



## ► NEWS BRIEF

H M CONDOLES EMIR OF QATAR

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, on the demise of Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Abdullah al Thani.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to have mercy on the departed soul and grant the deceased's family patience to bear the loss.

H M GREETES PRESIDENT OF TUNISIA

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Kais Saied of the Tunisian Republic on his country's Republic Day.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life. His Majesty prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions on President Saied and the Tunisian people.

OMAN OIL PRICE RISES TO \$81.65

Muscat - Oman oil price for September delivery on Monday went up by 91 cents to US\$82.56 from US\$81.65 on Friday.

The average price of Oman oil for July delivery has stabilised at US\$74.94 per barrel, which is US\$8.34 lower per barrel than June delivery.

04



Agreement inked for Oman's first silicon metal plant

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Are you a weekend warrior or a weeklong workhorse?

# Generative AI could help Oman reap \$1.3bn in economic benefits by 2030

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman is likely to reap about US\$1.3bn per year in economic benefits by 2030 as investments in generative artificial intelligence (AI) continues to grow globally and in the GCC region, according to a new report.

The increasingly heated generative AI (GenAI) race has sparked excitement and investments in a technology that has the potential to change the world profoundly. PwC's Strategy& Middle East expects to see widespread adoption of this technology across the corporate world over the next six to 12 months, along with rapid progress in the field.

Although accurate predictions are difficult at this early stage, Strategy& Middle East's conservative top-down estimate predicts that by 2030, the GCC region could realise approximately US\$9.9 of economic growth for every US\$1 invested in



GenAI. 'At that rate, the overall economic impact of GenAI could reach US\$23.5bn per year by 2030 in the GCC region,' Strategy& Middle East said in its report.

GenAI-fueled improvements in efficiency and effectiveness will likely have the greatest effect in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with

annual economic impact of US\$12.2bn and US\$5.3bn, respectively. Other countries in the region will also benefit, with Qatar gaining US\$2.6bn, Kuwait US\$1.6bn and Bahrain US\$0.6bn annually.

According to the report, the largest affected industry is likely to be media and entertainment,

with US\$8.5bn of likely economic impact across the GCC region, followed by banking and financial services at US\$3.5bn, healthcare at US\$3.8bn, and IT and telecommunications at US\$2.9bn.

'Given this expected impact and the accelerating pace of new GenAI advances, executives in the Middle East should seize the

opportunity without delay. Companies that merely watch risk falling behind, while their forward-thinking counterparts that adopt GenAI stand on the verge of gaining a significant competitive edge,' the report said.

Strategy& Middle East noted that GenAI is not just another tech buzzword - it is a revolution

set to redefine the business landscape.

It said, 'Grasping GenAI's capabilities can catapult organisations ahead, giving early adopters a formidable competitive advantage. Adopting GenAI and building the required underlying capabilities is not a quick or cheap fix. It calls for sustained and long-term investments to drive an enterprise-wide transformation. The race is on, and the prize - a share of a multibillion-dollar market impact in the Middle East - is too significant to be ignored.'

GenAI is more than an advanced chatbot. These large language models (LLMs) trained on extensive textual and, of late, multimodal data, perform a multitude of linguistic tasks, including generation, editing, summarising, translation and classification. More broadly, GenAI is poised to trigger a seismic shift in business, impacting functions from sales and marketing to customer service and compliance.

## Critical decline in myrrh trees; study calls for urgent action

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Results of the second phase of 'Survey of Arabian Myrrh Trees in the Sultanate of Oman' have revealed that the species is going through a 'very critical stage'.

With less than 250 trees remaining in Oman, Environment Authority (EA) advocates an urgent reassessment of the species' national classification in line with the International Union for Conservation of Nature's guidelines. EA also underscored the need for a concerted effort from all stakeholders and relevant authorities at regional and international levels to safeguard the species.

The myrrh tree resin has been used throughout history for a variety of purposes, including perfumes, incense and medicine. It is a resin similar to frankincense, produced by trees of the *Commiphora* genus. Frankincense originates from the *Boswellia* trees.

The study, carried out by EA's Office of Conservation of Environment in Dhofar, identified the leading threats to myrrh trees. Overgrazing emerged as the most significant challenge, accounting for 62% of the threats, followed by insect activity - 22%,



Overgrazing emerged as the most significant challenge, accounting for 62% of the threats, followed by insect activity, drought and unsustainable harvesting methods

drought - 10%, and unsustainable harvesting methods - 6%.

The second phase of the study expanded the scope of the survey, using around 15 scientific

indicators to determine the species' current status. It documented and took samples from all 59 surviving trees, which were recorded in a local database.

In response to these alarming findings, EA is planning to establish a garden specifically for myrrh trees. This initiative aims to conserve several 'mother trees' and set up a nursery dedicated to producing myrrh seeds and seedlings.

The study employed precise scientific methods and categorised indicators into four categories: spatial, vital tree indicators, degree of threat indicators, and documentation indicators. This comprehensive approach allowed for the collection of various data, such as location specifics, tree health indicators, threat factors, and sample collection of gum.

Additionally, the study conducted an initial assessment of the age of the myrrh trees. The oldest tree is estimated to be around 40 years old, while the youngest is about nine months old.

The overarching goal of the study is to discern the vital indicators of myrrh trees and identify the natural and human threats causing their number to dwindle. The study also seeks to collect updated and precise scientific data on the trees, potentially leading to a new classification of threat level for the species both locally and globally.



## MHT invites bids for tourism films

Muscat - The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is seeking a professional production company to create engaging promotional films that showcase the sultanate's unique tourist appeal.

In a tender issued on Sunday, the ministry invited specialised companies with the objective of highlighting Oman's rich heritage, striking landscapes and genuine hospitality, presenting the country as an irresistible global tourism hotspot.

The winning bidder will distil the expansive narratives of Oman's deserts, mountains, valleys, adventure sports, wildlife, cuisine and history into powerful visual storytelling.

MHT requires two films, each serving a distinct purpose. The first film, a one-

minute teaser, should showcase the charm of Oman in a brief, impactful way. The second, a three-minute feature, will provide a more in-depth exploration of the diverse Omani experiences.

The selected production company will manage all aspects of the project from start to finish. This includes scriptwriting, storyboarding, location scouting, filming and post-production tasks such as editing and background score.

Bid submission concludes on September 5.

The ministry engages international markets by organising campaigns and road shows. On Monday, MHT kicked off a road show in New Delhi, India. The road show will travel to Jaipur and Kolkata before ending in Mumbai on July 31.

## Twitter's bird flies out; payments, banking and commerce coming soon

San Francisco, United States - Twitter launched its new logo on Monday, replacing the blue bird with a white X on a black background as the Elon Musk-owned company moves towards rebranding as X.

The social media network's website showed the company's new logo, but its URL was still showing as twitter.com and the blue 'Tweet' button was visible, suggesting the rebranding was not yet finalised.

Musk and the company's new chief executive Linda Yaccarino announced the rebranding on Sunday, saying the company

would be renamed X and move later into payments, banking and commerce.

Founded in 2006, Twitter takes its name from the sound of birds chattering, and it has used avian branding since its early days, when the company bought a stock symbol of a light blue bird for US\$15, according to the design website Creative Bloq.

Musk changed his profile picture late on Sunday to the company's new logo, which he described as "minimalist art deco", and updated his Twitter bio to 'X.com', which now redirects to twitter.com.

He also tweeted that under the site's new identity, a post would be called "an X."

Musk had already named Twitter's parent company the X Corporation and has said his takeover of the social media giant was "an accelerant to creating X, the everything app" - a reference to the X.com company he founded in 1999, a later version of which went on to become online payments giant PayPal.

Such an app could still function as a social media platform and also include messaging and mobile payments.

Musk had previously said he



wanted to create a super-app modelled on China's WeChat, a social media platform that also

offers messaging and mobile payments.

"You basically live on WeChat

in China because it's so usable and helpful to daily life, and I think if we can achieve that, or even get close to that at Twitter, it would be an immense success," he told a company town hall meeting in June last year.

The new logo was projected onto the facade of Twitter's San Francisco headquarters on Sunday night.

"Powered by AI, X will connect us in ways we're just beginning to imagine," Linda tweeted earlier.

A former advertising sales executive at NBC Universal who Musk hired last month to be Twitter's CEO, Linda said the so-

cial media platform was on the cusp of broadening its scope.

"X is the future state of unlimited interactivity - centred in audio, video, messaging, payments/banking - creating a global marketplace for ideas, goods, services and opportunities."

Since Musk bought Twitter for US\$44bn last October, the platform's advertising business has partially collapsed as marketers soured on Musk's management style and mass firings at the company that gutted content moderation.

AFP

# Mwasalat handles over 2mn passengers in H1 2023

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman National Transport Company - Mwasalat - transported over 2mn passengers on its buses and ferries in the first six months of 2023. This figure represents a substantial increase compared to the 1.43mn passengers serviced during the first half

of 2022. The government-run company transported over 10,400 bus passengers and more than 600 ferry passengers daily. These accounted for a total of 1,900,000 bus passengers and 111,000 ferry passengers in H1 2023. Further, its ferries transported over 29,200 vehicles and more

*37.32% of bus passengers and 80.09% of ferry passengers were Omanis; 13.8% of bus passengers and 21.8% of ferry passengers were women*

than 10,500 tonnes of cargo. Among bus passengers, 37.32% were Omanis, who accounted for 80.09% of the ferry passengers. Female passengers accounted for 13.8% of the bus passengers and 21.8% of ferry passengers.

Mwasalat transported more than 850,000 passengers in the first quarter of 2023 and a total of 3mn passengers in its buses in 2022. Similarly, its ferry services transported over 60,000 passengers in the first quarter of 2023, and a total of 221,000 in 2022. The ferry services cover a

broad network of routes including Shinas-Khasab, Shannah-Masirah and Khasab-Lima. Integrated bus and ferry services connect regions like the Governorate of Musandam and Masirah Island. Mwasalat attributed these increased numbers to the Omani public's growing interest in public transport, backed by the company's effective marketing efforts

and its dedication to service efficiency. The company maintains that customer satisfaction is integral to its success. The company also highlighted its commitment to employment opportunities and localisation. 'Jobseekers at Mwasalat received 15,000 training hours and the company boasts a 93% Omanisation rate,' it stated.

