamad Salim al Harthy, acting CEO of ODB.

This collaborative effort between Oman and Saudi Arabia took shape following a memorandum of understanding signed by Oman's Ministry of Finance and Saudi Fund for Development in February 2022.

Oman calls for global strategy for nutritional development

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has advocated for a global initiative focusing on nutritional development. This initiative seeks to moderate daily food intake, transform consumption habits, and boost food production efficiency.

H E Dr Ahmed Nasser al Bakri, Undersecretary for Agriculture in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, made the call at the International Conference on Food Security in Samarkand, Uzbekistan from September 7-8.

The conference, a collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), delved into the prevailing state of food production, challenges to eradicating hunger, and refining agricultural food systems. As a result, attendees committed to



(Supplied photo)

the 'Samarkand Declaration on Food Security'.

In his address, H E Bakri emphasised Oman's dedication to fortifying its food security framework. This involves enhancing production of competitive goods, solidifying import supply chains, and strengthening logistics for storage and distribution across Oman.

He added that the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy 2040, along with the Fisheries Sector Strat-

egy 2040, targets a more resilient agricultural and fishery sector in Oman. The goals include heightened economic returns, more job opportunities for Omanis, and bolstering rural communities.

In recent years, the ministry has also initiated a food security investment laboratory. This lab zeroes in on short to medium-term investment projects, notably in the food and water security domain, carrying an investment value exceeding

RO1.3bn. These projects align with Oman Vision 2040, as noted by H E Bakri.

Furthermore, H E Bakri revealed that the Global Food Security Index 2022 placed Oman 35th globally, a leap from its 40th position in 2021. Impressively, in the Arab world, Oman climbed to 3rd in 2022 from its 5th place the previous year.

The conference concluded by examining innovative global practices in food safety and quality.

FORESIGHT



SYED ADIL ABBAS

An MBA graduate from Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK), Abbas is currently based in Muscat, and has over 20 years of international experience working with the public and private sectors in the Middle East, Far East, Africa and India.

For more than a century, our energy reliance centred around resources that were consumed and released as smoke. Today, an opportunity emerges to transition away from fossil fuels and embrace energy alternatives derived from renewable sources like sunlight, wind and water. However, the shift to green energy also calls for essential raw materials such as lithium, cobalt and copper, crucial for constructing wind turbines, solar panels, electric vehicles and catalytic converters - comparable to how oil, gas and coal powered the fossil fuel era.

The remarkable aspect is that the constituents of green energy can be repeatedly used, in theory, indefinitely. However, this perpetual value hinges on designing products for reusability. Transforming from metal consumers to users, we could turn the growing mountains of discarded electronics into repositories of green raw materials through a concept called 'urban mining,' which holds the potential to evolve into a significant industry.

While curtailing electronic consumption remains the most environmentally friendly approach, the circular economy underscores the significance of extending product lifespans, promoting repairs and fostering recycling. The European Union's proposal for extended repair entitlement, surpassing traditional warranties, sets a positive precedent. Manufacturers are obligated to provide spare parts long after sales, nurturing a repair market for items

ranging from old washing machines to mobile phones.

However, even with enhanced product longevity, eventual depletion is inevitable. To prevent squandering valuable metals, a paradigm shift is essential in their management.

Last year, a staggering 50mn tonnes of electronics were discarded globally, equivalent to 5,000 Eiffel Towers. This annual heap continues to grow exponentially. Amidst the green transition, marked by proliferation of wind turbines, solar panels and electric vehicles, the demand for these metals escalates. Trade tensions aside, the mining industry would struggle to meet this demand even under optimal conditions. Consequently, the prices of raw ma-

URBAN MINING

terials required for the green transition are projected to surge, heralding improved prospects for maintenance, reuse and recycling.

Recognising this trend, the mining industry is investing in urban mining facilities. As metal prices rise, their investment potential strengthens. As our recycling efforts improve, urban miners face a new challenge in the coming years as the first wave of electric vehicles, turbines and solar panels reach their end-of-life stage. Companies investing now stand to profit by extracting reusable raw materials, es-

pecially if regulations enforce a minimum percentage of recycled components in new products, and designs facilitate efficient material reuse.

The process of extracting metals from urban scrap mines progresses slowly. The mobile market exemplifies how far we are from achieving circular goals. Globally, most phones still exit the lifecycle outside proper recycling channels. According to the European Environment Agency, only 10% of mobile devices in Europe are recycled, another 10% collected but not recycled, and 20% are passed down or sold. These untapped resources remain either in storage or outside the circular loop.

With high electronic waste volumes, Oman's situation isn't very promising. According to the United Nations University, our electronic waste volumes in 2019 were among the top three countries in the Arab world (15.2 kg per inhabitant) and the proportion of electronic waste that is collected has been declining for many years. Swift action is vital, and if the industry falters, legislations akin to the UK's initiative could be adopted. The UK aims to establish a fully circular metals system, setting a global precedent.

The rationale for embracing this approach is compelling - it addresses looming supply issues, restores ecological balance, and serves as an exceptional business model within the green transition. The question is: what are we waiting for? The imperative to act has never been clearer.

Shrimp production touches 2,700t in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has reported shrimp production of approximately 2,799 tonnes in 2022. This figure includes artisanal and aquacul-

ture fishing, valued at over RO7mn.

Year 2021 saw production of 1,130 tonnes, solely from artisanal fishing, valued at RO3.5mn.

The shrimp fishing season started in the beginning of September and will continue for

three months.

Highlighting regional productivity, Ibrahim Abdullah al Qartoubi, Assistant Director General of Fisheries in Al Wusta, informed that the governorate led in shrimp production in 2022, accounting for 90% of the total catch.

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OQ GAS NETWORKS ANNOUNCES INTENTION TO FLOAT ON MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

The Selling Shareholders intend to offer up to 49% of OQ Gas Networks share capital through the Initial Public Offering (IPO)

According to international media reports, the OQGN IPO could raise up to \$800mn, making it Oman's largest share offer since Omantel IPO in 2005

The listing on MSX will provide investors with access to growth of the company, which holds a natural monopoly over essential gas transportation in Oman

The IPO subscription period is expected to commence in September, after receiving the required approval from the Capital Market Authority

Muscat - OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) recently announced its intention to proceed with an Initial Public Offering (IPO) and listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), which is expected to take place in October 2023, subject to receiving the required regulatory approvals from the Capital Market Authority of Oman (CMA). The company's planned listing will allow investors to gain exposure to the exclusive operator and owner of the NGTN.

The OQGN IPO could raise between \$700mn and \$800mn, a source with knowledge of the matter told Reuters, which would make it the largest since Oman Telecommunications (Omantel) raised RO288mn (\$748mn) by selling a 30% stake in 2005. According to a Bloomberg News report, the OQGN IPO could raise as much as \$800mn, which would make it a contender for Oman's 'largest' listing ever.

The Selling Shareholders expect to sell up to 49% of the total issued share capital of OQGN, with the company and the Selling Shareholders retaining the right to amend the size of the offering at any time before the end of the subscription period at their sole discretion, subject to applicable laws and the approval of the CMA. Immediately following the offering, a minimum of 51.0% shareholding will continue to be held by OQ, according to a press release.

The offering is being offered to eligible investors in Oman and qualified institutional and other investors in a number of countries (Category I Investors) and retail investors in Oman (Category II Investors). Further information on the eligibility requirements for participation in the offering will be available in the Offering Document upon its publication.

The subscription period for Category I and Category II investors is expected to commence in September, after receiving the required approval from the CMA. Admission of the shares to trading on the MSX is expected in October 2023.

Dividend policy

OQGN intends to adopt a semi-



This listing, which we are proud to conduct on the MSX, will allow us to move the company into the next chapter of growth

MANSOOR AL-ABDALI
Managing Director-OQGN

annual dividend distribution policy to pay dividends in cash after the offer. The company expects to pay the first dividend distribution of RO33mn for the first nine months of 2023 around January 2024 and expects to pay the second dividend distribution of RO11mn for the last three months of 2023 around April 2024.

The company currently expects to pay a dividend in respect of the fiscal year ending December 31, 2024, which will be the higher of 90% of the company's profit for the year ending December 31, 2024 or a 5% increase on



the aggregate dividends paid for 2023. For 2025, the company expects to pay a dividend, which will be the higher of 90% of the profit for the year ending December 31, 2025 or a 5% increase on the dividends paid for 2024.

Mansoor al Abdali, managing director of OQGN, said: "OQGN, as the exclusive operator of the Natural Gas Transportation Network (NGTN) in Oman, provides critical infrastructure to deliver gas that supports the industries and economy of Oman. This listing, which we are proud to be conducting on the MSX, will allow us to move the company into the next chapter of growth. The core focus of OQGN will remain unchanged, focusing on the delivery of vital resources supporting the growth of our customers and Oman. Our work is underlined by a commitment to reliability, efficiency, safety and sustainability. Together with our partners at OQ and the OIA, we look forward to the listing and are excited by the opportunities it

brings - to our customers, our investors, our employees, and the people of Oman."

Talal al Awfi, OQ Group CEO and OQGN chairman, said: "The IPO of OQGN is part of a broader divestment programme envisioned by the government and being implemented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA). This marquee offering is an opportunity for Omani and international investors to participate in Oman's Vision 2040, the long-term national development plan that aims to make Oman a prosperous, competitive and sustainable nation and to rapidly diversify its economy. The listing of OQGN is in line with this ambition while enriching the dynamically developing Omani stock market. We look forward to the listing on the MSX and are excited for what's to come."

Details of offering

All the shares being sold by the Selling Shareholders are existing ordinary shares of OQGN and

the company will not receive any proceeds from the sale of the shares in the offering, all of which will be paid to the Selling Shareholders. The offering expenses will be paid by the Selling Shareholders.

The offering will be conducted in the manner approved by the CMA and will be offered in two tranches, being carried out concurrently as defined below:

Category I offer represents 70% of the total offering (out of which 30% of the offer shares have been reserved for anchor investors) and will be made to eligible investors in Oman and qualified institutional and other investors in a number of countries. Category II offer represents 30% of the total offering for retail investors.

If the aggregate demand in Category II is less than 30% of the offer, then after full allocation to the Category II investors, the balance of the shares shall be made available to Category I investors, if there is oversubscrip-



This marquee offering is an opportunity for Omani and international investors to participate in Oman's Vision 2040

TALAL AL AWFI
OQ Group CEO

tion in Category I.

Details of the offering will be included in the Offering Document which is expected to be published by the company prior to subscription opening. The completion of the offering and admission of the shares to trading on the MSX is expected in October 2023, subject to market conditions and obtaining relevant regulatory approvals in Oman, including approval of admission.

The shares held by the Selling Shareholders following completion of the offering shall be subject to a lockup which starts on

the date of admission and ends 180 calendar days thereafter, subject to customary exceptions and waiver by the Joint Global Coordinators. The company will also be subject to a lock-up starting on the date of admission and ending 180 calendar days thereafter.

Bank Muscat, BofA Securities and EFG-Hermes UAE Limited (acting in conjunction with EFG Hermes UAE LLC) have been appointed as Joint Global Coordinators, and Bank Muscat has been appointed as Issue Manager for the IPO.

Overview of OQGN

OQGN holds a natural monopoly over the essential gas transportation infrastructure in Oman and is the exclusive owner and operator of the Natural Gas Transportation Network (NGTN), serving critical roles in Oman as the asset owner, operator and maintenance and transportation provider of gas through the NGTN.

The NGTN is a comprehensive gas transportation network encompassing a system of pipelines, metering facilities, compressor stations, gas supply stations and block-valve stations. The NGTN serves as an essential link connecting gas producers with gas consumers operating in various essential sectors requiring gas as a critical production feedstock or for power generation, such as liquefied natural gas (LNG), power generation and water desalination, oil and gas and industrial and commercial (e.g., petrochemical, fertiliser, aluminium and steel plants).

OQGN transports gas, through the NGTN on behalf of the Shipper, which buys gas from gas producers and sells it to gas consumers. At present, there is only one Shipper, IGC, although additional Shippers may be introduced in the future. In 2022, the company transported 39.4 BCM of gas, from six gas producers to a diverse consumer base of approximately 130 gas consumers through approximately 4,031km of gas pipelines, supported by three compressor stations and 25 gas supply stations, providing uninterrupted gas supply in 2022.

INVESTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

OQGN operates in the attractive investment destination of Oman

Oman is a resilient and stable economy, growing at a steady rate with a strong GDP outlook (real GDP growth CAGR 23E-25E of 3.7%), evidenced through various ratings and supported by a young and growing population.

Oman's strategic vision, "Oman Vision 2040", which is a national comprehensive 20-year plan, which aims for rationalisation of government expenditures, ensuring Oman is on track to achieve sustainable fiscal surplus with an economic diversification strategy and the introduction of new sources of revenue.

Other initiatives to transform Oman into an increasingly attractive investment destination include consolidating national assets and promoting privatisation and implementing favourable regulatory changes

to support foreign direct investment (FDI) flows.

Natural monopoly over critical gas transportation infrastructure under a 50-year concession

OQGN holds a natural monopoly over essential gas transportation infrastructure in Oman as the exclusive operator and owner of the NGTN.

OQGN operates under a 50-year concession expiring in 2070 granted by the Government of Oman under the Amended Concession Agreement.

OQGN has a strong operational track record with consistent gas availability, minimal interruptions and international certifications.

Established RAB framework underpinning predictable cash flows

The Regulatory Asset Base

(RAB) framework provides a regulated revenue system pursuant to which the company charges transportation charges to the Shipper, as well as connection fees to connected parties that require the company to build a connection to the NGTN.