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## Under-17 cricket players to embark on US tour



Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Fourteen cricketers of Muscat's Boshier Sports Center (BSC) are set to gain a unique experience as they head to the United States to play a series of matches. The under-17 team is scheduled to play six matches in Dallas and Houston from July 27 to August 7. The opportunity comes on the invitation of the North Texas Cricket Association (NTCA). The association is North Texas' governing body for cricket and represents 65 clubs and

1,200 members. It is also responsible for organising all cricket events in a region of southern United States. Excited about the tour, Sandesh Dhuri, head coach of BSC, informed that this is the second international trip of the year for the players. The first was to Hyderabad, India. "BSC is a leading cricket training centre in Muscat and we are delighted to offer this opportunity to our students. Our goal is to enhance the talent and skills of these young players by giving them global exposure. This enables them to compete

with international talent and grow into notable sports persons who bring pride to Oman," Dhuri said. Since its inception in 2013, BSC has organised multiple overseas cricket tours to countries such as Australia, the UK, UAE, Sri Lanka, India and Qatar. NTCA's invitation for the tour in Texas was accepted as international tours provide invaluable exposure to young cricketers, Dhuri added. His son and promising cricketer Nimish S Dhuri will lead the team in the six matches.

## Majority of Omani pilgrims express satisfaction with hajj services this year

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman Hajj Mission has hailed this year's pilgrimage as a success, with the majority of pilgrims - 96% - indicating satisfaction with the services rendered. At a press conference on Monday, Sultan bin Saeed al Hinai, head of Oman Hajj Mission, informed that of the 14,000 registered pilgrims - 99.7% or 13,956 individuals - fulfilled the hajj rites this season. Forty-four people could not perform the hajj rituals due to various reasons. Hinai also presented results of a survey on the quality of hajj services offered by Omani companies. According to the survey, 93% of respondents rated the Mina camp services favourably. Scores were similarly high for accommodation (94%), food (97%), and hygiene and cleanliness (94%). In collaboration with the Saudi

Ministry of Hajj and Umrah and other competent bodies, Oman Hajj Mission devised solutions to overcome any challenge faced by pilgrims, Hinai informed. The survey results also revealed areas needing improvement, including the number and cleanliness of toilet facilities in the Mina and Arafat camps. Approximately 71% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the number of toilets in the Mina camp, while 54% were not satisfied with the number of toilets in the Arafat camp. Forty-six per cent rated the cleanliness of toilets in the Mina camp as not up to the mark.

*Of the 14,000 registered pilgrims 99.7% - or 13,956 individuals - fulfilled the hajj rites this season*



# Al Omaniya Financial Services (SAOG)

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### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023



**Economy:** Oman continues to be one of the performing economies in the Gulf region, with its GDP at Constant Price registering a 4.7 percent growth for the first quarter of 2023 against the same period last year. The increase is primarily driven by a 4.6 percent increase in non-petroleum activities and an increase of 3.5 percent in petroleum activities. According to the IMF recent press release in June 2023, economic growth in Oman is projected to slow down to 1.3 percent in 2023 and then rebound to 2.7 percent in 2024, reflecting oil production cuts by OPEC+ and moderate growth in the non-hydrocarbon sector due to subdued recovery of construction activity, slowdown in global economic activity and tighter financial conditions. IMF also stated that favorable oil prices and continued fiscal reforms are expected to maintain fiscal and external balances in comfortable positions over the medium term and the banking sector remains sound, with ample capital and liquidity buffers and strong asset quality.

Substantial oil windfalls and fiscal consolidation have boosted fiscal and external positions resulting in significant decline in government debt. This progress has led to a series of upgrades from the major ratings agencies. The government has made decisive strides in the structural agenda under Oman's Vision 2040 and continued implementation will help diversify the Omani economy and boost prospects for strong, inclusive, and green non-hydrocarbon growth.

Note : The complete report is available with the Muscat securities Market. The Complete financial statements of the company together with the financial statements of any subsidiary company required to file financial statements would be available to any shareholders or interested party on request in Arabic or English within seven days as of the date of request.

P.O. Box 1087, Jibroo, PC 114, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24724700, Fax: 24813258

#### Financial Highlights

For the second quarter ending 30th June 2023, the company earned a net operating income of RO 5,373K as compared to RO 4,985K for the same period last year, showing an increase of 7.78%. The profit before Provision stood at RO 2,860K against RO 2,668K for the same period last year. The company achieved a profit after tax of RO 1,565K for the period as compared to RO 1,333K for the same period last year, showing an increase of 17.40%. The company's Loan Book as on 30th June 2023 stands at RO 125.5 million against RO 96 million as of the same period last year. The company has provided RO 1,023K towards ECL for the period ending 30th June 2023 against RO 1,100K for the same period last year. The Total ECL and reserve interest on Instalment Finance receivables stands at RO 14.55 million as on 30th June 2023.

#### Capital Enhancement

The company is well capitalised with a healthy capital adequacy of 32.53%, including the Compulsorily Convertible Bonus Stock Bonds. The company has issued compulsorily convertible bonus stock bonds which are listed. These compulsorily convertible bonus stock bonds will be converted to Equity Shares in due course resulting in further Capital enhancement. During the current period bonus stock bonds of RO.830K were compulsorily converted into a specific number of equity shares as per terms of the issue on the due date.

#### Concerns

A challenging geopolitical situation and the fallout from the recent banking crisis in the west has resulted in further pressure on liquidity, pushing up the interest rates. Higher rates are driving up the cost of funds, while NBFCs have limited ability to reprice their assets to offset the impact. The deferment of installments from the COVID affected borrowers continues to impact the cash flows of the company. Expected delinquencies due to reduced

cash flow at the borrower's level may reduce the net margins and result in dilution of the NPA coverage. Addressing employment-related concerns continues to remain a persistent challenge for the Omani government and the private sector equally.

#### Prognosis

We continue to foresee a challenging period ahead tempered with optimism. The company is well aware of the current economic scenario and has taken proactive mitigating measures and designed strategies to capitalize on opportunities as they unfold. The company is fundamentally strong with solid net worth, clean loan book, lowest NPLs and high Non-Performing asset coverage. With the added strength of robust liquidity buffer in the form of liquid deposits with commercial banks which can be repriced upward or used for negotiating better borrowing rates, the company is confident of posting satisfactory numbers.

#### Acknowledgement

On behalf of the company and the Board of Directors, I would like to express my deep gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his vision and leadership, which is taking the Sultanate on the new path of development and prosperity. We are also grateful to the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority and other regulatory authorities for their guidance and support. We also thank our shareholders, bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence and support. Last, but not the least, we acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the management and staff of the company.

Khalid Said Al Wahaibi  
Chairman

### UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD 1 JANUARY 2023 TO 30 JUNE 2023

|                                                                              | Amt in RO '000<br>II Quarter ended<br>30 June 2023 | Amt in RO '000<br>II Quarter ended<br>30 June 2022 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Interest income on finance lease, working capital finance and other advances | 5,360                                              | 4,195                                              |
| Finance Income                                                               | 2,004                                              | 1,870                                              |
| <b>Total Instalment finance and finance income</b>                           | <b>7,364</b>                                       | <b>6,065</b>                                       |
| Interest Expense                                                             | (2,896)                                            | (2,132)                                            |
| <b>Net Instalment finance and finance income</b>                             | <b>4,468</b>                                       | <b>3,933</b>                                       |
| Other Income                                                                 | 905                                                | 1,052                                              |
| Administration & operational costs                                           | (2,513)                                            | (2,317)                                            |
| Provision for expected credit loss, net                                      | (1,023)                                            | (1,100)                                            |
| <b>Profit before Taxation</b>                                                | <b>1,837</b>                                       | <b>1,568</b>                                       |
| Provision for taxation                                                       | (272)                                              | (235)                                              |
| <b>Net Profit</b>                                                            | <b>1,565</b>                                       | <b>1,333</b>                                       |

### UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT

|                                                  | Amt in RO '000<br>30 June 2023 | Amt in RO '000<br>30 June 2022 |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Assets</b>                                    |                                |                                |
| Gross Instalment Finance Receivables             | 140,087                        | 108,774                        |
| Less: ECL on instalment finance receivables      | 14,552                         | 12,724                         |
| Net Instalment Finance Receivables               | 125,535                        | 96,050                         |
| Deposit with CBO                                 | 250                            | 250                            |
| Deposits with Commercial Banks                   | 84,627                         | 84,627                         |
| Cash & Bank balances                             | 360                            | 366                            |
| Land and Buildings                               | 694                            | 768                            |
| Other assets                                     | 1,498                          | 1,247                          |
| <b>Total Assets</b>                              | <b>212,964</b>                 | <b>183,308</b>                 |
| <b>Liabilities</b>                               |                                |                                |
| Deposit                                          | 4,500                          | 4,000                          |
| Bank borrowings                                  | 123,600                        | 98,373                         |
| Trade Creditors & Other liabilities              | 14,132                         | 10,988                         |
| Unsecured Compulsorily Convertible Bonus Bonds   | 4,112                          | 3,426                          |
| Unsecured Non Convertible Redeemable Bonus Bonds | 1,460                          | 1,460                          |
| <b>Total Liabilities</b>                         | <b>147,804</b>                 | <b>118,247</b>                 |
| <b>Equity</b>                                    |                                |                                |
| Share Capital                                    | 30,767                         | 30,321                         |
| Legal Reserve                                    | 10,256                         | 10,107                         |
| Share Premium                                    | 986                            | 751                            |
| Exchange Reserve                                 | 636                            | 3,617                          |
| Special Reserve for Non Performing Assets        | 4,998                          | 4,998                          |
| Retained Earnings                                | 17,517                         | 15,267                         |
| <b>Total Equity</b>                              | <b>65,160</b>                  | <b>65,061</b>                  |
| <b>Total Liabilities &amp; Equity</b>            | <b>212,964</b>                 | <b>183,308</b>                 |

Contingent Liability of RO NIL (2022 - RO Nil) is outstanding as of 30th June 2023 towards bank guarantees issued on behalf of the customers As approved by the regulatory authorities the unsecured compulsorily convertible bonus bonds are treated as part of the networth, accordingly the networth of the company for computing all regulatory limits is RO 69,272 K ( 2022: RO.68,487 K)

# Oman launches major tourism campaign in India

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is taking significant strides to deepen engagement with India, the second largest source of tourists for the country.

The ministry launched a road show in New Delhi on Monday, kicking off a campaign to enhance visibility of Oman's tourism potential.

The road show, a multi-city event, will visit Jaipur and Kolkata before concluding in Mumbai on July 31. The initiative seeks to introduce and promote the numer-



(Supplied photo)

ous attractions that make Oman a fascinating destination for Indian tourists.