The RAB framework aims to provide a predictable tariff-setting regime that should allow a relatively stable and cost-reflective revenue stream, with Allowed RAB revenues not affected by changes in the price and volume of gas transported during a price control period, which is currently set for a period of three years. Thus, it supports the company in achieving stable profitability margins with resilient performance and stability against the volatility in commodity prices and gas volumes transported.

The regulator determines the maximum revenue that the company may earn from gas transportation (i.e., the Allowed

RAB revenues) based on several building blocks set out in the Amended Concession Agreement.

The transportation charges charged to the Shipper are then derived from the Allowed RAB revenues as approved by the regulator and the network capacity booked by the Shipper. A large majority of the company's income in 2022 was received from the Shipper.

Indispensable role as the link between core Omani gas producers and gas consumers, with stable long-term demand and supply

OQGN's NGTN plays the critical role of connecting gas producers with consumers through pipelines, gas supply stations, and gas compressor stations, earning transportation and connection fees.

OQGN serves a diverse con-

sumer base of approximately 130 gas consumers through approximately 4,031km of gas pipelines, transporting 39.4 BCM of gas from six gas producers in 2022.

The company's future growth is supported by Oman's growing demand for gas, which is forecasted to range between 37.7 BCM and 54.5 BCM by 2043.

Stable financial performance with a growing asset base and efficient capital structure

In 2022, the company earned income of RO160.4mn and Regulated Adjusted EBITDA of RO96.4mn (Regulated Adjusted EBITDA Margin of 70.9%).

For the six months ended June 30, 2023, the company earned income of RO85mn and Regulated Adjusted EBITDA of RO59.3mn (Regulated Adjusted EBITDA Margin of

78.0%). In comparison, the company earned income of RO73mn and Regulated Adjusted EBITDA of RO49mn (Regulated Adjusted EBITDA margin of 73.1%) for the six months ended June 30, 2022.

The company has also maintained an efficient capital structure, resulting in its Adjusted Net Debt-to-Regulated Adjusted EBITDA of 3.3x in 2022 (4.1x in 2021) and Adjusted Net Debt-to-Regulated Asset Base of 0.3x in 2022 (0.4x in 2021).

In June 2023, the company entered into refinancing facilities in order to improve the company's long-term capital structure.

Strong growth prospects through approved near-term network expansion and long-term transformative growth initiatives

OQGN has strong growth

prospects through Regulator-approved near-term network expansion and long-term transformative growth initiatives.

The company's growth strategy comprises three key pillars, namely (i) continued investment in natural gas transportation network growth, debottlenecking and upgrades, (ii) acquisition of gas transportation assets and (iii) expansion into transportation of other energy sources.

The company's growth strategy also contemplates utilising its strengths and market position to play an essential role in the energy transition in Oman by facilitating hydrogen and captured carbon transportation and storage.

The company's strategic priorities are aligned with Oman's ambitious sustainability agenda and it is committed to contributing to the achievement of Oman's Net Zero goals.

Oman crude delivery via DME rises 18% to 106mn barrels in first-half 2023



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The physical deliveries of Oman crude oil on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) recorded a sharp increase during the first half of 2023.

DME, the premier international energy futures exchange in the Middle East, delivered 106mn barrels of Oman crude via its exchange delivery mechanism in the first six months of 2023. This was an increase of 18% from the 90mn barrels delivered in the same period of 2022, according to a statement issued by DME.

The DME also recorded a 15% increase in total trading volume during the first half of this year as compared to the same period a year ago. DME Oman front-month trading volumes increased from 361mn barrels in the first six months of 2022 to 415mn barrels for the same period in 2023, the exchange said.

The DME noted that Oman crude oil contract continued to attract a diverse range of participants from around the world, underscoring its status as the main crude oil benchmark in the East of Suez market.

Raid al Salami, managing director of DME, said that the first

half of 2023 has been exceptional for the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.

He said, "Our unwavering dedication to transparency and customer service has driven our strong performance. As we move forward, we remain committed to providing our participants with the tools and opportunities they need to navigate the ever-changing energy landscape. We remain optimistic about the remainder of 2023. We expect to build upon the same momentum and to continue to deliver value to our stakeholders."

DME Oman crude oil futures are a physically settled contract

that is a core Middle East crude pricing benchmark. The contract's daily pricing is utilised by the Middle Eastern national oil companies (NOCs) to price oil exports from the Middle East to Asia and acts as a fundamental indicator for crude oil supply-demand in Asia.

The Middle East NOCs from Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Dubai all use DME Oman pricing as part of 5.5mn barrels of crude that is exported to Asia each day.

Recently, Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals sold a cargo of 2mn barrels of Omani crude via the DME Auctions platform.



Hydrom promotes Round 2 auction for green hydrogen

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Continuing its efforts to unlock the potential of the green hydrogen sector in Oman, Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) conducted an in-person session in Riyadh on Wednesday.

The event aimed to spotlight Hydrom's vital role in the green hydrogen field and promote the Round 2 Public Auction of green hydrogen blocks in Oman. Distinguished guests, including embassy representatives from many countries interested in green hydrogen, prominent government officials and business leaders from the Saudi private sector, and members of the press, attended the event.

The session commenced with an opening address delivered by H H Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of Oman to Saudi Arabia.

Commenting on the Riyadh event, H H Sayyid Faisal said, "We are pleased to welcome

Hydrom to Riyadh for this event. The visit highlighted the strong investment and cooperation opportunities that leverage the enduring relations between Saudi Arabia and Oman. Both nations share a common vision of sustainable energy production and a net-zero economy. Oman's abundant renewable energy resources and world-class infrastructure and logistics make it an ideal destination for Saudi investors and those from other countries looking to steer the world toward a greener, more sustainable future."

Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, general manager of Hydrom, said, "Our visit to Riyadh is part of our ongoing efforts to showcase Oman's green hydrogen sector and the Round 2 Public Auction of green hydrogen blocks in the Dhofar Governorate as prime investment prospects. With its vast renewable energy resources and

available Tier 1 infrastructure and logistics, Oman offers immense potential for green hydrogen production, making it an ideal choice for Saudi investors looking to be part of the green hydrogen revolution."

"Hydrom is committed to facilitating such partnerships to drive the growth of Oman's green hydrogen industry, offering substantial benefits to businesses seeking opportunities for sustainable investments in the Sultanate," he added.

Oman's Round 2 Public Auction for green hydrogen blocks is capturing widespread attention from international energy corporations. This auction is poised to award up to three green hydrogen blocks within the Dhofar Governorate, presenting lucrative investment prospects and highlighting Oman's commitment to fostering a robust green hydrogen sector.



Google faces \$9bn claim on behalf of UK consumers

London, UK - Google is facing a new lawsuit in Britain, which accuses the US tech giant of stifling competition in the search engine market and causing prices to rise across the UK economy, a statement said.

The claim, filed with the UK Competition Appeal Tribunal, is seeking around £7bn (around \$9bn) in damages on behalf of effectively every consumer in the country.

It accuses Google of breaching competition law by shutting out mobile search competition and using its market dominance to increase the prices paid by advertisers for their prominence on the Google search page.

These costs are then passed on to consumers, who are charged more for the goods and services they buy, according to the claim.

The lawsuit argues that Google abused its dominant position by tying its Search with other apps and services such as requiring smartphone manufacturers to pre-install Google

According to consumer rights group Consumer Voice, the claim is made on behalf of 65mn UK consumers, who may be owed around £100 in compensation each if the lawsuit is successful

Search and Google Chrome browser apps to obtain a licence to use the Google Play app store.

It also says Google paid Apple to ensure Google was the default search engine for the Safari browser on Apple devices such as iPhones.

Nikki Stopford, a consumer rights campaigner and the class representative in the action, said: "It's a clear breach of competition law, for which consumers are paying the price."

"Google has been warned about its behaviour by competition regulators repeatedly but has taken no meaningful action to stop the abuse."

"This action aims to make the company accountable for its re-

peated lawbreaking and get consumers back the money they're owed."

According to consumer rights group Consumer Voice, the claim is made on behalf of 65mn UK consumers, who may be owed around £100 in compensation each if the lawsuit is successful.

A Google spokesperson called the case "speculative and opportunistic" and said the company "will argue against it vigorously".

"People use Google because it is helpful. We only make money if ads are useful and relevant, as indicated by clicks - at a price that is set by a real-time auction," Google said.

AFP

China's economy emerges from deflation as August prices rebound

Beijing, China - China's consumer price index rebounded in August as the world's second-largest economy emerged from deflation, official data released Saturday showed, despite sluggish domestic consumption that is complicating the country's post-Covid economic recovery.

Last month's CPI, the main gauge of inflation, rose 0.1% year on year, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

China briefly slipped into deflation in July for the first time in over two years, with prices falling 0.3%, year on year.

Analysts surveyed by Bloomberg had anticipated a rebound in August of 0.2%, year on year.

Deflation indicates falling prices of goods and services, and is the opposite of inflation.

China experienced a short period of deflation at the end of 2020 and early 2021, due largely



to a collapse in the price of pork, the most widely consumed meat in the country.

Prior to that, the last deflationary period was in 2009.

Despite the August rebound, many analysts do not rule out a relapse into deflation in coming

months, as China's main growth engines stall and after youth unemployment reached a record level of more than 20% in June.

Authorities suspended the publication of official data on youth unemployment in August.

A crisis in the real estate sec-

tor - long providing around a quarter of China's GDP - presents a major obstacle to recovery, while exports, traditionally a main growth engine, are also flagging.

Exports fell in August by 8.8%, year on year, for the fourth consecutive month of decline, according to official statistics, as weak overseas demand continued to take its toll.

The downturn has a direct impact on employment, as China's tens of thousands of export firms bear the brunt.

Meanwhile, the producer price index contracted again in August by 3%, marking the eleventh consecutive month of decline, according to official data.

The PPI measures the cost of goods leaving factories and gives an overview of the general health of the economy.

Falling producer prices mean reduced margins for companies.

AFP

US 'carefully' monitoring China economy

New Delhi, India - The United States is "carefully" monitoring China's challenges, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Friday, as the slowdown in the world's second largest economy raises concerns for global growth.

Many are worried about the Asian giant's struggles, with the threat of recession in Europe and high inflation in many major economies contributing to a plunge in demand for Chinese goods.

"China faces a variety of both short and longer term global challenges, economic challenges



Janet Yellen

that we've been monitoring carefully," Yellen told reporters in New Delhi, ahead of a two-day G20 summit.

"That said, China has quite a

bit of policy space to address these challenges," she added.

China's President Xi Jinping will miss the leaders' meeting at a time of heightened trade and geopolitical tensions with the United States and India, with which it shares a long and disputed border.

China's challenges included "less of a pick up in consumer spending that had been anticipated in the aftermath of the Covid restrictions, as well as long standing issues with respect to the property sector and... debt related to that", she said.

G20 host India overtook its

northern neighbour as the world's most populous country earlier this year, and Yellen added that China's "labour force is beginning to shrink".

Xi's absence will impact Washington's bid to keep the G20 the main forum of global economic cooperation and its efforts towards a financing push for developing countries.

While "aware of the risks to global growth", Yellen said she had "been surprised by the strength of global growth and how resilient the global economy has proven to be".

AFP



IntercityHotel Muscat celebrates first anniversary

IntercityHotel Muscat, operated by Deutsche Hospitality, commemorated the first anniversary of delivering renowned German hospitality to guests in the heart of Muscat.

Over the past year, the hotel has provided guests with comfort, exceptional service, and unforgettable experiences that reflect the hallmark of German excellence, a press release said.

Nestled amidst the stunning landscape of Oman's capital city and part of the A'Raya Complex, IntercityHotel Muscat has quickly become a premier destination for both, business and leisure, travelers. Its prime location in the ministry and embassy district offers guests easy access to major attractions, shopping avenues, and corporate hubs while enveloping them in the rich culture and warm hospitality that Oman is renowned for.

IntercityHotel boasts of contemporary decor with a touch of Omani tradition. As part of the renowned Deutsche Hospitality

brand, the hotel seamlessly integrates German precision and efficiency into every aspect of guest experience.

"As we celebrate this momentous occasion to mark the first anniversary of IntercityHotel Muscat, a year that has been filled with remarkable moments, heartfelt hospitality, and unforgettable memories, it is my pleasure to elaborate our gratitude to our partners, shareholders, management, and employees who were the driving force behind the success. Our commitment to providing an exceptional blend of renowned German hospitality and Omani warmth has allowed us to create a unique space where every guest feels truly at home. As we reflect on this journey, we are excited to continue setting new standards in service delivery, and we look forward to welcoming guests for many more years of exceptional experiences," said Renjith Chandran, general manager.

Visa, Bank Muscat announce She's Next grant winners

Visa, the world's leader in digital payments, together with Bank Muscat announced Yasmeen al Alawi, founder of Sprout, a pioneering healthy food business, as the much-anticipated winner of its first She's Next grant programme for Oman. The winner was selected at an award ceremony held at Princess Noura bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh.

Handpicked from a pool of over 880 applicants across GCC, the winning woman-owned small business received a US\$50,000 grant along with one year of business coaching from International Trade Centre (ITC), a United Nations and World Trade Organization, and US\$3,000 of Amazon Web Services credits. The business coaching will be provided by the ITC SheTrades Initiative, ITC's flagship women and trade programme. The winner was selected from a pool of applicants representing a range of sectors including but not limited to textiles, education, food and beverage, professional services, beauty and wellness, a press release said.