Addressing Indian and Omani tourism delegates, Asmaa bint

Salim al Hajri, Assistant Director General of Tourism Promotion in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, shared insights on Indian travellers. In 2022, Oman

welcomed 355,459 visitors from India, a significant leap from 106,042 in 2021. This growth positioned India as the second most vital source market for Oman's

*The road show reflects the ministry's endeavours to highlight Oman as a top travel destination*

ASMAA BINT SALIM AL HAJRI

tourism industry, contributing 12.2% of all tourists to the sultanate, following the GCC countries.

Highlighting the road show's importance, Asmaa stated, "This initiative reflects the ministry's

ongoing endeavours to highlight Oman as a top travel destination, aiming to boost tourism inflow from our key markets."

Addressing the event in New Delhi, H E Issa bin Saleh al Shaibani, Oman's Ambassador to India, touched upon the deep historical ties between the two nations. He emphasised the fruitful cooperation in multiple areas, including tourism, and underscored the importance of such events in showcasing the evolution of Oman's tourism sector. He also stressed the significance of promoting travel packages offered by Omani tourism companies to

attract the Indian market.

Additionally, Asmaa announced that Oman's overall visitor numbers have seen remarkable growth. From January to May 2023, Oman reported 1,548,630 visitors, a surge of 95.1% compared to the same period last year.

Benefiting from this tourism boom, revenues of 3- to 5-star hotels increased to RO98.431mn, up 34.7% from the corresponding period in 2022. These hotels recorded a guest count of 801,014, marking a 27.3% increase compared to the same period last year.

## Red tide severely impacts Barka desalination plant



Muscat - An alarming red tide outbreak in South Batinah has compromised water production capacity of Barka desalination plant.

Responding to this urgent situation, Nama Water Services (NWS) has called on its subscribers 'to rationalise water consumption until seawater quality improves'.

In a statement on Monday, NWS said the red tide phenomenon has significantly disrupted Barka's main desalination plant. Consequently, there's been a reduction and even cessation in desalinated water production.

Addressing the impact of the red tide, NWS confirmed that the operating companies are implementing several precautionary

measures. These are aimed at ensuring both safety of the plant and quality of water produced.

To mitigate the effect on subscribers, NWS has activated emergency plans. These include operation of alternative sources and reserve wells, and interconnection activation between desalination plants in Sohar, Barka and Ghubra.

NWS can be contacted for any inquiries via its call centre at 1442.

Red tides are harmful algal blooms, which occur when colonies of algae - plant-like organisms that live in the sea and freshwater - grow out of control, producing toxic or harmful effects on people, fish, shellfish, marine mammals and birds.

## Batinah Expressway-Khazaen city linking roadworks begin

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has initiated a road project for Khazaen Economic City to connect it to Batinah Expressway.

This undertaking involves the design and construction of road links that provide entrances and exits between Khazaen Economic City and Batinah Expressway, spanning a distance of roughly 7km.

Once completed, the project will ensure efficient traffic

flow to and from Khazaen Economic City. Moreover, it is set to invigorate the logistics sector by integrating it with the main road network across the sultanate.

The project represents a key initiative of MTCIT aimed at strengthening the logistics sector. It is part of a suite of logistics projects currently being implemented according to the ministry's annual plan. The commencement of the Khazaen Economic City road links project is a significant step towards realising these objectives, the ministry stated.

جهاز الاستثمار العماني  
Oman Investment Authority

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**MSX drops 1 point, closes at 4,799**

Muscat - Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) (general index 30) lost 1.4 point on Monday, scripting a 0.03% drop to close at 4,799.07 points, compared to the last session, which stood at 4,800.52 points.

The trading value on Monday stood at RO2,347,934, comprising a rise by 6.5%, compared to the last session, which stood at RO2,204,224.

The report released by MSX pointed out that the market value went up by 0.031% to reach about RO23.91bn.

The report added that the value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached RO502,000, comprising 21.36%.

The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached RO279,000, comprising 11.90%.

The net non-Omani investment increased by 9.46% to reach RO222,000.

## SOHAR Freezone, Green Ferro Alloy to set up Oman's first silicon metal plant

Sohar - SOHAR Port and Freezone signed a land lease agreement with Green Ferro Alloy (FZC) LLC to establish Oman's first silicon metal plant in SOHAR Freezone.

With a total investment of US\$68mn, this project reinforces SOHAR's position as a global trade hub and represents a significant milestone in the economic growth and diversification of the region, meeting the growing demand for silicon metal in Asia, Europe, and North America.

The silicon metal plant, which will occupy a land area of 160,000sqm, will be designed and built to produce high-quality silicon metal, initially at a capacity of 25,000TPA in the first phase and expanding to 50,000TPA in the second phase.

The molten silicon metal is poured from the furnace to ladles and moulds, expertly cooled through moulds or continuous casting. After cooling, the silicon metal is crushed and packaged in large bags, ready for global export. This innovative process ensures premium quality silicon



*This agreement marks a pivotal moment for us as it strengthens our position in global trade and reinforces our commitment to economic resilience*

OMAR AL MAHRIZI

metal for our valued customers worldwide.

"We are excited about this

partnership with SOHAR Freezone and the promising opportunities it offers to investors," said

the Director of Green Ferro Alloy.

"By leveraging the strategic advantages provided by SOHAR Freezone and its proximity to key markets, the establishment of the first silicon metal factory in the sultanate will strengthen the mining sector in the area."

Commenting on this achievement, Omar al Mahrizi, CEO of

SOHAR Freezone, DCEO SOHAR Port said, "This agreement marks a pivotal moment for us as it strengthens our position in global trade and reinforces our commitment to economic resilience.

The SOHAR Freezone CEO pointed out that the establishment of the first silicon metal

plant in Oman showcases dedication to diversifying industries.

"Moreover, it demonstrates our ability to attract significant foreign direct investment, fostering business growth by increasing throughput and creating new opportunities, shaping a brighter and more sustainable future for SOHAR and beyond," he added.



## Chinese delegation discusses investment opportunities in OPAZ

Muscat - A delegation of 15 Chinese businessmen, accompanied by the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman accredited to the People's Republic of China, recently visited the Public Authority for Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) to strengthen the investment partnership between Oman and China.

The visit was made to get introduced to investment projects and commercial opportunities available in OPAZ's economic

*The delegation learnt about the facilities and incentives offered to foreign investors, as well as the services and modern technologies*

and free zones, and help identify the most promising economic sectors in Oman.

During the visit, the delegation learned about the facilities and incentives offered to foreign investors by OPAZ, as well as the services and modern technologies that support the business environment.

A detailed presentation was given on the economic, industrial, and free zones supervised by OPAZ, including their nature of economic activities, volume of investments, and contribution to the GDP.

The delegation emphasised

the importance of focusing on several sectors that achieve mutual benefit for both countries, including building and construction, renewable energy, fisheries, as well as oil and gas industry sectors.

This week, the delegation continues to visit economic and investment projects in Oman to explore opportunities for enhancing economic sectors and contributing to doubling the volume of trade exchange between the two countries.

## NCSI data indicate rise in electricity, water production

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman's total production of electricity increased by 0.6% till the end of May 2023 to reach 15,537.5GW per hour compared to 15,440.1GW per hour during the corresponding period in 2022, latest data show.

According to the preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the governorates of Dhahirah, North and South Batinah, produced 9,838GW per hour of electricity recording 1% rise in total production till the end of May this year.

Meanwhile, electricity production in the governorate of Dakhiliyah surged by 327.3% to reach 35.4GW per hour.

A rise was also recorded in the following governorates: North and South Sharqiyah by 6.6% to reach 3,494.8GW per hour and Dhofar by 13.4% to reach 1,836.1GW per hour.

Further, the governorate of Muscat recorded a decline in total electricity production by 82.6% to stand at 89GW per



hour. Musandam governorate registered a drop by 1.7% to reach 150.7GW per hour and Al Wusta governorate also went down by 27.8% to reach 93.5GW per hour.

Oman's net production of electricity till the end of May reached 15,045.8GW per hour. The net figures are inclusive of purchases by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) and the Rural Areas Electricity Company (RAEC).

The highest volume of net electricity production was registered in the Governorates of Al

Dhahirah, South and North Batinah, which stood at 9,516.9GW per hour.

On the other hand, total water production in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a rise of 1.6% to reach 210,931,200mn cubic metres by the end of May 2023 compared to 207,673,700mn cubic metres during the corresponding period in 2022.

Dhofar governorate's water production recorded a rise during the same period by 4.2%, followed by Muscat governorate, which recorded an increase by 2.1%.

## Top Chinese leaders at Politburo say economy 'facing new difficulties'

Beijing, China - China's top leaders said the economy was facing "new difficulties and challenges" in a meeting of the 24-person Politburo on Monday.

The country's highest-ranking officials gather annually at the end of July to review the economic situation before their traditional summer break in August.

This year, they met as the post-COVID recovery in the world's second-largest economy was running out of steam, due in large part to sluggish consumer spending.

"The meeting pointed out that the current economic operation is facing new difficulties and challenges, mainly due to insufficient domestic demand, operational difficulties for some enterprises, high risks and hidden dangers in key areas, and a complex and severe external environment," a readout of the meeting on state broadcaster CCTV said.

The Politburo agreed on Monday that China must 'implement precise and effective macroeconomic regulation, strengthen countercyclical regulation and policy reserves', according to CCTV.

The meeting, headed by President Xi Jinping, also called for efforts to expand domestic consumption and 'adjust and optimise real estate policies in a timely manner', CCTV said.

A run of dismal economic data over recent months has ramped up calls for officials to unveil support measures.

China this month said its economy grew 6.3% in the second quarter, much weaker than the 7.1% predicted in an AFP survey of analysts.



The disappointing result came in spite of the very low base of comparison with last year, when the country was hit by a series of COVID lockdowns in major cities.

In quarter-on-quarter terms -- considered a more realistic basis for comparison - growth came in at 0.8%, well down from the 2.2% seen in January-March, the first full period after the removal

of zero-COVID restrictions.

Youth unemployment jumped to a record 21.3% in June, up from 20.8% in May.

And the property sector remains in turmoil, with major de-

velopers failing to complete housing projects, triggering protests and mortgage boycotts from homebuyers.

While the People's Bank of China last month cut interest rates and authorities pledged to help the troubled property sector, there has been very little concrete action out of Beijing.

"The key to watch from the meeting is not specific policy measures, but the policy tone set by top leaders," Macquarie economist Larry Hu wrote in a note.

"The government mentioned 'strengthening countercyclical policies' but the tone related to fiscal and monetary policies seems not significantly different from before," said Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management.

Zhang said the call to support the property sector appeared to

show that the government has "recognised the importance of policy change in this sector to stabilise the economy".