A jury evaluated entries based on the following criteria - the progression of applicant's entrepreneurial journey, robustness of their business metrics, digital presence, and a demonstrated ability to problem-solve confidently. The members of the jury included Manish Gautam, Visa's country manager for Oman, Ilham Murtadha al Hamaid, general manager of Corporate Bank-



ing, Bank Muscat, Rizwan Jawaaid, Visa's head of Fintech Partnerships and Regional Financial Institutions - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman, and Mona Alsemayen, country head, Strategy and Growth at Amazon Payment Services.

For the first time, She's Next included a People's Favourite award, voted for online by members of the public. This award with cash prize of US\$10,000 went to Shamsa al Salami, founder of Zumr, a platform that bridges the gap between the financially excluded and formal financial services.

Through their participation in



the She's Next programme, women entrepreneurs have already had access to practical insights from women leaders, valuable tools, educational re-

sources, and facilitated trainings. This includes access to AWS Connected Community and ITC SheTrades Initiative's 'Elevate Your Business' training pro-

gramme. Visa and ITC will also provide one-to-one advisory support for 30 finalists - equipping these individuals with the guidance and insights to boost their business and financial strategies.

Ilham Murtadha al Hamaid said, "We are proud to continue this partnership with Visa for the She's Next programme to help empower women-owned SMEs. Bank Muscat is always keen to support entrepreneurs and help them enhance their businesses. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere congratulations to the winners of She's Next in Oman."

Changan CS75 Plus crossover arrives

Experience the extraordinary world of automotive luxury and innovation with the remarkable Changan CS75 Plus crossover. Boasting a commanding 2ltr turbo engine that unleashes 224 hp and smoothly paired with an 8-speed AT, this crossover guarantees an exhilarating driving experience like no other.

Embodying opulent design, plush interiors, and cutting-edge technology, the Changan CS75 Plus has captured the hearts of car enthusiasts in Oman and worldwide, a press release said.

A spokesperson for Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment (AGAE), said, "Step into a realm of ground-breaking features, flawless aesthetics, seamless functionality, and remarkable stability, as Changan unravels the allure of this extraordinary vehicle. From its captivating design to its lavish interior, every drive is an unforgettable experience that elevates your adventures to new heights.

"The intelligent features integrated into this vehicle are de-



signed to enhance your confidence and sophistication, ensuring each ride is a testament to the cutting-edge and state-of-the-art technology meticulously crafted within the CS75 Plus. Get ready to redefine your driving experience and embrace the ultimate blend of elegance and performance."

This compact crossover,

available in both luxury and sport variants, presents a plethora of special features that will elevate your driving experience. The luxury variant, in particular, is enhanced with fully automatic parking, adding an extra touch of convenience to your journeys. Step into the future of automotive excellence with the Changan CS75 Plus, where sophistication

meets innovation for an unparalleled driving sensation.

Changan CS75 Plus 2WD is a dynamic powerhouse with a sleeker, sloped roofline and an impressive boost in power. Beneath its hood lies a formidable 2ltr turbocharged 4-cylinder engine, expertly paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission, generating astounding 224hp.

OOMCO, Youth Center launch 'Tmakon' for youth

In partnership with the Youth Center, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) launched 'Tmakon', its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme to empower young Omanis to reach their full potential as emerging entrepreneurs.

Tmakon aims to build the capacity of Omani youth-led start-ups and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It will also enable participants to further develop innovative thinking and other relevant skills to run a business successfully, a press release said.

Tarik bin Mohammed al Junaidi, CEO of Oman Oil Marketing Company, said, "Providing the next generation with the know-how, confidence, and skills to create, innovate, and collaborate is one of our key investments. Our young entrepreneurs in Oman are crucial to the development and diversification of the economy, while youth-led entre-



preneurship is a way to boost employment and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities across our communities."

He added, "Through the cooperation with the Youth Center, the Tmakon programme will enable participants to face and overcome challenges and develop skills to successfully implement their creative projects and ideas."

Eng Zaid bin Abdullah al

Salmani, executive director of the Youth Center said, "Omani youth constitutes one of our greatest assets as their progress will benefit the national economy, the health of our environment, and society at large. Therefore, our government puts young people at the centre of its agenda. With the valuable support of entities like Oman Oil Marketing Company, we are grateful to be able to implement this programme."

National Finance, Injaz Oman fete winners of 'The Company'

National Finance joined Injaz Oman to unveil the winners of 'The Company' competition, at a ceremony held at OCEC.

An initiative by Injaz, 'The Company' programme and competition gave student participants the opportunity to learn entrepreneurial skills and honoured the most innovative young entrepreneurs. This competition not only highlights the talent and potential of the Omani youth, but also underscores National Finance's commitment to fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, a press release said.

Under the umbrella of its



'Imtidad' social responsibility wing, National Finance partnered with Injaz Oman as the main

sponsor for the University category of the Competition. This partnership exemplifies National

Finance's unwavering dedication to providing the youth with avenues and opportunities to turn

business aspirations into well-rounded ventures.

Tariq Sulaiman al Farsi, CEO,

National Finance said, "We are extremely proud of the Omani youth who have demonstrated

flair, intelligence, business acumen and tenacity during the course of 'The Company' programme and competition. Through this experience, the participants have learned the value of hard work, perseverance, problem-solving and team work. At National Finance, we believe our youth should be encouraged to act on their entrepreneurial instincts in order for them to build home-grown brands that will succeed in the market. To this end, we go above and beyond to establish collaborations and partnerships with organisations like Injaz."

Morocco quake kills more than 1000 people

6.8-magnitude quake struck a mountainous area 72km southwest of tourist hotspot Marrakesh at 11:11pm on Friday

Moulay Brahim, Morocco - Morocco's deadliest earthquake in decades has killed over 1000 people, officials said on Saturday, causing widespread damage and sending terrified residents and tourists scrambling to safety in the middle of the night.

The 6.8-magnitude quake struck a mountainous area 72km (45 miles) southwest of tourist hotspot Marrakesh at 11:11pm (2211 GMT) on Friday, the US Geological Survey reported.

Strong tremors were also felt in the coastal cities of Rabat, Casablanca and Essaouira.

"I was nearly asleep when I heard the doors and the shutters banging," said Ghannou Najem, a Casablanca resident in her 80s who was visiting Marrakesh when the quake hit.

"I went outside in a panic. I thought I was going to die alone."

It is the strongest-ever quake to hit the north African kingdom, and one expert described it as the region's 'biggest in more than 120 years'. "Where destructive earthquakes are rare, buildings are simply not constructed robustly enough... so many collapse, resulting in high casualties," said Bill McGuire, professor emeritus at Britain's University College London.

Where destructive earthquakes are rare, buildings are simply not constructed robustly enough... many collapse, resulting in high casualties

BILL MCGUIRE

Updated interior ministry figures on Saturday showed the quake killed at least 1,037 people, the vast majority in Al-Haouz, the epicentre, and Taroudant provinces. Another 1,204 people were injured, including 721 in a critical condition, the ministry said. The ministry also recorded deaths in Ouarzazate, Chichaoua, Azilal and Youssoufia provinces, as well as in Marrakesh, Agadir and the Casablanca area.

'Unbearable' screams

Faisal Badour, an engineer, said he felt the quake three times in his building in Marrakesh. "There are families who are still sleeping outside because we were so scared of the force of this earthquake," he said. "The screaming and crying was unbearable."

In Moulay Brahim village, in the mountains of Al-Haouz province near the quake's epicentre, rescuers were searching for survivors in the rubble of col-



A woman evacuates with her belongings through the rubble in the earthquake-damaged old city of Marrakesh (AFP)

lapsed houses, AFP correspondents reported.

On a nearby hill, residents began digging graves for the vic-

tims, the correspondents said.

Frenchman Michael Bizet, 43, who owns three traditional riad houses in Marrakesh's old town,

told AFP that he was in bed when the quake struck. "I thought my bed was going to fly away. I went out into the street half-naked and

immediately went to see my riads. It was total chaos, a real catastrophe, madness," he said.

Footage on social media

showed part of a minaret collapsed on Jemaa el-Fna square in the historic city. An AFP correspondent saw hundreds of people flocking to the square to spend the night for fear of aftershocks, some with blankets while others slept on the ground.

Mimi Theobald, 25, a tourist from England, said she was with friends on a restaurant terrace when the tables began shaking and plates went flying.

Houda Outassaf, a local resident, said she was 'still in shock' after feeling the earth shake beneath her feet - and losing relatives. "I have at least 10 members of my family who died... I can hardly believe it, as I was with them no more than two days ago," she said.

The interior ministry said authorities have 'mobilised all the necessary resources to intervene and help the affected areas'.

The regional blood transfusion centre in Marrakesh called on residents to donate blood for those injured. The army has set up a field hospital in Moulay Brahim and deployed 'significant human and logistical resources' to support search and rescue efforts in Al-Haouz, state news agency MAP said.

AFP



This file photo shows US President Joe Biden walking with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at St. Michael's Golden-Domed Cathedral during an unannounced visit in Kyiv on February 20, this year (AFP)

Joe Biden fires 2024 salvo with Ukraine 'war zone' advert

Washington, US - With its war zone imagery and macho voiceover it could be a movie trailer - but the sunglasses-clad star of a new campaign ad is none other than 80-year-old US President Joe Biden.

Facing a battle in the opinion polls, America's oldest ever commander-in-chief is using his surprise trip to Kyiv in February to sell himself as a 'true leader' ahead of the 2024 election. The 60-second spot - which debuted on social media on Thursday and will air on TV in US battleground states during prime time on Saturday - draws a stark contrast with his Republican rivals over the Ukraine war.

The message is simple: the Democrat's support against Russia's brutal 2022 invasion shows global leadership, while Republicans including Donald Trump have wobbled all over the place on the issue.

It was a political gamble for Biden to give Kyiv his full backing - and more than US\$43bn in military aid - but he is now doubling down that it could help him at the ballot box.

US President Joe Biden is using his surprise trip to Kyiv in February to sell himself as a 'true leader' ahead of the 2024 election

"It was the first time in modern history that an American president went into a war zone not controlled by the United States," the ad starts, narrated by a gravely voiced man.

Airing as Biden attends the G20 summit in India - which Russian President Vladimir Putin is skipping - the ad shows photos of Biden taking a train from Poland to Kyiv 'under cover of night'.

It then describes him walking 'shoulder to shoulder with our allies in the war-torn streets, standing up for democracy in a place where a tyrant is waging war to take it away'.

Cue a picture of Putin raising a glass of champagne. Then

footage of soldiers firing cannons, followed by Biden in his trademark aviator sunglasses meeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. "In the middle of a war zone, Joe Biden showed the world what America is made of. That's the quiet strength of a true leader who doesn't back down to a dictator," the ad concludes.

Quietness is part of the problem for Biden, though.

Biden is struggling with tepid approval ratings and low visibility ahead of a possible rematch with airtime-hogging Trump next year.

And literally too. Reporters sometimes strain to hear the octogenarian - yet more fuel for concerns among Republican and Democrat voters alike that he's too old for a second term.

But while foreign policy is rarely a key theme in US elections, the ad shows Team Biden sees his Ukraine stance as crucial for a counteroffensive against Republican contenders.

It's also airing as the US Congress is to debate whether to keep funding Ukraine.

AFP

Iran arrests 6 people for 'planning riots'

Tehran, Iran - Authorities in Iran's southwest have arrested six people accused of 'organising riots' on the first anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death in custody which triggered nationwide protests, state media reported on Saturday.

Amini, an Iranian Kurd, died on September 16, 2022, after her arrest in Tehran for alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress rules for women. The intelligence organisation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) suspended five social media pages and arrested the six individuals behind them, it said according to news agency IRNA.

IRGC accused them of 'organising riots and driving insecurity on the internet', the statement said without identifying the suspects.

AFP

Three dead as renewed clashes hit Lebanon Palestinian camp

Sidon, Lebanon - Two fighters and a civilian were killed on Saturday in clashes at a south Lebanon Palestinian camp, official media reported, as Prime Minister Najib Mikati rebuked Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas over the spiralling violence.

Renewed fighting broke out late on Thursday in Ain al-Helweh refugee camp on the outskirts of the coastal city of Sidon, just weeks after deadly violence pitted members of Abbas's Fatah movement against Islamist fighters. Ongoing clashes inside the camp on Saturday killed 'one person from Fatah' and an Islamist, while 'a civilian was killed by a stray bullet' outside the camp, Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said, reporting dozens of others wounded.

'What is taking place does not serve the Palestinian cause at all and is a serious offence to the Lebanese state' and the city of Sidon, Mikati told Abbas in a phone call on Saturday, his office said in a statement. Mikati emphasised 'the priority of ending military operations and cooper-



Soldiers man a checkpoint at the entrance of Ain el-Helweh Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon's city of Sidon on Saturday (AFP)

ating with Lebanese security forces to address tensions', according to the statement on X.

Heavy clashes broke out on Saturday morning after calm had largely prevailed overnight, an AFP correspondent in Sidon said, reporting the sound of automatic and heavy weapons. The fighting was focused on a school compound belonging to the United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, a source in the camp's Palestinian leadership said on condition of anonymity.

UNRWA had previously warned that assailants were occupying its schools in the camp.

Ain al-Helweh is home to more than 54,000 registered refugees and thousands of Palestinians who joined them in recent years from Syria, fleeing war in the neighbouring country.

The camp, Lebanon's largest, was created for Palestinians who were driven out or fled during the 1948 war that coincided with Israel's creation.