"We don't expect policymakers to unleash a bazooka-like stimulus package," Hu of Macquarie said.

"More likely, they would continue to roll out stimulus measures in a piecemeal way."

China on Friday unveiled a number of measures to encourage the purchase of automobiles, while other measures have also been announced to promote artificial intelligence and electronics consumption.

Beijing is aiming for about 5% growth this year, one of the lowest targets set by the Asian giant in decades, and one that Premier Li Qiang has warned will not be easy to achieve.

AFP



# MoCIIP sees RO122mn investment opportunities

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) pointed out that there are a number of investment opportunities available in the manufacturing sector, with an investment volume exceeding RO122mn.

The ministry elaborated that these opportunities are represented by the establishment of a ‘factory of barriers and copper bars’ in Sumail Industrial Zone and Ibri Industrial Zone, an opportunity to establish ‘steel casting and steel ingots manufacturing plant’ in the governorate of North Batinah, an op-

*These opportunities will contribute to attracting quality investments in the sectors of economic diversification across various governorates*

portunity to set up the ‘Semi-rigid aluminium foil containers manufacturing’, a new facility at Sohar Industrial Estate that produces pre-formed aluminium, such as food containers, plates and trays for the retail and

restaurant sectors and an investment opportunity to set up a ‘steel factory’, which aims to establish a new plant for the manufacturing of light-gauge steel framing for construction in the governorate of Dhofar.

These opportunities will contribute to attracting quality investments in the sectors of economic diversification and the development of the governorates. These opportunities are distributed in a number of governorates of Oman.

Such opportunities will also contribute to creating the appropriate environment for the success and development of all investments, empowering and stimulating the private sector to

invest, in addition to contributing to augmenting the proportion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the gross domestic product (GDP) and promoting Oman as an investment hub in various converting industries sector.

These investment opportunities in the converting industries also come within the framework of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion’s action plan for the major projects, programmes, initiatives and targeted investment sectors that contribute to the development of the national economy in order to create an enhanced and enabling business milieu for investment in diverse sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040.

# Treasury bills worth more than RO27mn cleared

Muscat - Oman has this week cleared government Treasury Bills amounting to RO27.050mn.

The value of the allotted Treasury Bills amounted to RO3mn, for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached RO99.670 for every RO100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.670 per RO100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.30179% and 4.31603%, respectively.

In another, the value of the allotted Treasury Bills amounted to RO20.550mn, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO98.766 for every RO100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.765 per RO100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.94869% and 5.01051%, respectively.



Additionally, the value of the allotted Treasury Bills amounted to RO3.5mn, for a maturity period of 182 days. The average accepted price reached RO97.500 for every RO100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO97.500 per RO100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.01374% and 5.14229%, respectively.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

# Stock markets mixed before rate calls

London, UK - Stock markets diverged on Monday as traders reacted to weak global data and political uncertainty in Spain, while awaiting key interest-rate decisions due this week.

Europe’s main indices steadied but Madrid was down 0.7% in early afternoon deals, as Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and his rightwing rival try to head off a fresh vote after an inconclusive snap election resulted in a hung parliament.

Asia’s top stock markets were a mixed bag amid concern over weakness in the Chinese economy. China’s top leaders said the world’s second-biggest economy was facing “new difficulties and challenges” in a meeting of the 24-person Politburo on Monday.

In a bleak update for the eurozone, a key survey showed economic activity shrank at its fastest rate for eight months in July, as a contraction gathered pace on the back of cuts in manufacturing.

The painful PMI data comes as the European Central Bank is eyeing a further rate hike on Thursday in its quest to tame inflation.

The ECB “will raise rates this week as planned, but with economic weakness spreading, the outcome of the September meeting is becoming an increasingly close call”, noted UniCredit economist Tullia Bucco.

AFP

| Gulf Mushroom Products Co. (S.A.O.G.)                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| REPORT ON MATERIAL EVENTS & SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FOR THE PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS ENDED ON 30 JUNE 2023                                                                                                                                 |  |  |
| <b>MATERIAL EVENTS</b><br>In the annual general meeting of the company held on 15 March 2023 the shareholders declared bonus shares at 10% (one share for every ten shares) and cash dividend at 10% (Ten Omani Baiza per share).  |  |  |
| <b>MATERIAL CHANGES IN FIGURES</b><br><b>Sales</b> – During the period the company achieved a sales turnover of RO 5.197 million compared to RO 4.901 million for the same period last year, an increase of about 6%.              |  |  |
| <b>Gross Profit</b> – During the period the company made a Gross Profit of RO 2.442 million compared to a Gross Profit of RO 2.492 million for the same period last year, a decrease of about 2%.                                  |  |  |
| <b>Selling &amp; Distribution Expenses</b> – During the period the company incurred RO 379,000 as Selling & distribution expenses compared to RO 340,000 for the same period last year, an increase of about 11%.                  |  |  |
| <b>General &amp; Administration Expenses</b> – During the period the company incurred RO 636,000 as General & administration expenses compared to RO 497,000 for the same period last year, an increase of about 28%.              |  |  |
| <b>Profit before tax</b> – During the period the company earned Profit before tax of RO 1.015 Million compared to Profit before tax of RO 1.224 Million for the same period last year, a decrease of about 17%.                    |  |  |
| <b>Income tax</b> – During the period Company provided Income tax of RO 154,000 compared to RO 186,000 provided for the same period last year, a decrease of about 17%.                                                            |  |  |
| <b>Profit after tax</b> – During the period company earned a profit after tax of RO 0.861 Million compared to profit after tax of RO 1.039 Million for the same period last year, a decrease of about 17% for above reasons.       |  |  |
| <b>Chief Executive Officer</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |  |
| The complete accounts of Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG will be delivered to any shareholder or other interested party who requests them, in either Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of written request. |  |  |
| M/s Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG<br>P.O. Box: 383, Postal Code: 320, Barka, Sultanate of Oman, Fax: 00968 26883955,<br>Email: info@gulfmushroom.com                                                                             |  |  |

| المها للسيراميك ش م ع ع<br>Al Maha Ceramics SAOG                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                      |                                      |                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| PO Box 482, Postal Code 322, Falaj Al Qabail, Sohar, Oman. Tel: 26752322/23<br>Fax: 26752177. Email: info@almahaceramics.com, web: www.almahaceramics.com                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                      |                                      |                           |
| DIRECTOR'S REPORT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                      |                                      |                           |
| <b>Dear Shareholders,</b><br>On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the results of Al Maha Ceramics SAOG for the first half of 2023, ending June 30th.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                      |                                      |                           |
| <b>Company's Performance:</b><br>During this first half of 2023, Al Maha Ceramics SAOG faced various challenges in the form of intense competition from low-cost tiles imported from India and China. However, we are proud to report that our company has demonstrated resilience and ingenuity in navigating these challenges. Unlike some of our competitors, we have resisted the temptation of heavy discounting and have focused on maintaining the value and quality of our products. We continue to face challenges attributed to the antidumping duty and price war in KSA, which has restrained us from exploiting the opportunities there. and as a result, the company experienced a temporary de-growth in revenue, but we are confident that our corrective measures and well-thought-out strategy will lead to a sustained recovery in the second half.<br>Revenue for this first half of the year amounted to RO 3,537,431, representing a decrease of 29.59% compared to the same period of the previous year when the revenue was RO 5,024,354.<br>The company had an operational profit before tax in the first half of the year for RO 750,718, which reflects a decrease of 52.35% compared to the previous year's RO 1,575,557.<br>The net profit/(loss) after tax for period is RO (148,611), which is a decrease of 111.23% compared to the previous year's profit of RO 1,323,468. The decrease in profits is primarily attributed to the decline in revenue due to increased competition and the continuation of anti-dumping duties in KSA. Additionally, the company recorded a share of loss from its newly acquired associate, Al Hael Ceramics LLC, amounting to RO 786,721.<br>The losses incurred by Al Hael Ceramics LLC during the first half can be attributed to the delay in the commencement of production of porcelain tiles.<br>Your Company continues to comply with the Omanisation requirements and invests in continuous training and improvement programs to enhance the skills of our human resources. |                                      |                                      |                           |
| <b>Outlook for the Future:</b><br>We anticipate an improvement in economic activity with the holiday and festive season ending, but we expect the continued anti-dumping duty policy of KSA to impact our business across all markets, coupled with price pressure caused by the influx of cheaper tiles from India and China. Furthermore, we anticipate continuance of disruptions due to discounting by high-capacity manufacturers which have been restrained from selling in KSA.<br>However, Al Maha Ceramics has initiated concerted efforts in expanding its distribution network in new territories, product portfolio and marketing communication to navigate through these challenges. We also expect to expand our market presence with the introduction of new segments and applications, establishing our leadership and brand equity with a sustained progressive return of the investment. It is important to note that the industry faces additional risks and challenges such as rising utility costs and constant pressure on raw material costs.<br>We remain cautiously optimistic about the business trends in 2023 and are committed to capitalizing on growth opportunities within the tile industry.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                      |                                      |                           |
| <b>Corporate Social Responsibility:</b><br>At Al Maha Ceramics, we continue believing in supporting the community and contributing to the upliftment of marginalized and deprived sectors of society. Our CSR policy aligned to focus on healthcare, education, and social welfare initiatives.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                      |                                      |                           |
| <b>Thanks, and Appreciation:</b><br>On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to our honorable shareholders, customers, banks, and suppliers for their continued support. I would also like to express gratitude to the executive management and all employees of the company for their sincere efforts. We look forward to achieving better results in the ensuing quarters.<br>On behalf of the Board of Directors and employees, we offer our prayers to Almighty Allah, wishing His Majesty long life, health, and success in pursuing the march of goodness and development for the prosperity of Oman and its people.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                      |                                      |                           |
| For Al Maha Ceramics SAOG,<br>Masoud Humaid Malik Al Harthy<br>Chairman                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                      |                                      |                           |
| UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION<br>As at 30th June                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                      |                                      |                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 2023<br>RO                           | 2022<br>RO                           | Audited<br>Dec 2022<br>RO |
| <b>ASSETS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                      |                                      |                           |
| <b>Non-current assets</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                      |                                      |                           |
| Property, plant and equipment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 5,383,222                            | 5,821,362                            | 5,699,606                 |
| Investment property                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 225,000                              | 225,000                              | 225,000                   |
| Investment in associate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 1,726,292                            | --                                   | 2,513,013                 |
| Right-of-use asset                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 651,148                              | 559,440                              | 518,084                   |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 7,985,662                            | 6,605,802                            | 8,955,703                 |
| <b>Current assets</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                      |                                      |                           |
| Inventories                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1,749,458                            | 1,594,662                            | 1,637,318                 |
| Trade and other receivables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 2,688,940                            | 2,712,021                            | 3,190,999                 |
| Cash and bank balances                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 467,745                              | 3,218,368                            | 2,841,251                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 4,906,143                            | 7,525,051                            | 7,669,568                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 12,891,805                           | 14,130,853                           | 16,625,271                |
| <b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                      |                                      |                           |
| <b>EQUITY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                      |                                      |                           |
| Share capital                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 5,500,000                            | 5,500,000                            | 5,500,000                 |
| Share premium                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 88,199                               | 88,199                               | 88,199                    |
| Statutory reserve                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1,833,333                            | 1,833,333                            | 1,833,333                 |
| Retained earnings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 3,191,452                            | 3,739,913                            | 4,440,063                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 10,612,984                           | 11,161,445                           | 11,861,595                |
| <b>LIABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                      |                                      |                           |
| <b>Non-current liabilities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                      |                                      |                           |
| End of service benefits                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 279,942                              | 254,661                              | 266,075                   |
| Deferred tax liability                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 225,498                              | 283,596                              | 225,498                   |
| Non-current portion of lease liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 620,471                              | 521,515                              | 483,374                   |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 1,125,911                            | 1,059,772                            | 974,947                   |
| <b>Current liabilities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                      |                                      |                           |
| Bank borrowings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | -                                    | -                                    | 600,000                   |
| Trade and other payables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 968,464                              | 1,582,903                            | 2,598,687                 |
| Current portion of lease liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 72,078                               | 72,072                               | 72,078                    |
| Income tax payable                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 112,368                              | 254,661                              | 517,964                   |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 1,152,910                            | 1,909,636                            | 3,788,729                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 2,278,821                            | 2,969,408                            | 4,763,676                 |
| <b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 12,891,805                           | 14,130,853                           | 16,625,271                |
| <b>TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 12,891,805                           | 14,130,853                           | 16,625,271                |
| <b>Net assets per share</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 0.193                                | 0.203                                | 0.216                     |
| UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                      |                                      |                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 6 months ended<br>30 June 2023<br>RO | 6 months ended<br>30 June 2022<br>RO |                           |
| Revenue                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 3,537,431                            | 5,024,354                            |                           |
| Cost of sales                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | (2,432,842)                          | (2,917,685)                          |                           |
| <b>Gross profit</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1,104,589                            | 2,106,669                            |                           |
| Administrative and general expenses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | (252,772)                            | (287,114)                            |                           |
| Selling and distribution expenses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | (188,473)                            | (294,102)                            |                           |
| Other Income / (expenses)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 114,414                              | 68,029                               |                           |
| <b>Profit from operations</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 777,758                              | 1,593,482                            |                           |
| Finance charges                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | (27,040)                             | (17,925)                             |                           |
| <b>Profit before tax</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 750,718                              | 1,575,557                            |                           |
| Income tax                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | (112,608)                            | (252,089)                            |                           |
| <b>Profit after tax</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 638,110                              | 1,323,468                            |                           |
| Share of profit/(Loss) of associate for the period                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | (786,721)                            | --                                   |                           |
| <b>Comprehensive income and net profit (Loss) for the period</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | (148,611)                            | 1,323,468                            |                           |
| <b>Basic earnings per share (Annualised)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | (0.005)                              | 0.048                                |                           |

Send your comments to [muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om](mailto:muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om)

# Audi participates in Green Mobility Forum

In its unwavering pursuit of fostering a more sustainable future, Audi Oman recently demonstrated its dedication to conservation-oriented transportation at the significant Green Mobility Forum.

The forum, organised by Oman's Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, served as a platform for industry leaders to engage in insightful discussions and present innovative solutions.

As a representative of Audi Oman, Premium Motors actively participated in this influential event, highlighting the brand's sustainable mobility initiatives and reaffirming its commitment to shaping a greener automotive landscape.

At the Green Mobility event, Oman unveiled plans to decarbonise the transport sector, focusing on green mobility. The government has developed a comprehensive green mobility plan divided into short, medium, and long-term phases. The initial phase involves promoting the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) throughout the country.



To facilitate the transition to EVs, the ministry has implemented various initiatives. One key initiative aims to support the installation of electric charging stations across Oman. By the end of this year, charging stations will be available, and the number is projected to increase to 250 by 2040.

Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, stated that there are now sufficient charging stations throughout the country to accommodate all EV users.

Furthermore, the Omani government has introduced multiple tax incentives to incentivise the use of EVs. These incentives include the highly acclaimed Audi e-tron GT and Audi e-tron Sportback models.

These vehicles embody Audi's unwavering commitment to reducing carbon emissions while delivering exceptional performance, representing a paradigm shift towards sustainable mobility.

*The participation of Audi in the forum highlights its sustainable mobility initiatives and reaffirms its commitment to shaping a greener automotive landscape*

The prominent display of these state-of-the-art electric vehicles further underscored Audi's dedication to driving the transition toward a cleaner and more environmentally responsible transportation ecosystem.

Christian Nehme, General Manager of Premium Motors, made an insightful presentation on 'Shaping the Future of Premium Mobility: Audi's Electrification Strategy'.

Nehme showcased Audi's

comprehensive approach towards electrification, focused on the global electric car sales, highlighted the electric market in the Middle East, and spoke about home charging solutions and EV charger network in Oman and advancements in sustainable mobility.

Through an engaging and informative discourse, Nehme elucidated Audi's vision for a future where premium mobility seamlessly integrates with environmental consciousness, contributing to the broader dialogue on sustainable transportation.

Audi's electric vehicles offer a comprehensive ownership package with customer satisfaction and long-term value in mind. With a generous 5-year service inclusion, owners can enjoy peace of mind and top-notch maintenance.

Audi EVs are built to last, with reduced wear and tear characteristics for exceptional durability. The battery, a crucial component, is backed by an impressive 8-year warranty, ensuring optimal performance and reliability over an extended period.



## New Indian Assurance celebrates 105th foundation day in Muscat

New Indian Assurance celebrated its 105th foundation day at a gathering in Muscat on Sunday.

From a very humble beginning on July 23, 1919, to becoming one of the premier insurance provider across 28 countries, this momentous occasion symbolises the dedication and perseverance of each member of the New India family, the company stated.

Celebrating the occasion, COO V V Raghavan expressed deep gratitude to all loyal customers, employees and supporting stakeholders in building a legacy of trust and reliability.

Looking ahead, he said, the company will embrace innovation and continue to serve all the stakeholders in a better way. He further adds New India Oman has its presence in Oman from 1975 and will shortly begin its 50th year celebrations.

He further thanked the regulator, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) for their support and guidance and also expressed gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and people of Oman for accepting New India as the preferred insurer of Oman.

## Shifa Hospital adds high-tech cath lab for better heart care

Shifa Hospital Oman is pleased to announce the expansion of its heart and vascular care with the introduction of the new high-tech hybrid cath lab facility, the first of its kind in the region in the private healthcare sector.

The centerpiece of the new facility is the Allia IGS 7 image guided therapy system developed by GE Healthcare, which combines advanced imaging technology with interventional device for minimally invasive procedures.

The most advanced cath lab is designed to provide a comprehensive range of services for patients with heart and vascular conditions, offering state-of-the-art technology and world-class medical expertise.

With the addition of the Allia IGS 7 system, doctors at Shifa Hospital Oman will be able to perform complex procedures with greater precision and efficiency, reducing risk and improving outcomes for patients.



"As part of our unwavering commitment to supporting Oman Vision 2040, Shifa Hospital is dedicated to expanding our surgical specialties. Our primary goal is to provide state-of-the-art treatment facilities and ensure access to highly skilled medical professionals," stated Dr Salim al Ghanami, Chief Executive Officer of Shifa Hospital.

"The introduction of the remarkable Allia IGS 7 system signifies a major breakthrough in medical technology. Its implementation will enable us to perform more intricate procedures with heightened precision and safety."

Powered by GE Healthcare's Edison intelligence platform, the Allia imaging system offers the first Artificial Intelligence driven imaging chain that may reduce radiation dose and contrast for interventional procedures.

A digital hub of software packages gives physicians the clinical information they need to plan, guide, and assess procedures to increase diagnostic accuracy and make more informed decisions designed to improve

the effectiveness of the treatments they deliver to patients.

"At Shifa Hospital Oman's Cardiac Centre of Excellence, we offer an extensive range of cardiac care services, encompassing everything from basic screening tests to advanced diagnostic and therapeutic procedures," said Dr Fahad al Kindi, Interventional Cardiologist and Head of the Cardiology unit at Shifa Hospital.

This new cath lab features a non-invasive lab that conducts a variety of diagnostic tests, including trans-thoracic and trans-esophageal echocardiograms, Holter monitoring, including Cardiac MRI and stress tests.

Dr Adil Barakat al Riyami, Senior Consultant - Interventional Cardiology at Shifa Hospital Oman said, "This High-Tech Hybrid Cath Lab, will enable us to provide a comprehensive range of services for patients with heart and vascular conditions using cutting-edge technology and world-class expertise."

## Omantel announces launch of 'To Dhofar' campaign as part of Khareef sponsorship

Omantel, the first and leading telecommunication company in Oman, has announced the launch of its marketing campaign named 'To Dhofar', joining forces with Dhofar Municipality to enhance visitors' experience during the Khareef season by offering a plethora of services and activities to keep them connected and entertained.

"We have launched the To Dhofar campaign as part of our marketing initiatives and it is strongly linked to our corporate strategy that puts the society at the centre of our operations," said Saba Albusaidi, Senior Manager of Corporate Affairs at Omantel.

"The campaign covers our CSR initiatives and SME support in Khareef, and it is an addition to the activities and initiatives that are planned for Khareef to help offer visitors a unique experience," she pointed out. "Moreover, our collaboration with Dhofar Municipality comes from being the technology partner, and we are keen on increasing our brand presence in Khareef Dhofar as it is the most promi-



nent tourism event in the region and attracts millions of people from Oman and abroad."

In line with the CSR strategy, the company would engage with the local communities in Dhofar and carry out initiatives that support the society, among these initiatives are the clean-up in Ain Jarziz in Sahel Ittin for the children with Down Syndrome, and a one-week training programme to enhance the technological skills of the visually impaired adults in collaboration with Al Noor Association for the Blind in Dhofar, in addition to other initiatives with the Omani Bahjah Orphans Society including training programme on technology and robots, and tree-planting in cooperation with Luban Land Volunteering Team.