AFP

US panel denounces French ban on abaya as targeting Muslims

Washington, US - A US government advisory panel on Friday denounced ally France's ban on schoolgirls wearing abayas, saying the restriction on the long, flowing dresses was meant to 'intimidate' the Muslim minority.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom is tasked with making recommendations to the US government but does not set policy itself.

The commission's chair, Abraham Cooper, called the abaya ban a 'misguided effort to promote the French value of laicite', the country's official secularism.

"France continues to wield a specific interpretation of secularism to target and intimidate religious groups, particularly Muslims," Cooper said in a state-



A woman wearing an abaya dress walks through the streets of Lille, northern France, on August 28 (AFP)

ment. "While no government should use its authority to impose a specific religion on its population, it is equally condemnable to restrict the peaceful practice of

individuals' religious beliefs to promote secularism."

French Education Minister Gabriel Attal announced last month that schools would no

longer allow girls to wear abayas, the flowing dresses of Middle Eastern origin. In 2004, France banned school children from wearing 'signs or outfits by which students ostensibly show a religious affiliation' and outlawed headscarves, turbans, large crosses or kippas.

But abayas had fallen into a gray area with some women saying that they wear them due to their cultural identity rather than religious belief. Conservative French politicians have sought to widen restrictions. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen, who came in second to President Emmanuel Macron in last year's election, has campaigned for the banning of wearing veils in the street.

AFP

Russian, Chinese officials attend North Korea's founding anniversary parade

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea marked its founding anniversary with a parade attended by leader Kim Jong Un as well as Russian diplomats and a high-ranking Chinese delegation, state media said on Saturday, as Pyongyang deepens ties with Moscow and Beijing.

The Friday event featured Pyongyang's 'paramilitary forces', state media said, rather than soldiers in the regular army, and it did not showcase the country's banned weaponry including intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Images in state media showed uniformed paramilitary brigades, including some riding tractors or in large red trucks.

Kim, flanked by his young daughter, looked on smiling and clapping.

Kim Il Sung Square 'was full of excitement and joy of the spectators significantly celebrating the birthday of their great powerful country', the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

"All the participants paid the highest glory and warmest thanks to Kim Jong Un, peerless patriot and ever-victorious iron-willed commander."

Kim met with the visiting Chinese delegation led by Liu Guozhong, vice-premier of the State Council, the second such visit by top officials from Beijing



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his daughter attending the paramilitary parade at Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang, to mark the 75th founding anniversary of North Korea on Friday (AFP)

in six weeks, as Pyongyang shows signs of easing its strict COVID-era border controls.

The two sides announced their aims of 'further intensifying the multi-faceted coordination and cooperation' between the two countries, according to a separate KCNA report.

Russian diplomats also attended the event, as well as a Russian military song-and-dance ensemble which had arrived in Pyongyang to mark the occasion, KCNA reported.

Moscow expanded its official presence in North Korea shortly before the parade, with its Py-

ongyang embassy saying this week that it had been allowed to bring in 20 diplomatic and technical staff - the first such rotation of personnel since 2019.

Russian President Vladimir Putin sent Kim a message marking the anniversary, KCNA said on Saturday, in which he called for the two countries to 'expand the bilateral ties in all respects'.

And according to Chinese state media, President Xi Jinping 'extended congratulations in a call to Kim Jong Un' on the anniversary. "For the North Koreans, it's another confirmation that they can completely count on the

Kim met with the visiting Chinese delegation led by Liu Guozhong, vice-premier of the State Council, the second such visit by top officials from Beijing in six weeks

Chinese support and a nice confirmation that, (since) the war in Ukraine, Russia basically has no choice but to be supportive of North Korea," analyst Andrei Lankov said.

'New Cold War'?

Friday's event was the nuclear-armed state's third parade this

year and has not travelled since the coronavirus pandemic started - will meet Putin to discuss arms deals.

US and other officials told The New York Times that Kim is likely to head by armoured train later this month to Vladivostok, on Russia's Pacific coast not far from North Korea, to meet Putin.

Lankov told AFP that a Kim-Putin meeting is 'likely to happen' as, for Moscow, 'with a bit of diplomacy North Korea can be used as a tool to influence behaviour of the United States, South Korea' and other places over the Ukraine war.

Moscow's moves to boost military ties with Pyongyang - including possible naval drills - are 'gentle diplomatic blackmail' of Washington, he added.

Growing cooperation between China, Russia and North Korea, coupled with Xi skipping the G20 Summit in India, 'give the appearance of a widening fissure in Asia's geopolitical landscape', said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

'Most stakeholders in the region want to avoid a new Cold War, but this looks increasingly difficult,' he said.

AFP

Almost 50 people missing after deadly Brazil cyclone

Brasília, Brazil - Brazilian rescue workers were on Friday searching for almost 50 people still missing after a devastating cyclone unleashed torrential rain and flooding in the south of the country.

Five days after the cyclone, which left 41 dead, the country is taking stock of a rising toll, with at least 223 people injured and 11,000 forced from their homes, according to official statements.

More than 147,000 people were affected across the state of Rio Grande do Sul, civil defense authorities said in a statement.

It added that the number of missing had gone from 25 to 46.

Nearly a thousand emergency workers and a dozen helicopters have been deployed in the rescue efforts, which have been complicated by the destruction of two bridges and blocked roads.

Eight military aircraft and hundreds of soldiers are also taking part in search and rescue.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da



An aerial view of the damage caused by a cyclone in Roca Sales, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil on Thursday (AFP)

Silva, in India for the G20 summit, is sending Vice President Geraldo Alckmin to the region, where he will arrive on Sunday with a min-

isterial delegation.

"We are acting on all fronts," Lula wrote on social media.

Alckmin announced at a press

conference in Brasilia that the federal government would send 20,000 food baskets and medicine kits for 15,000 people in Rio Grande do Sul, where authorities have declared a state of emergency. In addition, the more than 3,000 people who lost their homes will receive 800 reais (US\$167), he said. The governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Eduardo Leite, has estimated rebuilding road infrastructure will cost about 100mn reais (US\$20mn).

Brazil is not used to cyclones, but it is becoming 'more and more frequent' for them to make landfall in the country, according to Francis Lacerda, a researcher at the Pernambuco State Agronomy Institute's Climate Change Laboratory. "This is all a result of climate change," Alckmin said.

Unchecked urbanisation and irregular housing built on hillsides are also making weather disasters deadlier in Brazil.

AFP

Scientist shocks peers by 'tailoring' climate study

Paris, France - In a controversial bid to expose supposed bias in a top journal, a US climate expert shocked fellow scientists by revealing he tailored a wildfire study to emphasise global warming.

While supporters applauded Patrick T Brown for flagging what he called a one-sided climate 'narrative' in academic publishing, his move surprised at least one of his co-authors - and angered the editors of leading journal Nature. "I left out the full truth to get my climate change paper published," read the headline to an article signed by Brown in the news site The Free Press on September 5.

He said he deliberately focused on the impact from higher temperatures on wildfire risk in a study in the journal, excluding other factors such as land management.

AFP covered the study in an

article on August 30 headlined: 'Climate change boosts risk of extreme wildfires 25%'. "I just got published in Nature because I stuck to a narrative I knew the editors would like," the article read. "That's not the way science should work."

Co-author surprised

One of the named co-authors of the study, Steven J Davis, a professor in the earth system science department at the University of California, Irvine, told AFP Brown's comments took him 'by surprise'.

"Patrick may have made decisions that he thought would help the paper be published, but we don't know whether a different paper would have been rejected," he said in an email.

"I don't think he has much evidence to support his strong claims that editors and review-

ers are biased."

Brown is co-director of the climate and energy team at the Breakthrough Institute, a private non-profit group that researches technological responses to environmental issues, including boosting nuclear energy.

He did not respond to an AFP request to comment following his September 5 revelation but wrote about it in detail on his blog and on X, formerly known as Twitter.

A number of tweets applauded Brown for his 'bravery', 'openness' and 'transparency'. Others said his move raised ethical questions.

His presentation of the research in the study 'is a choice, but to boast about it publicly is next level', tweeted David Ho, a climate scientist at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

AFP

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE

Students dressed in traditional Huipil costumes take part in an event to celebrate Huipil National Day at the Plaza de la Solidaridad in Managua on Friday. The Nicaraguan Parliament approved a law that declares the Huipil as an intangible, artistic, and cultural heritage of the nation (AFP)

Buthelezi, South Africa's Zulu hawk, dies aged 95

Johannesburg, South Africa - Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the once-feared Zulu nationalist and historic leader of Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) which presided over South Africa's deadliest violence ahead of the first all-race elections, died on Saturday aged 95, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced.

"I am deeply saddened to announce the passing of Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi ... Traditional Prime Minister to the Zulu Monarch and Nation, and the Founder and President Emeritus of the Inkatha Freedom Party," Ramaphosa said in a statement.

"Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi has been an outstanding leader in the political and cultural life of our nation, including the ebbs and flows of our liberation struggle, the transition which secured our freedom in



Senior Prince of the Zulu Nation Mangosuthu Buthelezi (AFP)

1994 and our democratic dispensation," Ramaphosa said.

"He quietly and painlessly stepped into eternity in the early hours of the morning," Buthelezi's family said in a statement. Buthelezi, last week was discharged from hospital after a prolonged stay. Funeral arrangements have not yet

been confirmed.

Born of royal blood on August 27, 1928, Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi was to some the embodiment of the Zulu spirit: proud and feisty. To others, he bordered on a warlord.

For years he was defined by his bitter rivalry with South Africa's ruling African National

Congress (ANC), a party that was his political home until he broke away to form IFP in 1975.

He led the party from its inception, until the age of 90, a reign marked by bloody territorial battles with ANC supporters in black townships during the 1980s and 1990s that left thousands dead.

The current IFP leader, Velenkosini Hlabisa, said in a statement that 'as South Africa mourns, the IFP gives thanks - even through our tears - for the exceptional leader given to us for so many years. He blessed our country beyond measure. We cannot begin to express our gratitude'. South Africa's largest opposition party the Democratic Alliance said on X that South Africans had 'have lost a founding father'.

AFP

G20 leaders paper over divisions on war in Ukraine, climate change



New Delhi, India - G20 leaders papered over deep divisions on the war in Ukraine and tackling climate change on Saturday, avoiding direct criticism of Moscow and any concrete pledge to phase out polluting fossil fuels.

Leaders of the grouping, which brings together Russia as well as some of Ukraine's most ardent backers, have struggled to agree on much, in particular about the 18-month-old invasion. But facing a major diplomatic embarrassment, hosts India had pressed members to agree a common statement at a two-day summit in New Delhi.

With Vladimir Putin skipping the summit to dodge political opprobrium and the risk of arrest on war crimes charges, the G20 denounced the use of force for territorial gain but refrained from direct criticism of Russia by name. "There were different views and assessments of the situation," the leaders' statement said.

European nations and the United States had pressed for



(L-R) European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and PM Mohammed bin Salman, India's PM Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden attend a session at the summit (AFP)

the G20 not to water down its earlier condemnation of a war that has caused food and fuel price spikes worldwide.

With long-time Russian ally India in the G20 chair, Ukraine's allies appeared to have failed in that bid. Nonetheless, a top White House official said they were happy with the outcome.

"From our perspective, it does a very good job," US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters.

He said the G20 statement stood up 'for the principle that

states cannot use force to seek territorial acquisition or to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of other states'.

With Putin repeatedly raising the spectre of the conflict turning thermonuclear, Sullivan also pointed to the G20's agreement that 'the use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible'.

'Phasedown'

On climate, too, the G20 found minimal common round.

With major fossil fuel pro-

Leaders of the grouping, which brings together Russia and some of Ukraine's most ardent backers, have struggled to agree on much, in particular about the 18-month-old invasion

ducers including Saudi Arabia, Russia and Australia - and coal-dependent nations such as India and South Africa - around the table, there was no overarching commitment to phase out the polluting fuels.

committing only to a 'phase-down' of coal 'in line with national circumstances'.

The G20 countries account for 85 per cent of global GDP and a similar amount of global climate-warming emissions, making action in the forum crucial to real progress.

The backdrop to the talks could hardly be starker: the European Union's climate monitor has said this year is likely to be the hottest in human history, with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva calling it an

'unprecedented climate emergency' on Saturday.

On reaching the final agreement, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked leaders for their 'hard work' and banged a ceremonial gavel to adopt the declaration.

Modi had a heavy personal investment in the success of the summit, which he has billed as India's diplomatic coming of age and has used to boost his domestic standing ahead of elections next year.

AFP

Modi opens summit as PM of 'Bharat'

New Delhi, India - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his opening address to the G20 summit on Saturday with his country nameplate labelled 'Bharat' - an ancient Sanskrit word - in the biggest signal yet of a potential official change.

The gesture came days after invitations to the summit dinner were sent out in the name of the 'President of Bharat', prompting rumours that official usage of the country's English name would be scrapped.

Modi himself typically refers to India as 'Bharat', a word steeped in Hindu religious symbolism and dating back to scripture: in the Mahabharata, King Dushyant and Shakuntala's son was named 'Bharat' and the kingdom he inherited came to be known as 'Bharatvarsha'.

Hindus are the overwhelming majority of India's 1.4bn population but many religious minorities, in particular its more than 200mn Muslims, fear that Modi wants to remould India as a Hindu nation.

Zakia Soman, the co-



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks on during at the start of the second working session of the G20 Leaders' Summit at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Saturday (AFP)

We've always been India and 'Bharat' both. By insisting only on 'Bharat', they are trivialising our heritage and legacy

ZAKIA SOMAN

founder of Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, a rights group, said the potential name change reeked of yet more 'polarising politics' by the government. "It takes away from the real issues and real problems faced by the people of the country," she told AFP. "We've always been India and 'Bharat' both. By insisting only on 'Bharat', they are trivialising our heritage and legacy."