"We seek to enhance our brand identity as the leading telecom company in Oman that offers integrated solutions, and we have partnered with a number of local SMEs to organize events and activities, primarily Salah Eat, which will take place in

As Saadah Park, in addition to activities for kids and others for adults to try and experience 5G-based technologies through live experiments and video games at Omantel 5G Bus."

Besides, Omantel offers foreign visitors 'Tourist Pack' an easy-to-activate prepaid SIM card with essential voice minutes and internet data to make calls, navigate way through online maps and stay connected with family and friends while on holiday.

## All-new Geely Emgrand sets trend in convenience features: Towell Auto

The fastest growing automotive brand in the world, Geely's lineup of exceptional vehicles is designed to offer the ultimate driving experience, combining cutting-edge technology, advanced safety features, unparalleled comfort, bold styling, high quality, superior performance and smart interiors.

The latest addition to the Geely range is the visually attractive, 4th generation all-new Emgrand, a stylish sedan designed to impress. Made in Geely's advanced Changxing (an advanced 5G smart) factory using the B-segment Modular Architecture (BMA), it has been designed to exceed the criteria for 5-star NCAP safety ratings.

The sedan is equipped with a lightweight 1.5-litre engine and 8CVT transmission that delivers excellent performance, fuel efficiency and features a sleek and aerodynamic design.

It offers the maximum power of 101 HP and high rotational torque of 142Nm, for smooth and responsive acceleration.

The elegant exterior design comes with Geely's latest 'En-



ergy Pulse' radiator grille flanked by projector LED headlamps, and LED daytime running lights. The skyline rhythmic tail lights comprise 190 LEDs. The 17-inch alloy wheels ensure a comfortable ride while the sunroof adds style to make that strong impression.

The plush interiors of the all-new Geely Emgrand are second to none with nearly 1.5m transverse space. The 6-way electric adjustment ensures the driver feels comfortable in his seat. Another value addition is the Remote Key Start/Stop Engine. Added to this is the 8" central media screen and 12.3" HD Digi-

tal Instrument, the auto folding rear view mirror and the Cruise Control system.

The all-new Emgrand has advanced safety and technical features such as ABS with EBD, electronic stability program, traction control, hill hold control, electric parking brake with auto hold, six SRS airbags, intelligent seating monitoring system and the BOSCH 9.3 ESP system that enable a safe ride. It comes with normal/sport/ECO driving modes.

In Oman, Geely vehicles are brought to you by Towell Auto Centre LLC.

# Thousands more evacuated as Greece 'at war' with fires

Rhodes, Greece - Authorities evacuated nearly 2,500 people from the Greek island of Corfu on Monday as the heat-battered nation was 'at war' with several wildfires.

Tens of thousands of people have already fled blazes on the island of Rhodes, with many frightened tourists scrambling to get home on evacuation flights.

About 2,400 visitors and locals were evacuated from the Ionian tourist island of Corfu from Sunday into Monday, a fire service spokesman said, adding that the departures were a precaution. "We are at war and are exclusively geared towards the fire front," Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told parliament, warning that the nation faced 'another three difficult days ahead' before high temperatures are forecast to ease.

Greece has been sweltering under a lengthy spell of extreme heat that has exacerbated wildfire risk and left visitors stranded in peak tourist season.

Kelly Squirrel, a transport administrator from the United Kingdom, said police had ordered people from her hotel on Rhodes to evacuate.

"We had to keep walking," she told AFP at the international airport. "So we walked for about six hours in the heat."

Rhodes, which counted 2.5mn visitor arrivals in 2022, is one of Greece's leading holiday destinations. Greek television broadcast images of long lines of people, some in beachwear, lugging suitcases along the island's roads on Saturday, when the evacuations were ordered.

## More extreme heat expected

Some 30,000 people fled the flames on Rhodes at the weekend, the country's largest-ever wildfire evacuation.



Firefighters and civilians confront a wall of smoke as wildfires burn, in the northern part of the Greek island of Corfu on Monday (AFP)

*There were thousands of people, the buses couldn't pass, we had to walk for more than two hours. We couldn't breathe, we just covered our faces and moved forward*

DANIEL-CLADIN SCHMIDT

Police said 16,000 people had been transported on land and evacuated 3,000 by sea. Others had to flee by road or used their own transport after being told to leave the area.

"We are exhausted and traumatised," said Daniel-Cladin Schmidt, a 42-year-old German tourist waiting to be evacuated with his wife and nine-year-old son. "There were thousands of people, the buses couldn't pass, we had to walk for more than two hours," he told AFP at Rhodes airport.

"We couldn't breathe, we just covered our faces and moved

forward."

Holiday-makers and some locals spent the night in gyms, schools and hotel conference centres on the island.

In the departures hall of the international airport, AFP saw groups of tourists sleeping on the floor, surrounded by luggage.

"We had to lend a woman some of my wife's clothes because she had nothing to wear," Kevin Sales, an engineer from England, told AFP. "It was terrible."

## 'Hell'

Several travel companies have

halted their inbound tourist flights to Rhodes, and have been helping to ferry foreigners home.

"We ran 10km (six miles) with all our luggage to escape the flames", while the temperature was 42 degrees Celsius (108 degrees Fahrenheit), said German tourist Lena Schwarz, after arriving at Hanover airport overnight Sunday into Monday.

The 38-year-old told AFP their journey leaving Rhodes was 'hell on Earth'.

Oxana Neb, 50, also arriving at Hanover, said the evacuation had been 'very bad'.

"We stayed in the hotel until the end and fire came from all sides," she said.

She joined other guests running to the beach, eventually abandoning her suitcases on the way, she said.

Crews have been battling the flames in parts of Greece for

about a week, and firefighters were from dawn on Monday using aircraft to try to douse the flames on Rhodes.

According to the authorities, many regions were under extreme risk of forest fires on Monday, but no towns were directly threatened by flames, the fire service told AFP.

Like every summer, Greece is plagued by forest fires, often deadly, ravaging tens of thousands of hectares of forest and vegetation.

This summer, the country experienced one of the longest heatwaves in recent years, according to experts, with the thermometer hitting 45 degrees Celsius at the weekend.

On Monday, the heat was expected to ease slightly with temperatures expected to reach 37C in Athens, but on Tuesday, it was forecast to pick up again.

AFP



Rescuers work at a school gym after the roof of the building collapsed in Qiqihar, in China's northeastern Heilongjiang province early on Monday (AFP)

# 11 people dead after roof of school gym collapses in China

Beijing, China - Eleven people died after the roof of a school gym collapsed in northeastern China, state media reported on Monday.

The collapse in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province was caused by construction workers illegally placing perlite - a form of volcanic glass - on the building's roof, state news agency Xinhua said. Heavy rain then led the perlite to expand and increase in weight, causing the roof to collapse, it added.

Footage aired by state broadcaster CCTV showed the roof - made of concrete slabs, according to state media - gave way in its entirety.

Rescue workers broke through large chunks of concrete and twisted metal in a bid to reach victims, the footage showed. One worker used a pneumatic jackhammer. "A total of 11 people died in the accident," state broadcaster CCTV said.

An in-depth investigation of the accident was in progress, state media has said, with those in charge of the construction company having been placed in police custody.

The gym at the No. 34 Middle School collapsed just before 3pm (0700 GMT) on Sunday, Xinhua said. Nineteen people were at the gym when the accident took place, local newspaper *Heilongjiang Daily* said. Four escaped and four others survived after being pulled from the rubble.

AFP



A woman cries outside the Guayas 1 prison after clashes between inmates in Guayaquil, Ecuador on Sunday (AFP)

# Latest prison riot in Ecuador kills at least six inmates

Guayaquil, Ecuador - Rival gangs fought in a prison in Ecuador, killing at least six inmates in the latest riot to hit the troubled penal system, the government said on Sunday.

Another 11 prisoners were injured in the new bout of violence in the Guayas 1 prison in the port city of Guayaquil overnight on Saturday into Sunday, the agency that runs the prison system said.

Mass killings featuring stunning levels of violence such as beheadings are common in the overcrowded Ecuadorian prison network.

The riots pit gangs with links

to drug traffickers against each other in this country that has emerged as a key player in the South American cocaine trade.

Authorities say a dozen drug-gang riots have claimed at least 420 lives in prisons since 2021. Some of the victims were burnt alive.

Anguished people waited outside the Guayas prison on Sunday hoping for news of loved ones held inside.

"I am desperate here, and I want information and I do not have any at all," said a woman whose son is a prisoner inside. She asked not to be identified.

AFP

## SURVIVING HEATWAVE



People spend the day at a beach off La Marsa suburb of Tunis, Tunisia on Monday, during a heatwave (AFP)

# Khalidi Library restores Palestinian history one manuscript at a time

Jerusalem - A library in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem offers a rare glimpse into Palestinian history with its treasure trove of manuscripts dating back hundreds of years before the creation of Israel.

At the Khalidi Library in the walled Old City, Rami Salameh expertly inspects a damaged manuscript as part of the effort to restore and digitise historical Palestinian documents.

"The manuscripts range from jurisprudence to astronomy, the Prophet's (Mohammed) biography and the *Quran*," says the Italian-trained restorer as he carefully manoeuvres a dry brush over a fragile text on Arabic grammar. From his small work-

shop, he lets out a sigh of relief, concluding that it won't be necessary to treat the 200-year-old document for discolouration as a result of oxidation.

Working alone, Salameh has already restored 1,200 pages from over a dozen manuscripts belonging to private Palestinian libraries over the past two and a half years. The items date back as far as 300 years, to the Ottoman period.

The majority of the manuscripts come from the Khalidi Library itself, the largest private collection of Arabic and Islamic manuscripts in the Palestinian territories. Also on its shelves are Persian, German and French books, including an impressive



Rami Salameh speaks during an interview at the Khalidi library premises in the old city of Jerusalem on June 17 (AFP)

collection of titles by French writer Victor Hugo.

Located in the Old City near one of the entrances to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, the li-

brary was founded by Palestinian judge Raghib Al-Khalidi in 1900.

From its main building, which overlooks the Western Wall - the holiest site where Jews can

pray - warring sultans reportedly played a role in liberating Jerusalem from the Crusaders in the 12th and 13th centuries.

## Glimpse into history

The collection contains books, correspondence, Ottoman decrees and newspapers, including documents from the influential Khalidi family. They offer a rich view of past life in the holy city, with the oldest book dating back to the 10th century.

"We have manuscripts that talk about the cultural and social status of the people of Jerusalem, and this is an indication of the presence of Palestinians here for centuries," says librarian Khader Salameh, the re-

storer's father who manages the collection. "The contents of the library negate the Zionist claim that this country was empty," he added, referring to the common refrain that the land was unpopulated prior to the creation of Israel in 1948 and the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians.