'India, that is Bharat'

India and Bharat are both official names for the country under its constitution, in which Article 1 opens with the phrase: 'India, that is Bharat'. But members of Modi's Hindu nationalist party have campaigned against using the better-known moniker, which has roots in Western antiquity and was imposed during the British

conquest. Modi's government has worked to remove any lingering symbols of British rule - and Muslim heritage - from the country's urban landscape, political institutions and history books since coming to power in 2014.

The northern city of Allahabad - named by Mughal ruler Akbar centuries ago - was changed to the Sanskrit word Prayagraj in 2018.

Earlier this week, foreign minister S Jaishankar seemed to support the idea of shedding the name India. 'Bharat' he said, had 'a meaning and understanding and a connotation that comes with it and that is reflected in our Constitution as well', the *Hindustan Times* quoted him as saying on Wednesday.

Rumours of the plan were enough to spark a mix of anger from opposition lawmakers and enthusiastic support from other quarters.

"I hope the government will not be so foolish as to completely dispense with 'India'," Shashi Tharoor of the opposition Congress party said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

AFP



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi gestures with African Union Chairman and Comoros President Azali Assoumani (AFP)

African Union formally joins as new member

New Delhi, India - The African Union formally took its seat as a new member of the G20 on Saturday at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The expansion of the bloc is a notable diplomatic victory for Modi, who faces national elections next year and has used hosting rights for this year's forum to burnish his image as an international statesman.

Before his opening speech, Modi greeted African Union chair and Comoros President Azali Assoumani with a warm hug.

"India put a proposal to give permanent membership of G20 to the African Union. I believe that with we have everyone's agreement on this," Modi said in his opening address to the summit. "With everyone's approval, I request the African Union head to take his seat as a permanent G20 member," he added, banging a ceremonial gavel.

Assoumani then took his seat among world leaders at the invitation of India's foreign affairs minister S Jaishankar.

Finding consensus among members has been increasingly difficult in recent years with deep divisions on the Ukraine war. "The world has a huge crisis of trust," Modi said in his opening remarks.

"War has made this trust deficit deeper. If we can defeat COVID, we can also conquer this mutual trust crisis."

The African Union at full strength has 55 members but six junta-ruled nations are currently suspended. Collectively, it has a GDP of US\$3tn with some 1.4bn people.

"As a continent, we look forward to further advancing our aspirations on the global stage using the G20 platform," Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who is at the summit, posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

AFP

'Cascading crises challenge long-term growth'

New Delhi, India - The G20 warned on Saturday of significant headwinds and 'cascading crises' buffeting the global economy, while saying more pain could be on the way.

"Cascading crises have posed challenges to long-term growth," said the Group of 20 leading economies.

"With notable tightening in global financial conditions, which could worsen debt vulnerabilities, persistent inflation and geoeconomic tensions, the balance of risks remains



Britain's PM Rishi Sunak, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, US President Joe Biden, Canada's PM Justin Trudeau and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the summit (AFP)

tilted to the downside," it said in a statement.

Many countries are still recovering from the coronavirus pandemic and drastic commodity price surges triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while climate change is affecting some of the poorest countries least able to cope.

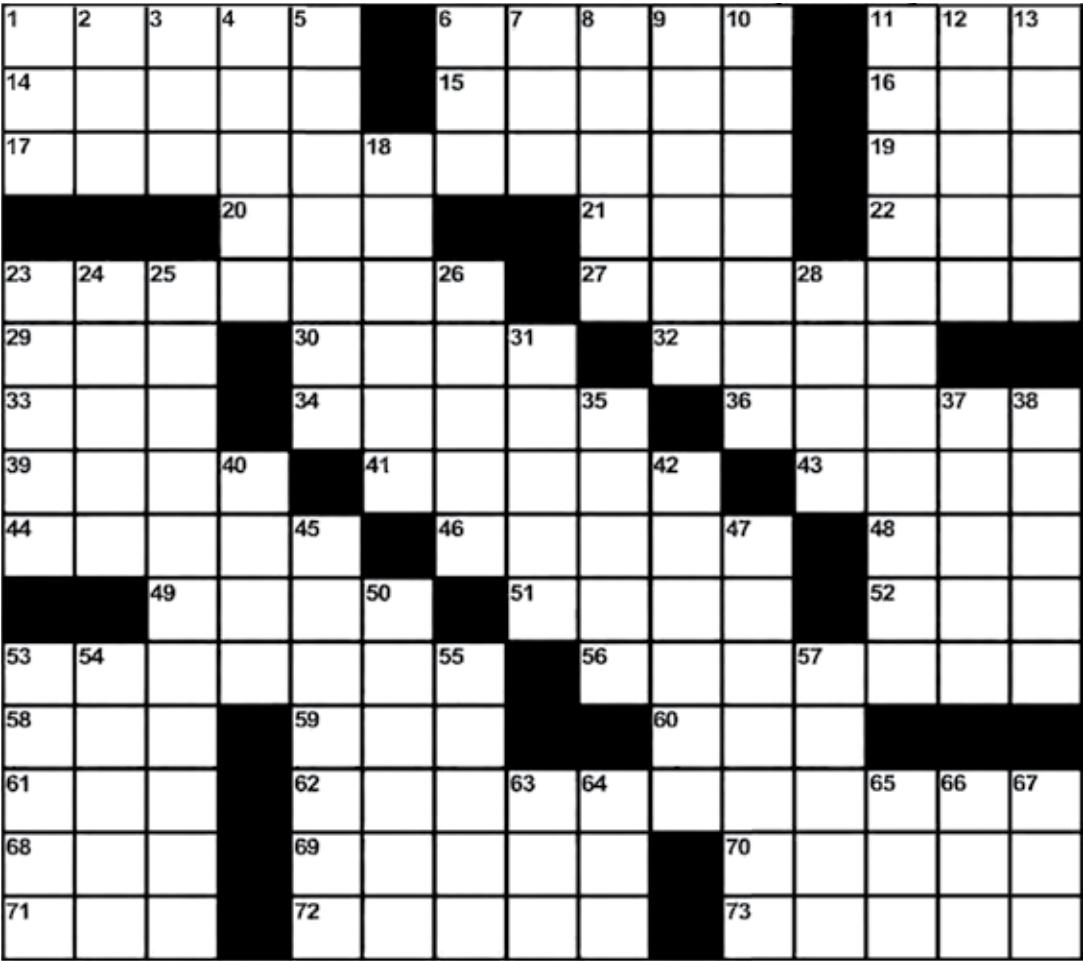
"Global economic growth is below its long-run average and remains uneven," the G20 statement said. "The uncertainty around the outlook remains high."

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Friday before the G20 summit that, while 'aware of the risks to global growth', she had 'been surprised by the strength of global growth and how resilient the global economy has proven to be'.

"While there are risks and some countries that have certainly been affected, overall, the global economy has been resilient," she said. For Yellen, the 'most negative influence is Russia's war on Ukraine'.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Make scholarly revisions
- 6) Fan part
- 11) Mongrel
- 14) San_, (California city)
- 15) "Nevermore" speaker
- 16) Gene material, briefly
- 17) Testy garden flowers?
- 19) Wood-shaving tool (var.)
- 20) Fuss
- 21) Came in first
- 22) Feed lines to
- 23) Inept
- 27) Followed obsessively
- 29) "Close Encounters" craft
- 30) Nevada's second-largest city
- 32) Keystone State port
- 33) Chop, as tree limbs
- 34) Follows recipe directions
- 36) Guessed wrong, e.g.
- 39) Artist's apartment
- 41) Cook, as crabs
- 43) Not quite closed, door-wise
- 44) Brew, in a teapot

- 46) Deep sleep
- 48) Title of respect, abroad
- 49) Customer come-on
- 51) Effervescent beverage
- 52) Shed tears
- 53) Private's privy
- 56) Abolishes or cancels
- 58) Jackie O's spouse
- 59) Org. quoted on toothpaste tubes
- 60) "Go team!"
- 61) Carving mo. in the U.S.
- 62) Laughing very hard, in slang
- 68) Docs in a bloc
- 69) Disclose
- 70) Commit character assassination?
- 71) Mineo of old Hollywood
- 72) More than a third of "Mississippi"
- 73) Roomy vehicle
- DOWN
- 1) Bad __, Germany
- 2) Dog's best friend?
- 3) Flier's concern, for short
- 4) Country bordering Tibet
- 5) Walks unsteadily
- 6) Grille cover

- 7) Hang back
- 8) Declares openly
- 9) De musical sign?
- 10) Catch in a trap
- 11) First-rate
- 12) Type of influence
- 13) Brought down the house
- 18) Red colors used by painters
- 23) Ships' bottoms
- 24) Underway, as a game
- 25) Musical extravaganza
- 26) Agitated states
- 28) Italian cash, once
- 31) Cookies with three parts
- 35) It's a matter of taste
- 37) Tidal bore
- 38) Mule-drawn vehicles
- 40) Kind of drop
- 42) Up-to-date
- 45) Easily bent
- 47) Wreaks havoc on
- 50) Provides with a trait
- 53) Turner and Cantrell
- 54) Free bakery treat?
- 55) 90-degree headings
- 57) Midwest airport
- 63) Little piggie, for one
- 64) Write-__ (some vote-

- getters)
- 65) __ about (wander)

- 66) "Anytown, __"
- 67) Midmorning hour

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

When someone asks you what you want today, you may surprise yourself when you can't come up with an answer. It's not that you have everything you need, it's that you really haven't given enough thought to what you want, and that is a real problem. It's not selfish to put energy toward achieving your own desires instead of the desires of other people. In fact, it's necessary sometimes. Put your own needs on the front burner today. Figure out your priorities so you'll be ready next time.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today, someone's honest assessment of your work might sting a little bit, but you need to take their criticism and learn from it, even if what you learn is that you should never ask this person for their feedback, again! Turn off your defense mechanisms, because while they protect you, they also prevent you from learning things that will improve the quality of your work. You are secure enough in yourself to know that you're not perfect and never will be.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your bright smile will be your most useful tool today, so shine it wherever you go and watch the doors of opportunity fly right open. When an unsympathetic person stands between you and where you want to be, show them those pearly whites and toss them a genuine compliment and watch them transform in front of your eyes. You have so much charm that you're letting go to waste. Harness the power of positive thinking and positive exchanges with others.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Don't hesitate to act from your gut when you see something unusual today. You won't know what to make of the episode as it's happening, but shortly thereafter you will get a strong sense of what to do. Obey this urge and follow through as quickly as you can. Don't worry that people will fault you for sticking your nose in where it doesn't belong. Your involvement will be seen as a blessing, not as meddlesome interference. Use your compassion to make stronger connections.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Spend the morning cranking on whatever you've got in the works, then spend the afternoon letting things glide on their own considerable momentum. Yes, you've done everything you can for the moment, and it's time to catch your breath and clasp your hands behind your neck and rest your tired feet on your desk and take it all in. If it looks like your project is losing momentum, go ahead and give it another push.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You could feel a lot of sympathy for someone today. Your compassionate side has been drawn out a lot lately, and you're seeing the problems people are having in a new light. There's something inside you that wants to make deeper connections with people, and you understand that by helping someone get through a tough time you can make those connections possible. Don't just tell people what you think they want to hear. It's essential to be honest if you want to connect.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You won't have to worry about your friends misinterpreting you. They always know right where you're coming from. However, you do need to watch out for a new person on the scene. They're not used to all the verbal shortcuts and inside jokes, and could easily misinterpret what you say, and even make some negative assumptions. Until they get the knack of how things work, try to be as low-key as you can. Invite them into every conversation you have.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It's a good thing that you are more flexible than ever, because today you're certainly going to get a workout. There is some new confusion in your life right now, and it could throw your daily routine for a loop. Luckily, this isn't of your doing. You can't fix it. All you can do is dodge it as best you can, keep clear of the aftershocks, and try not to slow your forward momentum any more than you absolutely have to. Try not to get caught up in anyone's drama.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's time for you to get a handle on where you spend your money, especially in terms of your social life. Going to see a great play, checking out a hot new band, and dining out at an exclusive restaurant are fine things to do every now and again, but going out too often is putting a strain on your wallet. And there are plenty of ways to have fun without paying someone for the privilege. Invite some friends over and stream a movie. Make a pizza and enjoy having fun for next to no cost.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Perfection just doesn't exist. Even those perfect-looking celebrity images you see online have been airbrushed and filtered. So you need to stop holding yourself to such impossibly high standards. It's bumming you out and ruining your good energy. Imperfections are what make you who you are, so why are you rejecting them? You don't want to be a robot. You want to be the charming, real person you are. Embrace your imperfections. The people who love you do.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Today is a great day to contact a friend who owes you one or two favors. They're in an excellent position to help you reach an important goal. If you're looking for a job, they have a great contact for you. If you need a few extra bucks, they can help you out. Whatever it is, they're going to be only too happy to show you the generosity that you've shown them so many times in the past. All you have to do is ask. And remember to thank the people who help you.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Getting along well with others could be an unrealistic goal for you today, but that doesn't mean your day will be full of conflict. You can still get along well with enough of the people who matter to keep yourself smiling. Just refuse to compromise. Feel free to follow your own agenda first, even if that means you'll diverge from the rest of the group and bruise a few egos. They'll get over it. Besides, they admire your determination more than you know.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. At what Olympic Games was the Olympic cauldron first lit by a woman?

- A. 1976 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck
- B. 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich
- C. 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal
- D. 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico

02. Which of these people is associated with the Information Technology industry?

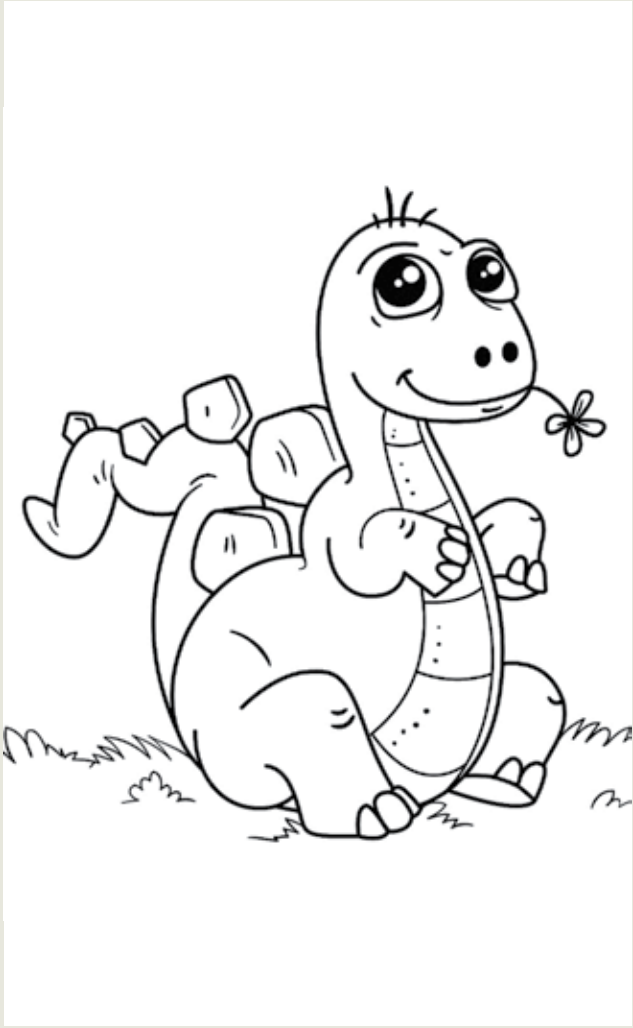
- A. Larry Ellison
- B. Isambard Kingdom Brunel
- C. Stephen Merchant
- D. Laurence Olivier

03. What field of activity does the phrase "on tenterhooks" refer to?

- A. Preparing canvases for oil painting
- B. Camping
- C. Making woollen cloth
- D. Theatre

Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

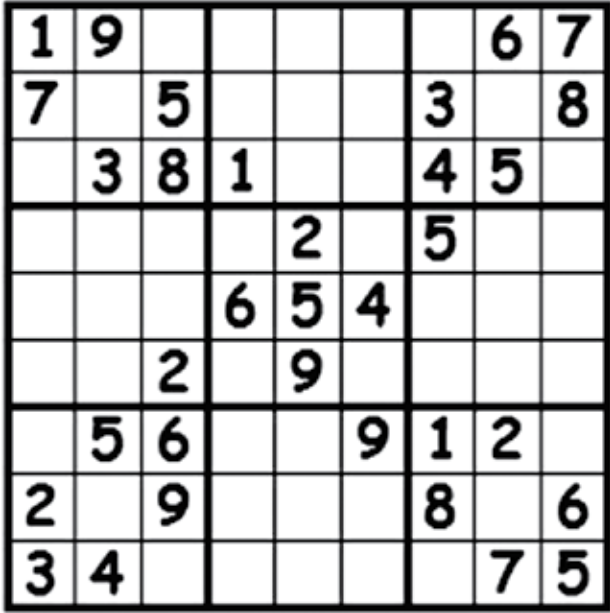


Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. 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





Russia's Daniil Medvedev celebrates after winning the US Open semi-final against Spain's Carlos Alcaraz (AFP)

Medvedev stuns Carlos Alcaraz to reach final

New York, United States - Daniil Medvedev upset defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in an enthralling semi-final duel to reach the US Open final on Friday.

Russian third seed Medvedev set up a rematch of his 2021 victory over Novak Djokovic after ousting Alcaraz 7-6 (7/3), 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 in a gripping 3hr 19min battle on the Arthur Ashe Stadium court.

Spanish star Alcaraz had been hoping to become the first man to successfully defend the US Open since Roger Federer in 2008, eyeing a blockbuster final against 23-time Grand Slam singles champion Djokovic on Sunday.

But Medvedev - who shattered Djokovic's dream of a calendar year Grand Slam two years ago by beating the Serb in straight sets in the final in New York - once again tore up the script. The 27-year-old from Moscow had said before semi-final he would have to deliver an "11 out of 10" performance to beat Alcaraz, who had defeated the Russian comfortably in two previous meetings this season.

Medvedev was to prove as good as his word over the course of a high-quality duel that is surely a contender for match of the tournament.

Medvedev completed victory in the ninth game of a nail-biting fourth set, smashing a desperate return from Alcaraz to convert his fourth match point.

"Amazing, especially beating someone like Carlos," Medvedev said. "Before the match for sure I had a lot of doubts after losing easily to him twice this year.

"I said I needed to play 11 out of 10 - I played 12 out of 10, except for the third set."

Alcaraz meanwhile was left reflecting on a loss that flew in the face of comments he made earlier in the tournament in which he said he was a more mature, mentally tougher player than when he won the title a year ago.

'Not mature enough'

"I thought that right now I am better player to find solutions when the match is not going in the right direction for you," Alcaraz said. "But after this match I'm gonna change my mind. I'm not mature enough to handle these kind of matches. So I have to learn about it.

"I'm gonna think about this loss for a long time. Of course I have to learn about it. I want to be better. These kind of matches help you a lot to be better and grow up in these kind of situations."

Medvedev had grabbed the early initiative by taking the first set on a tie-break after neither player gave up any break point opportunities in the opening frame. While Alcaraz looked instantly in the groove, it was Medvedev who prevailed in the tie-break.

'OVER THE MOON'

Djokovic schools Shelton to reach 10th US Open final

New York, United States - Novak Djokovic earned himself another shot at a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title after beating unseeded American Ben Shelton in straight sets on Friday to advance to his 10th US Open final.

Djokovic ended the run of the 20-year-old Shelton, winning 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) and will meet Daniil Medvedev in the final.

"Another Grand Slam final. I cannot be happier with where I am," said Djokovic, who signed off victory in his 100th US Open match by imitating Shelton's hang-up-the-phone celebration.

The 36-year-old Djokovic is attempting to become the oldest men's champion in New York in the Open era, which would also see him match Margaret Court's all-time mark for most major singles titles.

The Serbian, who will return to number one in the world after the tournament, has now won 22 of his last 23 Grand Slam semi-finals. He captured the last of his three US Open titles in 2018.

Djokovic has reached the final at all four majors in the same year for the third time. He will try to claim three Grand Slams in the same season for the fourth time in his career.

"I'm obviously over the moon with the results so far on Grand Slams," said Djokovic.

"Playing in all four finals of all four Slams in a season is amazing. It's the highest achievement I can think about when I start the season.

"That's what I dream about, that's what I really wanted, that's



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates his win over Ben Shelton of the US in their US Open semi-final on Friday (AFP)

where I want to be, in this kind of position."

Djokovic said there was no intent to send a message by mimicking Shelton's celebration.

"I just love Ben's celebration. I thought it was very original. I copied him. I stole his celebration."

Shelton, for his part, saw no issue with it.

"If you win the match you deserve to do whatever you want," he said.

"As a kid growing up, I always learned that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

Shelton began the US Open ranked 47th but will break into the top 20 for the first time Monday after making his first Grand

Slam semi-final.

"I think the two weeks as a whole was a good run for me. A lot of positives to take away for the rest of the year and going into next year," he said.

"There's a small piece of it is disappointment obviously. I'm a competitor. Every loss hurts. It cuts you a little bit.

"But if anything, this week has just motivated me more."

Djokovic too strong

Facing Shelton for the first time, with the roof on Arthur Ashe Stadium closed due to the threat of rain, Djokovic landed the first blow by breaking for a 4-2 lead in the opening set.

Shelton showed tremendous grit to save four set points on his serve at 2-5, carving out a point to break back the next game only for Djokovic to see out the set at the fifth time of asking.

Shelton pushed a forehand wide to present Djokovic with two break points at 2-2 in the second set, coughing up an untimely double fault to again gift his rival the upper hand.

Djokovic pressed home his advantage with a second break as he largely neutralised Shelton's powerful serve, and surged two sets clear.

A passing forehand winner gave Djokovic another break to open the third set, but Shelton put up a late act of defiance to break back for 4-all and even conjured a set point in the 10th game. Djokovic produced a clutch serve out wide on the way to a battling hold, punishing Shelton for a sloppy ensuing game but then stumbling himself with the finish in sight.

Shelton saved a match point to break and send the set to a tie-break before Djokovic hauled himself over the line and into a 36th Grand Slam final - in his 72nd major tournament.

AFP

Alcaraz says needs to 'grow up' after US Open exit

New York, United States - Carlos Alcaraz vowed to "grow up" after his reign as US Open champion was brought to an abrupt end in a semi-final defeat to Daniil Medvedev on Friday.

The 20-year-old Spaniard, who surged to victory in the US Open as a teenager last year to claim his maiden Grand Slam title, had said earlier this week he was a more mature, stronger opponent this season.

However Alcaraz abruptly revised that assessment in the wake of his shattering 7-6 (7/3),



Carlos Alcaraz greets the crowd as he leaves the court after losing to Daniil Medvedev (AFP)

6-1, 3-6, 6-3 defeat on Friday.

"I thought that right now I am better player to find solutions when the match is not going in the right direction for you," Alcaraz said. "But after this match I'm gonna change my mind. I'm not mature enough to handle these kind of matches. So I have to learn about it.

"I'm gonna think about this loss for a long time. Of course I have to learn about it. I want to be better.

"These kind of matches help you a lot to be better and grow

up in these kind of situations."

Alcaraz revealed he had struggled to maintain his composure in the first set tie-break, when a flurry of lost points left him in a hole.

"Let's say, I lose my mind," Alcaraz said. "I make three or four points without control. I didn't think. I totally lose my mind on that set. Fighting for 50 minutes and then, you know, for four points lose my mind.

"It was really tough for me to handle it."

AFP

Bopanna's Grand Slam quest ends in final as Ram, Salisbury triumph

New York, United States - Rohan Bopanna's quest for his maiden men's doubles Grand Slam title faced a cruel setback as he and his partner, Matthew Ebden, narrowly lost the hard-fought US Open final to defending champions Rajeev Ram and Joe Salisbury in New York.

In only his second men's doubles final at a Major tournament, Bopanna, now 43 and the oldest player in the competition, faced intense competition. The match stretched for two hours and one minute, with Ram and Salisbury clinching a 6-2, 3-6, 4-6 victory, making them the first team to secure three consecutive US Open titles.

The last team to achieve the feat was the all-American duo of Tom Bundy and Maurice McLoughlin from 1912-14.

Ram, 39, and Salisbury, 31, also won the 2020 Australian



Doubles champions Joe Salisbury of Great Britain and Rajeev Ram of the US with runners up Matthew Ebden of Australia and Rohan Bopanna of India (AFP)

Open crown, with Ram setting an Open era record by claiming his first Grand Slam doubles championship in his 58th appearance.

Bopanna had previously reached the US Open final in 2010, partnering with Aisam-ul-haq Qureshi, but fell short against the legendary Bryan brothers. His lone Grand Slam victory came in 2017 when he won the French Open mixed doubles alongside Canadian partner Gabriela Dabrowski.

Despite the heartbreak, Bopanna's determination and skill on the court showcased his enduring passion for the game. He joined the elite ranks of Indian tennis players who have come close to capturing Grand Slam glory, with Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi being the only two to have achieved this feat.

The final was a rollercoaster of emotions, with Bopanna and Ebden initially taking the lead. Bopanna's ferocious forehand and Ebden's volley winner gave them an edge in the first set, leading 5-2. However, Ram and Salisbury fought back.

Alcaraz pulls out of Davis Cup after US Open defeat

Barcelona, Spain - Spain's Carlos Alcaraz pulled out of the Davis Cup finals group stage on Saturday after his US Open semi-final defeat by Daniil Medvedev.

Veteran Albert Ramos will replace the 20-year-old world number one for the matches in Valencia between September 12-17, said the Spanish tennis federation in a statement.

Alcaraz had been set to lead Spain and clash with rival Novak Djokovic, named in Serbia's team, whom he beat in a thrilling Wimbledon final in July.

Spain will also face the Czech Republic and South Korea in the group stage, aiming to qualify for the last eight, played between November 21-26 in Malaga. The top two will progress.

AFP

Bopanna had reached the US Open final in 2010, partnering Aisam-ul-haq Qureshi, but lost to Bryan brothers. His lone Grand Slam victory was in 2017 French Open mixed doubles, with Gabriela Dabrowski

Neymar breaks Pele's record

Al Hilal striker scores twice in 5-1 rout of Bolivia to become Brazil's all-time top scorer

Montevideo, Uruguay - Neymar surpassed Pele as Brazil's all-time top scorer with two second-half goals in a 5-1 win over Bolivia in South America's 2026 World Cup qualifiers on Friday.

The 31-year-old striker went into the game level with Pele on 77 goals and had a golden opportunity to break the record in the 17th minute when Brazil were awarded a penalty.