Palestinian families and institutions in east Jerusalem have frequently been evicted to make way for Israeli settlements since Israel captured and annexed the area, including the Old City, in the 1967 Six-Day War - moves regarded as illegal by the UN and the international community.

Part of the library was seized by Israeli settlers to build a Jewish religious school, the librarian

lamented. The library's administration waged a long legal battle to fight the settlement, but did not succeed in preventing the seizure of part of it.

Khader Salameh said the outcome could have been much worse, and the entire property taken by settlers, had it not been for the support they received.

"Israeli intellectuals supported the library administration and testified in court in our favour," he noted. Ever since, the library has continued to preserve cultural heritage in Jerusalem through their restoration and digitisation, with support from local and international organisations.

AFP

# Spain in political limbo after hung verdict

PP and Vox won a total 169 seats, a far cry from 176 needed for governing majority

Madrid, Spain - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and his right-wing rival will each begin negotiations on Monday to try to head off a fresh vote after an inconclusive snap election resulted in a hung parliament.

Defying polls that for months had written him off as defeated, the Socialist premier managed to curb the gains of the right-wing opposition.

With all the votes counted, Alberto Nunez Feijoo's Popular Party (PP) and far-right Vox - its potential ally - won a total 169 seats, a far cry from the 176 needed for a governing majority.

Sanchez's Socialists and radical left Sumar ally secured 153 seats for the left bloc.

Feijoo narrowly wins and Sanchez resists: the government is up in the air', top-selling daily



The leader and candidate of conservative Partido Popular (People's Party) Alberto Nunez Feijoo (centre) gestures as he addresses supporters from a balcony of the PP headquarters in Madrid after Spain's general election on Sunday (AFP)

newspaper *El Pais* headlines on its front page on Monday.

**"They shall not pass!"**

Addressing a crowd of euphoric activists shouting 'No pasaran!' - the famous anti-fascist slogan of Spain's 1936-1939 civil war meaning 'They shall not pass!' - Sanchez was jubilant.

"The backwards-looking bloc that wanted to roll back all the progress we made over the past four years has failed," said a clearly jubilant Sanchez who focused his campaign on the danger of a PP-Vox government.

"There are many more who want Spain to keep advancing than those who want to go back-

wards," he said.

With their 153 lawmakers, the Socialists and Sumar will need the support of several regional formations such as the left-wing Catalan separatist ERC party or the pro-independence Basque party EH Bildu, seen as the heir of the now-defunct armed separatist group ETA.

But they will also have to negotiate the abstention of the hardline Catalan separatist party JxCat which has vowed not to help Sanchez remain in power without something in return.

If everything came together, Sanchez could assemble 172 lawmakers behind him, which is more than Feijoo, that would be

enough to secure a second parliamentary investiture vote which only requires a simple majority.

Otherwise, Spain - which held four general elections between 2015 and 2019 - could find itself once again in deadlock and forced to call a new vote.

Feijoo, who narrowly won the election on paper, has insisted he has the right to form a government. "As the candidate of the most-voted party, I believe it's my duty... to try and govern our country," he told supporters after results came in. "Our duty now is to ensure that Spain does not enter a period of uncertainty."

"It is with great determination that I will take on the task of opening dialogue to form a government," he said, urging the Socialists not to 'block' his efforts.

Without an absolute majority, Feijoo would seek to form a minority government but for that he would need the Socialists to abstain during any investiture vote in parliament - which they have no intention of doing.

Jose Pablo Ferrandiz, a director at polling company Ipsos, said the PP had run a bad campaign, adding Feijoo's boycott of the final TV debate between candidates was a bad decision.

AFP

## NZ justice minister quits after car crash

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand's justice minister resigned on Monday after being charged over a car crash, in a fresh setback for the government ahead of general elections in October.

Kiritapu 'Kiri' Allan said her position was now 'untenable' and she had told Prime Minister Chris Hipkins she was resigning from her position 'immediately'.

The justice minister was charged with careless use of a motor vehicle and refusing to accompany a police officer after the crash late on Sunday, the prime minister confirmed.

Police also issued an infringement notice to Allan for returning an alcohol breath test that was over the limit, Hipkins said. The minister was briefly held in police custody after the crash.

Further details about the collision were not immediately available.

Allan is the fourth minister to leave cabinet in Hipkins' centre-left government since he replaced Jacinda Ardern as prime minister in January.

New Zealand goes to the polls on October 14.

Opinion polls this month put Hipkins' Labour government just behind the centre-right opposition National Party.

Hipkins told Allan that he did not believe she was in a fit state to be a minister.

**'Inexcusable'**

"It's also untenable for a justice minister to be charged with criminal offending," he said.

"While her alleged actions are inexcusable, I've been advised she was experiencing extreme emotional distress at the time of the incident," Hipkins added.

"It appears some of those issues came to a head yesterday."

AFP



A rescue team setting out to conduct search and rescue operations in Buton Tengah, southeast Sulawesi after a boat sank, on Monday (AFP)

## Indonesia boat sinks: At least 15 dead, all missing passengers found

Kendari, Indonesia - At least 15 people were killed on Monday after a wooden boat sank off the coast of Indonesia's Sulawesi island, search and rescue officials said, adding that all missing passengers had been accounted for.

The boat sank with 48 people onboard just after midnight (1700 GMT on Sunday), the local office of Indonesia's search and rescue agency said in a statement. Six people were rescued and taken to hospital for treatment, it added, and the cause of the sinking was being investigated.

Muhamad Arafah, head of the local search and rescue agency in Kendari city in Southeast Sulawesi, said in the statement that the 27 other passengers had been accounted for and all the victims had been identified.

The agency had said earlier that 19 were missing, but Arafah said the search operation had now been 'declared finished and closed'. The boat was crossing a bay between the villages of Lanto and Lagili in Central Buton regency on Muna island, said local rescue office spokesperson Wahyudin, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

Survivor Marlina, 18, told reporters the boat was 'full' of passengers when it started to leak.

"Initially it was just normal, but suddenly someone screamed that water had entered," she said.

"The boat driver said 'it's okay'... eventually it just capsized because water filled the boat. We just fell, there were no winds and

waves."

**'Rescued themselves'**

But Wahyudin refused to confirm local media reports the boat was overcrowded. Indonesian media reported that villagers had travelled for a local celebration and gathered on an overcrowded boat that capsized on its way back across the bay.

It is common in Indonesia for the actual number of passengers on a boat to differ from the manifest. Wahyudin told AFP passengers had previously been recorded as missing because they had 'rescued themselves, and once they got on land, they went home'.

The vessel was a wooden passenger boat and not a ferry as initially reported, he said.

The rescue agency shared images of several dead bodies covered by sarongs and laid on tarpaulin at a local hospital.

Marine accidents occur frequently in the Southeast Asian archipelago nation of around 17,000 islands, where people rely on ferries and small boats to travel around despite poor safety standards. In 2018, more than 150 people drowned when a ferry sank in one of the world's deepest lakes on Sumatra island.

And in May last year, a ferry carrying more than 800 people ran aground in shallow waters off East Nusa Tenggara province and remained stuck for two days before being dislodged.

AFP

## UN Command says in 'conversation' with North Korea over US soldier King

Seoul, South Korea - The UN Command has started a conversation with Pyongyang over American soldier Travis King, who ran across the border into North Korea last week, its deputy commander said on Monday.

"A conversation has commenced with the KPA through the mechanism of the armistice agreement," Lieutenant General Andrew Harrison said at a press briefing, referring to North Korea's military, the Korean People's Army.

The UN Command is a US-led multinational force that oversees the Korean War truce. The two Koreas remain technically at war because the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice and not a peace treaty.

"The primary concern for us is for Private King's welfare," Harrison said, adding that the incident

was 'still subject to investigation'.

Harrison said that, under the armistice agreement, there was a mechanism allowing the UN Command to communicate with the North's military in the Joint Security Area (JSA).

"That process has started" but due to the 'very delicate nature of these negotiations' he said he would not go into further detail.

"Obviously there is someone's welfare at stake and clearly we are in a very difficult and complex situation which I don't want to risk by speculation or going into too much detail about the communications that have existed."

The United States does not have formal diplomatic ties with the North and, since North Korea closed its borders at the start of the pandemic, most embassies with a presence in Pyongyang have withdrawn their foreign



Andrew Harrison (AFP)

diplomats.

North Korea has not commented publicly on King.

**JSA tour**

Private Second Class King was being escorted to Seoul's airport last week and was due to fly to Texas after a drunken bar brawl, an altercation with police and a stint in South Korean jail.

But instead of getting on the plane to face disciplinary hear-

ings at Fort Bliss, King slipped away, joined a tourist tour of the Demilitarised Zone and fled across the border. He is now believed to be in North Korean custody. Most of the border between the two Koreas is heavily fortified. But at the JSA, the frontier is marked only by a low concrete divider and is relatively easy to cross, despite soldiers on both sides.

The JSA has been closed to tourists since King's border crossing, and it will likely remain that way for the foreseeable future, Harrison said.

But since the area has an educational value, the decision may be reviewed in future, he said, adding 'it's a constant balance between that value and the risk to the individuals who are in the demilitarised zone'.

AFP

## Cambodian heir apparent Hun Manet hails poll victory, defying international criticism

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen's heir apparent insisted on Monday on the legitimacy of elections his party won against no meaningful opposition, defying international criticism that the polls were neither free nor fair.

Hun Sen has ruled Cambodia for nearly 40 years - stifling all real opposition, freedom of speech and democratic reform - but has indicated recently that he will soon hand power to his eldest son Hun Manet.

The United States on Monday condemned the polls, in which the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) is predicted to win all but five of 125 parliamentary seats in the lower house.

But Hun Manet posted a triumphant message across multiple social media platforms hailing his party's victory.

"The Cambodian people have clearly expressed their wills through votes," he wrote.

"An overwhelming number have expressed support for the Cambodian People's Party."

He thanked Cambodians for choosing to vote, and especially



Hun Manet, eldest son of Prime Minister Hun Sen, gestures after he casts his vote at a polling station in Phnom Penh on Sunday (AFP)

**Hun Manet posted a triumphant message across multiple social media platforms hailing his party's victory**

for all the love and confidence in the CPP'.

Official results will not be available for weeks, although the

party, headed by Prince Norodom Chakravuth, is expected to take five seats - giving the new parliament a patina of diversity after the CPP won every seat in the last election.