But he looked distraught after his soft spot-kick was easily saved by Bolivia keeper Guillermo Viscarra to keep the scores goalless.

Seven minutes later, Brazil got in front when Rodrygo reacted quickly to slot home after a shot from Raphinha was parried out by Viscarra.

Brazil doubled their lead just after the break when Raphinha cut in from the left and his low shot took a slight deflection as it flew into the bottom corner.

Neymar had a hand in Brazil's third, with a clever chipped pass that was flicked on by Bruno Guimaraes into the path of Rodrygo who confidently drilled home.

Then came Neymar's moment to enter the history books as he pounced on a loose ball in-



Brazil's Neymar celebrates with teammates after scoring against Bolivia in their 2026 World Cup South American qualifiers on Friday (AFP)

side the box and tucked away his 78th goal in his 125th game for his country - raising his hands and his gaze to the skies.

Victor Abrego pulled a goal back for Bolivia, bustling through a disorganized Brazil backline before blasting an unstoppable shot past Ederson.

But there was still time for

Neymar to extend his record tally, connecting with a low ball from Raphinha in stoppage time to complete the victory and a memorable night for the forward.

The 31-year-old former Barcelona striker recently moved from Paris Saint-Germain to Saudi Arabian club Al Hilal.

Pele, who died in December

aged 82, scored 77 goals for Brazil in 92 appearances between 1957 and 1971.

The win was the perfect start for new coach Fernando Diniz, who took over from predecessor Tite in the wake of the Selecao's World Cup quarter-final exit last year.

Diniz paid tribute to Neymar,

whose role in the squad has been under scrutiny.

"Many did not know what he would come to do, and he came to do what he did: have fun, score two goals and break the record," he said.

"He is a very big idol, people must recognize him and accept him," he added.

eran strikers Edinson Cavani and Luis Suarez.

Bielsa was rewarded with an entertaining display from his new charges with River Plate attacking midfielder Nicolas de la Cruz scoring twice. De la Cruz opened the scoring with a fine left-foot strike in the 38th minute before Real Madrid midfielder Federico Valverde doubled the advantage on the stroke of half-time.

De la Cruz broke down the left before switching to Valverde, who made space before burying a shot into the far bottom corner.

The third goal, in the 71st minute, came after a fast break down the left with Liverpool striker Darwin Nunez pulling the ball back into the path of De la Cruz who made no mistake from close range. Chile pulled a goal back three minutes later with Arturo Vidal scrambling the ball home after a Diego Valdes header came out off the bar.

Bielsa was delighted with the display from his new charges.

He came to do what he did: have fun, score two goals and break the record. He is a very big idol, people must recognize him and accept him

FERNANDO DINIZ

Saudi Arabia transfer window shutting brings relief for European bigwigs

Paris, France - Clubs in Europe could breathe a collective sigh of relief following the closure this week of the transfer window in the Saudi Pro League, whose huge spending over the summer was topped only by the English Premier League.

The window shut late Thursday, six days after the market closed in Europe's leading leagues, and Liverpool's Mohamed Salah stayed put at Anfield despite reports that Jeddah club Al Ittihad had offered £150 million (\$189 million) for the Egyptian superstar.

However, Liverpool will surely have to brace themselves for further approaches from Saudi Arabia in the next window for the 31-year-old, whose current contract runs until 2025.

The last three months have seen reigning Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema, Brazilian superstar Neymar, Riyad Mahrez, Fabinho, N'Golo Kante, Sadio Mane, Ruben Neves and Jordan Henderson all leave major Euro-



Liverpool just about managed to hold on to Mohamed Salah who was linked with a £150 million move to Jeddah club Al Ittihad (AFP)

pean leagues to go to Saudi Arabia.

They have followed Cristiano Ronaldo, who moved at the turn of the year to sign for Al Nassr.

That list is far from exhaustive, with analysis by Deloitte's

Sports Business Group saying 37 players moved to Saudi Arabia from either England, Spain, Italy, Germany or France.

It is not just older players either, with 21-year-old Spain prospect Gabri Veiga leaving

Celta Vigo for Al Ahli.

"It is clear that European football is losing out," Manchester City and Spain midfielder Rodri said this week.

"We need to somehow stop the exodus of talent because at

first it seemed like it was just players at the end of their careers going, but now it is younger players too."

Deloitte said Saudi clubs had splashed \$957 million in the window, ahead of any other league apart from the Premier League, whose spending reached almost \$2 billion according to a FIFA report. But it may well soon catch up with England's numbers.

The Pro League has been buying players in a revamp as part of the country's ambitious economic diversification plan.

The spending has mostly been fuelled by four teams now owned by the Saudi government's oil-funded Public Investment Fund.

Those are Al Hilal and Al Nassr from Riyadh, reigning champions Al Ittihad and their Jeddah rivals Al Ahli.

The fees and wages being offered could have a serious impact for previously all-powerful teams in Europe who will not be able to compete.

AFP



Spain's Lamine Yamal dribbles past Georgia's Luka Gagnidze during their UEFA Euro 2024 qualifying match in Tbilisi on Friday (AFP)

Yamal makes history for Spain as Scotland edge closer to Euros

Paris, France - Lamine Yamal brightened the gloom that has descended over Spanish football by becoming the country's youngest ever player and goalscorer as La Roja thrashed Georgia 7-1 on Friday to get their Euro 2024 qualifying campaign back on track.

On a night of goals, Scotland beat Cyprus 3-0 and Croatia put five past Latvia while Portugal were made to work a bit harder, Bruno Fernandes on target in the 1-0 win in Slovakia.

The build up to Spain's match was tarnished by the ongoing saga of federation president Luis Rubiales and his kiss on the lips of women's midfielder Jenni Hermoso in the aftermath of their World Cup triumph over England in Sydney last month.

Spanish public prosecutors announced on Friday they had filed a lawsuit against Rubiales for sexual assault and coer-

cion.

Spain's mood in the Euro qualifiers was also not helped by a defeat by Scotland in their second game had left them fourth in Group A.

But they climbed up to second with a big win in Tbilisi, inspired by an Alvaro Morata hat-trick - although the Atletico Madrid forward's treble takes second place to Yamal's superb first appearance for his country at 16 years and 57 days old.

The Barcelona teenager came on from the bench with Nico Williams after 43 minutes to replace Marco Asensio and Dani Olmo, who had both suffered knocks, with Spain 4-0 up and cruising.

Yamal finished lethally in the 74th minute to send Spain 7-1 up after Williams found him with a cut-back.

"I'm happy obviously, for my debut and my goal," Yamal said.

Egypt struggle to Cup of Nations victory without Salah

Johannesburg, South Africa - Egypt sorely missed rested captain and star forward Mohamed Salah on Friday as they laboured to a 1-0 win over Ethiopia in the final round of Africa Cup of Nations qualifying.

The record seven-time African champions dominated possession in sweltering Cairo, but had only a 37th-minute Mostafa Fathy goal to show for their supremacy.

Fathy struck when Ethiopia goalkeeper Seid Aregawi could only parry a stinging close-range shot from Eintracht Frankfurt for-

ward Omar Marmoush.

Egypt did have the ball in the net three times at the June 30 Stadium in the Egyptian capital, but efforts from Hamdy Fathy and Sam Morsy were disallowed by the Gabonese referee for fouls.

Prolific Liverpool scorer Salah, the subject of a recent transfer bid by Saudi Arabian club Al Ittihad, is expected to join his Egyptian teammates for a September 12 friendly against Tunisia.

"I wanted to grant him (Salah) a well-deserved rest after he played seven consecutive matches in the past 23 days,"



Mostafa Fathy

Egypt coach Rui Vitoria told an eve-of-match press conference.

"Mohamed will rejoin the squad after the Ethiopia match. We cannot afford to take any unnecessary risks with him."

Only pride was at stake as Egypt, whose last Cup of Nations title came in 2010, had secured a place at the finals three months ago while Ethiopia were eliminated at the same time.

Victory for Egypt avenged their sole loss in Group D - a 2-0 defeat away to Ethiopia last year that led to the sacking of coach Ehab Galal.

Oman Sail’s optimist team finishes third in Turkey

Muscat - Oman finished third at the International Suleymanpa a Optimist Cup in Tekirdag, Turkey. In a competition dominated by sailors from the host nation, winners of the Country Cup, and neighbouring Bulgaria who finished as runners up, Oman Sail’s team competed well and Mohsin al Busaidi, Head of Performance, took away many positives from the experience.

Competition featured two categories. One for sailors under the age of 10, and one for sailors aged 10-18 years. In the junior

competition silver fleet, Habib bin Aziz al Hassani finished 48th out of 75, and one of just three non-Turkish sailors in the top 50. Harib bin Mohsin al Busaidi finished 13th in the bronze fleet out of 75 and the only visiting sailor in the race.

The senior competition gold fleet featured 66 sailors, the vast majority of whom were from the host nation. Oman Sail’s five competitors showed promise but were left trailing by the more experienced Turkish and Bulgarian sailors. Tameem bin Su-

laiman al Balushi was the highest ranked Omani sailor in 25th place, followed by Feras bin Haitham al Nabhani in 46th, Abdul Rahman bin Khalid Al Hadi in 50th, Hassan bin Nasser al Wahaibi in 52nd and Soud bin Talib al Shaqsi in 62nd.

The silver fleet comprised 65 sailors, including 58 from across Turkey. Hassan bin Mohsin al Oraini led the Omani team in 22nd place, followed by Khamis bin Nasser al Mashaikhi in 26th. The two female sailors in the team Tarteel bint Zaid al Hassani

and Hadeel bint Yousuf al Mushafri finished 43rd and 60th respectively.

Mohsin al Busaidi, Oman Sail Head of Performance, said: “This was a tough challenge against sailors far more experienced and familiar with the environment, but that provides opportunities for our team to learn. The more exposure our team receives, the better they will become and by racing against their peers from other nations we are able to incorporate real-life scenarios into training.”



The International Suleymanpa a Optimist Cup was a valuable learning experience for young Omani sailors

Al Harthy eyes ‘better performance’

Drying qualifying session delivers sixth-row start for Omani ace in Sunday’s 6 Hours of Fuji

Muscat - Aston Martin Vantage GTE racer Ahmad al Harthy had to settle for a top 12 placing in FIA World Endurance Championship qualifying at Fuji in Japan on Saturday, after a drying session which had initially looked incredibly promising for Oman Racing with TF Sport.

While expecting a tough and competitive battle throughout, the choice to run with slick Michelin tyres on the initially wet track proved to be the correct one. As Fuji Speedway dried more and more though, Al Harthy’s early session timesheet-topping performance couldn’t be sustained as the life of the tyres ebbed away.

“It was a drying track and we opted to go out with slicks, which was the right call, but I think I maybe pushed too much on the first three laps. For 60 percent of the session we were P1, but as the track became a lot quicker our tyre pressures were going



Ahmad al Harthy in action



It’s our first time here, weather conditions have been changing so much with storms, so I think in the race we will need to be in the right place at the right time

AHMAD AL HARTHY

high and so we lost performance and lost the window. Only 0.5 seconds would move us from where we are into the top three, so it shows how competitive it was. Had the session ended five minutes earlier, I’m sure we would have been pole,” said Al Harthy.

“Looking at data and studying

for tomorrow, I think we should be able to have a stronger race and a better performance overall. I’m looking forward to the 6 Hours of Fuji and pushing from the very first lap to see what we can achieve. It’s our first time here, weather conditions have been changing so much with storms, so I think in the race we

will need to be in the right place at the right time. We will focus as always and hopefully have a strong car.”

Setting the pace with his first flying lap, a time of 1m43.517seconds, the Omani – on his first visit to the world-famous Japanese track – improved markedly the next time around to 1m40.128 seconds and stayed on provisional pole, but by a reduced margin of 0.171 seconds.

Taking another half second off his best on his third flyer, Al Harthy remained on pole momentarily but was then edged back to third. With six minutes to go in the session only half a second covered the top six runners.

He responded with his best of the session, a time of 1m39.344seconds to retake pole, but that was the most he could extract out of the car and the Michelin tyres and was ultimately edged back to 12th position and a sixth row start for the big race, the penultimate round of the FIA WEC season.

Al Harthy, who is supported by key partners Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS, is determined to try and make progress in the weekend’s race – his first around Fuji Speedway – and will be challenging as hard as he can along with team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood.

Germany, Serbia reach Basketball World Cup final as US stars flounder

Manila, Philippines - Germany and Serbia have reached Sunday’s Basketball World Cup final after years of playing together, while the United States’ collection of NBA stars ran out of time to gel as a team.

Germany and Serbia will face off in Manila after knocking out the glamour names of the United States and Canada in Friday’s semi-finals.

The Americans, who lost 113-111 to Germany, arrived in the Philippines with a team full of up-and-coming NBA talent who had been together for only a matter of weeks before the tournament.

The Germans, by contrast, had been steadily building after finishing third at last year’s EuroBas-



Germany’s Andreas Obst goes for a layup against USA’s Jaren Jackson JR during their Basketball World Cup semi-final in Manila on Friday (AFP)

ket tournament.

Franz Wagner, who scored 22 points against the United States, said “it definitely helps playing to-

gether more times every summer”.

“For me, it’s just the second time, but for almost everybody

else, they’ve been playing with the national team for multiple years,” he said.

US head coach Steve Kerr has repeatedly stressed the differences between the NBA and international basketball since arriving at the World Cup.

International games are eight minutes shorter and have different rules and referees.

The Americans have come up against national teams who play together regularly and are familiar with the international game.

National pride is also on the line for countries that see the World Cup as the sport’s pinnacle. “We represent our families, our people,” said Serbia’s Marko Guduric.

Ramos guides France past All Blacks in thrilling opening game

Paris, France - Full-back Thomas Ramos kicked 17 points to help France to a thrilling 27-13 victory over New Zealand in Friday’s opening game of the Rugby World Cup.

Ramos kicked five penalties and a conversion at a sold-out Stade de France as the hosts, leading contenders for the title, started the tournament in style.

Winger Mark Telea claimed two tries for three-time winners All Blacks, who had led 13-9 with more than half an hour to play but went on to lose their first ever World Cup pool game in hot and humid conditions in Paris.

“We found it hard to get going especially with the pressure of an opening match at home and everything that followed,” France captain Antoine Dupont said.

“There was an All Black team who put us under a lot of pressure at rucks but we managed to be serious and rigorous throughout the match and we finished it well.”

After a colourful opening ceremony the All Blacks’ Haka was well respected by the sold-out Stade de France crowd as well as by Les Bleus.

New Zealand made a late change as captain Same Cane was ruled out, Tupou Vaa’i coming in from the bench with Dalton Papali’i moving from blindside flanker to the openside as No. 8



France’s scrum-half and captain Antoine Dupont (C) is tackled during the Rugby World Cup Pool A match between France and New Zealand

Ardie Savea took over as skipper, leaving Ian Foster’s side light at the breakdown.

“It’s tough when you lose your skipper, the boys that came in filled the job right, unfortunately we didn’t get the win,” Savea said.

“We lost the battle tonight but we still got a war to win.”

Italy thrash Namibia

Italy cruised to a seven-try bonus-point 52-8 victory over Namibia in their Pool A opener in Saint-Etienne on Saturday.

Star wing Ange Capuozzo was amongst the try scorers, with Lorenzo Cannone, Paolo Garbisi,

Dino Lamb, Epalahame Faiva, Manuel Zuliani and Paolo Odogwu also dotting down, while Gerswin Mouton replied for Namibia. Full-back Tommaso Allan contributed 17 points with the boot in a faultless display.

It was a 23rd straight defeat in as many World Cup matches for the African side.

Coming away with a maximum five-point haul was crucial for Italy, with clashes against pool heavyweights France and New Zealand to come.

Kieran Crowley’s team is looking to make the knock-out stages for the first time.

AFP

Jorge Martin wins San Marino MotoGP sprint race

Misano Adriatico, Italy - Jorge Martin won Saturday’s sprint race at the San Marino and Rimini Riviera MotoGP to close the gap on championship leader Francesco Bagnaia.

Pramac rider Martin is now 45 points behind world champion Bagnaia ahead of Sunday’s GP after winning from pole position well over a second ahead of Marco Bezzecchi.

Martin was on pole after



Jorge Martin

smashing the lap record clocked by VR46 rider Bezzecchi on Friday by nearly half a second in qualifying on Saturday morning.

He will start there again for Sunday’s GP and on the evidence of the sprint is a good bet to claim the honours ahead of his principle championship rivals.

The 25-year-old never looked troubled by the Italian pair chasing him, both of whom were suffering from injuries sustained in

crashes at last weekend’s Catalunya MotoGP.

Ducati’s Bagnaia flew off his bike at high speed at Montmelo and was then run over by Brad Binder, but has been riding well this weekend and will be aiming to limit the damage to his lead in the overall standings.

He managed to hold off Dani Pedrosa despite riding in pain and delighted the supporters when he crossed the line.

'WE HAVE THE EDGE'

Pakistan favourites against India in Sunday's Asia Cup super four clash, says captain Azam

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Pakistan skipper Babar Azam said Saturday his side will have an edge over India in their Asia Cup super four clash, with a bowling line-up ready to win matches and tournaments.

The arch-rivals meet again in Colombo on Sunday after their group match was abandoned due to rain, which has played havoc with the 50-over tournament that is a precursor to the ODI World Cup in India.

An India-Pakistan clash remains one of the most hotly anticipated matches in world cricket because the two South Asian neighbours only play each other in multi-nation tournaments due to political tensions.

Pakistan won their opening match of the Super Four stage and a second win will further enhance their chances of making the final on September 17.

But rain in the Sri Lankan capital is expected to play spoilsport again in the match, for which a reserve day has been kept aside.

"You can say we have the edge, as we have played back-to-back cricket here (in Sri Lanka) and in Pakistan," Azam told reporters. "It has been two-and-a-half months in Sri Lanka including the Test series, Lanka Premier



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (R) says they have one of the best bowling attacks in the world (AFP)

Shaheen says 'best yet to come'

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Pakistan pace ace Shaheen Shah Afridi has warned his devastating spell against arch-rivals India that set the Asia Cup alight is just the start, with the World Cup only weeks away.

The left-arm fast bowler rattled the Indian top-order in their Group A clash last week,

League, Afghanistan series and now the Asia Cup. So you can say it will be advantage (for us)."

Pakistan's pace trio of Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf have stood out,

taking 4-35 - including the wickets of star batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma.

That match was washed out but they meet again in Colombo on Sunday in the Super Four stage.

And Shaheen said there is more to come.

"Every match against India is

special and people watch this a lot," the 23-year-old said Friday. "I used to wait for this match as a fan before I played under-16 cricket. "I can't say this has been my best spell so far. This is just the start and there will be many more, so the best is yet to come."

AFP

"Fast bowlers win you tournaments and matches and I have total belief (in) them. The line-up that we have including Naseem and Faheem (Ashraf) is the best lot that we have."

India opener Shubman Gill said not playing Pakistan regularly made it tough to gauge the opposition.

"We all know that their bowling attack is quite good and when you don't play against such attacks often it makes a bit of difference in main tournaments," said Gill.

Gill, who was bowled by Rauf for 10 in Pallekele last week, and the Indian batsmen have been facing a left-arm specialist in their training to counter Shaheen.

Virat Kohli.

Azam said the team believes their bowlers can win them titles.

"Proud to have the fast bowlers that we have. One of the best (in the world)," said Azam.



Sri Lanka's Sadeera Samarawickrama plays a shot during their Asia Cup super four match against Bangladesh in Colombo on Saturday (AFP)

Samarawickrama lifts Sri Lanka to 257-9 against Bangladesh

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sadeera Samarawickrama hit an attacking 93 as Sri Lanka reached 257-9 after a stuttering innings against Bangladesh in an Asia Cup Super Four clash in Colombo on Saturday.

Bangladesh elected to bowl first in their must-win game of the 50-over tournament, a precursor to the upcoming ODI World Cup in India.

Their fast bowlers stood up, with Taskin Ahmed and Hasan Mahmud taking three wickets each to check Sri Lanka's scoring.

However, Kusal Mendis (50) and then Samarawickrama made sure the co-hosts posted a fighting total on an inconsistent pitch.

Samarawickrama reached his 50 in 47 balls and accelerated in a 60-run partnership with Dasun Shanaka, who made 24, to rouse the home fans at a largely empty ground.

Sri Lanka started briskly when Dimuth Karunaratne hit Hasan for two successive boundaries but the fast bowler had him out for 18 on the next ball.

Pathum Nissanka and Mendis put on 74 runs to put the innings back on track with some sensible batting, forcing Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan to rotate his bowlers.

Shoriful Islam was brought into the attack and he delivered with the wicket of Nissanka, trapped lbw for 40.

Mendis reached his fifty with a boundary off Shoriful in the next over but the fast bowler had his revenge four balls later to have him caught out.

The bowlers kept up the charge, with pace spearhead Taskin getting Charith Asalanka out with a slower delivery for 10. Dhananjaya de Silva departed soon after.

Samarawickrama took on the bowlers with a string of boundaries and finished off well as he surpassed his previous ODI best of 82. He was dismissed on the final ball.

Bangladesh need 258 runs to keep alive their chances of making the final at the same venue on September 17.

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A Christian orthodox male from Kottayam in Kerala, 32 years, 173cm tall, MBA, working as an accounts executive at a leading FMCG in Oman, is looking for a suitable alliance from a God-fearing, middle-class family.
Contact: +968-98960759

SITUATION WANTED

A person with ten years of Oman experience in MEP, piping, pipeline projects, business development & procurement is looking for a suitable position.
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FLAT FOR RENT

A five bedroom flat with 4 bathrooms, kitchen, store, AC fitted and balcony sea view, near the Indian School Darsait for rent at RO275 monthly only.
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A three room flat in the ground floor in Al Mahaj area, Al Amerat, is available for rent.
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OPEN POSITIONS

Require qualified & experienced male
1)Multicuisine "Cook"(Chef De Parte)
2)Baker
for a high-profile family in Oman

Job requirements are:

- Should have a minimum of 5 years of culinary experience and working in a formal household would be an asset.
- Prepare and develop recipes in accordance with the family and guest's nutritional needs and dietary restrictions such as lactose and gluten intolerance.
- Prepare daily meals for the family (Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner).
- Able to cook for events and formal dinner parties.
- Able to take full responsibility for the running of the kitchen and have effective communication skills.
- Be able to work alongside a team of household staff and as kitchen assistants that provide the highest level of service for the family.
- Ensure all kitchen equipment and appliances are kept clean and in proper working condition.
- Be creative, hardworking & have exceptional standards for cleanliness, health & safety.

Role carries an excellent salary, accommodation, food, annual leave with air ticket to hometown and medical insurance as per Oman Labor law.

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TORONTO
FILM FEST



Canadian rock band Nickelback, the featured artists in *Hate to Love: Nickelback*, perform during a free concert at the Toronto International Film Festival in Toronto

tiff

UNVEILED

Miyazaki's likely swan song charms Toronto as film fest opens

The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) opened Thursday with admiring applause for *The Boy and the Heron*, Japanese animation master Hayao Miyazaki's likely last movie - a meditation on love, loss and the horrors of World War II.

Cinema buffs crowded into the 2,000-seat Princess of Wales theatre to be the first outside Japan to catch Miyazaki's first feature film for the storied Studio Ghibli in a decade - and, at age 82, perhaps his farewell to the industry.

The semi-autobiographical film follows young Mahito as he moves with his father to the countryside after his mother perishes in the haunting fire-bombing of Tokyo during World War II - depicted in a whirl of flames, sirens and chaos.

After meeting a talking heron, he enters a surreal and perilous fantasy world in search of his mom, where he finds everything from giant bloodthirsty parakeets - in rainbow colours - to a warrior pirate and a swarm of frogs.

Festival CEO Cameron Bailey told the audience he believed the film was the 'most mature, dazzling expression' of Miyazaki's vision.

The screening was the marquee event of day one of TIFF, the largest film festival in North America, which began under the shadow of twin strikes by actors and writers that has brought Hollywood to a near-standstill.

Organisers of the event, a launchpad for numerous Academy Award-winning films, were finalising a stacked lineup of premieres, red carpet galas and prestige TV launches featuring work from dozens of countries when Tinseltown's actors staged a walkout.

Bailey, however, says the global reach of the programming, and the ability of filmmakers and actors to promote independent fare even amid the strikes, speaks of the 'strength of cinema right now'.

"It took some weeks to really figure out the specifics and the details of how you would navigate a strike-affected festival, but it turns out that we're going to have lots of red carpet talent," Bailey told AFP.

Also premiering on Thursday night was Patricia Arquette's *Gonzo Girl*, her directorial debut loosely based on a novel by a former assistant of American journalist Hunter S Thompson.

Arquette is one of several Hollywood A-listers whose work behind the camera will be featured at the 10-day movie extravaganza in Canada's largest city; others include Anna Kendrick, Taika Waititi, Kristin Scott Thomas, Michael Keaton and Ethan Hawke.

Hollywood actors and writers are striking in a battle with studios and streamers over pay and other work conditions - meaning that union members generally cannot promote films produced by companies involved in the dispute.

Waivers have been offered in some cases, such as Arquette's, while in others, the films screening in Toronto are not subject to the strikes because they were independently or internationally produced.

Arquette attended her premiere wearing a giant button in support of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA).

"We very much support our union, it's a very important strike for us," she said on the red carpet.

Oscars bellwether

The Toronto film fest is a key part of the

fall festival lineup, along with *Venice* and *Telluride*, at which movies hoping to build early Oscars momentum typically hold premieres.

TIFF's annual People's Choice Award has become an increasingly accurate Oscars bellwether, predicting eventual best picture winners such as *Nomadland* and *Green Book*.

Dumb Money, starring Seth Rogen and Paul Dano, about the amateur investors who turned *GameStop* into a



Wall Street phenomenon in 2021, premiered on Friday.

French filmmaker Ladj Ly will debut *Les Indesirables*, a follow-up look at marginalised communities in the suburbs of Paris four years after his Oscar-nominated debut feature *Les Misérables*.

And pop star Lil Nas X brought some flair to the red carpet on Saturday for the debut of his documentary *Lil Nas X: Long Live Montero* - one of several music films on tap including a premiere of *In Restless Dreams: The Music of Paul Simon*.

TIFF only returned to full strength in 2022, after two years of online or hybrid events staged amid the coronavirus pandemic. The festival runs until September 17.

AFP



Camila Morrone and US actor Willem Dafoe as they arrive for the premiere of *Gonzo Girl* during the Toronto International Film Festival



It took some weeks to really figure out the specifics and the details of how you would navigate a strike-affected festival, but it turns out that we're going to have lots of red carpet talent

CAMERON BAILEY

Japan's director Hayao Miyazaki poses during the photocall of his movie *Gake no ue no Ponyo*

US director-actress Patricia Arquette (L) poses with her niece, actress Zoe Bleu Sidel





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