The disqualification on a technicality of the only viable opposition force, the Candlelight Party, meant there was no realistic outcome other than a big CPP win.

The United States said the elections were 'neither free nor fair', pointing to 'a pattern of threats and harassment against the political opposition, media, and civil society'. "These actions denied the Cambodian people a voice and a choice in determining the future of their country," US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement on Monday.

He said Washington was preparing to impose visa restrictions on some individuals for undermining democracy, and halting some aid programmes.

**China praise**

Hun Sen has played off Washington's growing fears of Beijing in recent years, collecting huge

sums in aid and Chinese foreign investment - without any unwelcome demands for democratic reform. On Monday the Chinese foreign ministry congratulated Hun Sen on his win in 'successful elections' and said it looked forward to strengthening already close ties.

With the opposition virtually silenced, voters had few choices in the polling station - although intentionally invalidating their ballot papers would have been one way to show dissatisfaction.

Authorities are investigating 27 people for inciting voters to spoil their ballots on polling day, interior ministry spokesman Khieu Sopheap told AFP.

Election officials also banned exiled opposition figurehead and Hun Sen's longtime foe Sam Rainsy from running for office for 25 years for urging people to void their ballots.

During the counting AFP reporters witnessed a number of spoiled ballots, but there was little chance of protests in a country entirely under Hun Sen's thumb.

AFP

# Israel’s hard-right MPs approve key judicial reform clause as protests flare

Jerusalem - Israel's hard-right government on Monday pushed through parliament a key clause of its controversial judicial reform package despite months of mass protests and concerns voiced by foreign allies.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition allies approved the bill in a Knesset vote boycotted by opposition lawmakers, some of whom shouted 'shame, shame'.

Critics charge the judicial revamp will undermine Israel's liberal democracy by removing checks and balances on the executive, while the government argues it needs to curb judicial overreach.

The bill, passed with 64 votes in the 120-seat chamber, aims to limit the powers of the Supreme Court in striking down government decisions which the judges deem 'unreasonable'.

The reform package has triggered one of the biggest protest movements in Israel's history since it was unveiled by the government in January.

The bill was passed hours after Netanyahu, 73, returned to the Knesset - only a day after undergoing surgery to have a pace-maker fitted - as police outside the legislature used water can-



Israeli security forces use a water cannon to disperse demonstrators blocking the entrance of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, in Jerusalem on Monday, amid a months-long wave of protests against the government's planned judicial overhaul (AFP)

non and mounted officers were deployed against a crowd of demonstrators.

President Isaac Herzog - who had tried but failed to broker a compromise after half a year of mass street protests - earlier warned that Israel faced a 'national emergency'.

Netanyahu's coalition government, which includes far-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties, argues that the proposed changes are needed to ensure a better balance of power.

Israel's traditional bedrock ally Washington had on Sunday reiterated concern about the politi-

cal turmoil, with Biden urging Israeli leaders to postpone the vote.

"From the perspective of Israel's friends in the United States, it looks like the current judicial reform proposal is becoming more divisive, not less," he said in a statement first published by

news site Axios and shared with AFP. "It doesn't make sense for Israeli leaders to rush this - the focus should be on pulling people together and finding consensus."

While legislators met inside, protesters outside parliament booed, beat drums, blew horns and chanted 'shame'.

**‘Heading towards disaster’**

Herzog, just back from a Washington trip, had gone to Netanyahu's hospital room on Sunday in a last-minute effort to reach a compromise.

Herzog warned that 'there are foundations for understandings' but the sides would have to 'show responsibility' to close the gap.

*We are not cancelling the reasonableness clause but reducing its use*

YARIV LEVIN

Netanyahu had said on Sunday afternoon that 'we're continuing our efforts to complete the legislation, and the efforts to do it in agreement' with the opposition. The government had taken a 'cautious path', said Justice Minister Yariv Levin, the driving force behind the revamp.

"We are not cancelling the reasonableness clause but reducing its use, so that a judge's personal opinions won't come at

the expense of the people's desire," he told parliament at the end of a marathon debate before the vote.

"There is no reason to fear this amendment. There are many reasons to see in it as an important step in returning the balance between the government branches," Levin said.

But opposition leader Yair Lapid said the country was 'heading towards a disaster'.

Opponents accuse Netanyahu, who has been fighting corruption charges in court, of a conflict of interest, and some protesters have labelled him the 'crime minister'.

**‘Gateway to dictatorship’**

"This is the gateway to a dictatorship and that's why we're here. We're fighting for our democracy," said Shahaf Kushinsky, 34, a high-tech worker protesting near parliament ahead of the vote.

The 'reasonableness' clause is the first major component of the reform package to become law. Other proposed changes include allowing the government a greater say in the appointment of judges.

AFP

## Bangladesh court hands Nobel winner \$1.1m tax bill

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh's top court has ordered Nobel laureate and micro-finance pioneer Muhammad Yunus to pay more than US\$1mn in taxes on a US\$7mn donation made to three charitable trusts, lawyers said on Monday.

Yunus, 83, is credited with lifting millions out of poverty with his pioneering micro-credit bank, but he has fallen out with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has said he is 'sucking blood' from the poor. He was awarded the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for his work promoting economic development. "The Supreme Court... dismissed our petition," Yunus' lawyer Sarder Jinnat Ali told AFP.

The court ruled on Sunday that Yunus must pay as the law does not support tax exemptions for donations to trusts.

AFP

## Kyiv claims drone strike in Moscow

Moscow, Russia - Ukraine on Monday claimed a drone attack in central Moscow, the latest in a series of attacks revealing Russian vulnerabilities, while Kyiv said Russian forces again hit grain facilities near Odesa.

Police wearing masks cordoned off streets near the defence ministry in Moscow where one of the drones crashed, while the second shredded floor-to-ceiling glass walls of an office building in a southern district.

A Ukrainian defence source told AFP the attack - one day after Kyiv vowed to 'retaliate' for a Russian missile strike in the UNESCO-protected city of Odesa - was a 'special operation' carried out by Ukraine's military intelligence.

AFP reporters at the scene of the strike near the ministry on Komsomolsky Prospekt saw a two-storey building whose sloping, metal sheeted roof had been torn up by the impact of the drone's crash.

"I wasn't asleep. It was



Municipal workers remove a shattered glass window at the scene of a drone attack on Komsomolsky Prospekt in Moscow on Monday (AFP)

3:39am. The house really shook," Vladimir, who lives nearby told AFP.

"It is scandalous that a Ukrainian drone almost flew into the defence ministry," the 70-year-old who declined to give his last name said while taking pictures at the scene.

In Crimea, the peninsula annexed by Russia in 2014, Moscow-installed governor Sergei Aksyonov said an ammu-

nition depot had been hit and a private house damaged in a separate drone attack.

Villages near the depot were being evacuated, he added.

**Crimea, Odesa strikes**

Crimea - a regular Ukrainian target since Russia's large-scale offensive launched last year - has come under more intensive attacks in recent weeks.

Kyiv has repeatedly said it

plans to take back Crimea.

Russia's defence ministry said 14 Ukrainian drones that targeted Crimea overnight were 'suppressed' by electronic air defences and three others were shot down.

Meanwhile in southern Ukraine's Odesa region, officials reported a four-hour Russian drone attack on port infrastructure on the Danube River.

"A grain hangar was destroyed and tanks for storing other types of cargo were damaged," Ukraine's southern military command said on Telegram.

The Danube delta region, which spans across Romania and Ukraine, is being used as an export route for Ukrainian grain.

Russia last week pulled out of a key deal which had allowed the safe export of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea.

Since then Kyiv has accused Russia of targeting grain supplies and infrastructure vital to grain exports.

AFP

## Verse in *Oppenheimer* scene sparks Indian anger

New Delhi, India - A scene in the Hollywood blockbuster *Oppenheimer* featuring a line from a Hindu holy scripture sparked online outrage in India on Monday, with an official calling it a 'scathing attack'.

Critics say religious intolerance has been growing in the world's most populous country since the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. The biographical drama about US physicist Robert Oppenheimer - played by actor Cillian Murphy - opened in India on Friday to positive reviews, reportedly raking in more than US\$3mn at the box office in two days.

One scene shows Oppenheimer with his lover Jean Tatlock, played by Florence Pugh, in which she opens a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a Hindu religious text, and asks him to read from it.

Murphy reads the line, 'Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds', the quote which Oppenheimer reportedly recalled when the first nuclear bomb was detonated.

"This is a direct assault on religious beliefs of a billion tolerant Hindus," Uday Mahurkar, a senior official at the government's Central Information Commission, wrote to the film's director, Christopher Nolan.

"It amounts to waging a war on the Hindu community," Mahurkar said in the letter, a copy of which he posted on Twitter, and urged Nolan cut the scene. Hashtags such as #BoycottOppenheimer and #RespectHinduCulture have been trending on Twitter.

Harris Sultan, an author, said Hindus were 'left angry and perplexed at the blatant disrespect'.

AFP

### FOR A LIVING



Fishermen row their makeshift boat to catch fish in Yamjal Lake on the outskirts of Hyderabad on Monday (AFP)

## Churches, temples torched in Indian ethnic violence

Imphal, India - Charred walls, collapsed tin roofs and smashed windows in a burned Kuki community church illustrate how deadly ethnic violence has led to brutal sectarian attacks in India's troubled Manipur state.

At least 120 people have been killed since May in armed clashes between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly Christian Kuki in the northeastern state.

The ruins of the Kuki church in Imphal are just one among the more than 220 churches and 17 Hindu temples destroyed in the months of vigilante violence, according to a report by *India Today* news magazine.

Across the street from the burned church, Baptist priest Zuan Kamang Damai led a service on Sunday with a congregation just a third of its usual size of about 800 after many of his Kuki parishioners fled.



A view of Kuki Baptist Convention Centre church that was vandalised during ethnic conflict in Imphal (AFP)

"After this violence erupted, they moved to different places to save their lives," he said.

"They want to come back, they want to resettle, they want to live with my family," Damai said. "This is what they responded to me, and I comfort

them. God is there." Damai is himself a Naga, another major tribal group in the area who have largely been spared in the cycle of revenge attacks.

But many of his regular worshippers are staying away, fearful of the possibility of violence.

"We have to respect each religion - regardless of Christians, regardless of Hindu, Muslim, whatever," the 55-year-old said.

While there was 'conflict here and there', he said, 'we have to avoid attacking the temples'.

The cause of conflict is a com-

plex mix of land, rights and power.

The Kuki oppose Meitei demands for reserved public job quotas and college admissions as a form of affirmative action, fearing that they might also be allowed to acquire land in areas currently reserved for tribal groups.

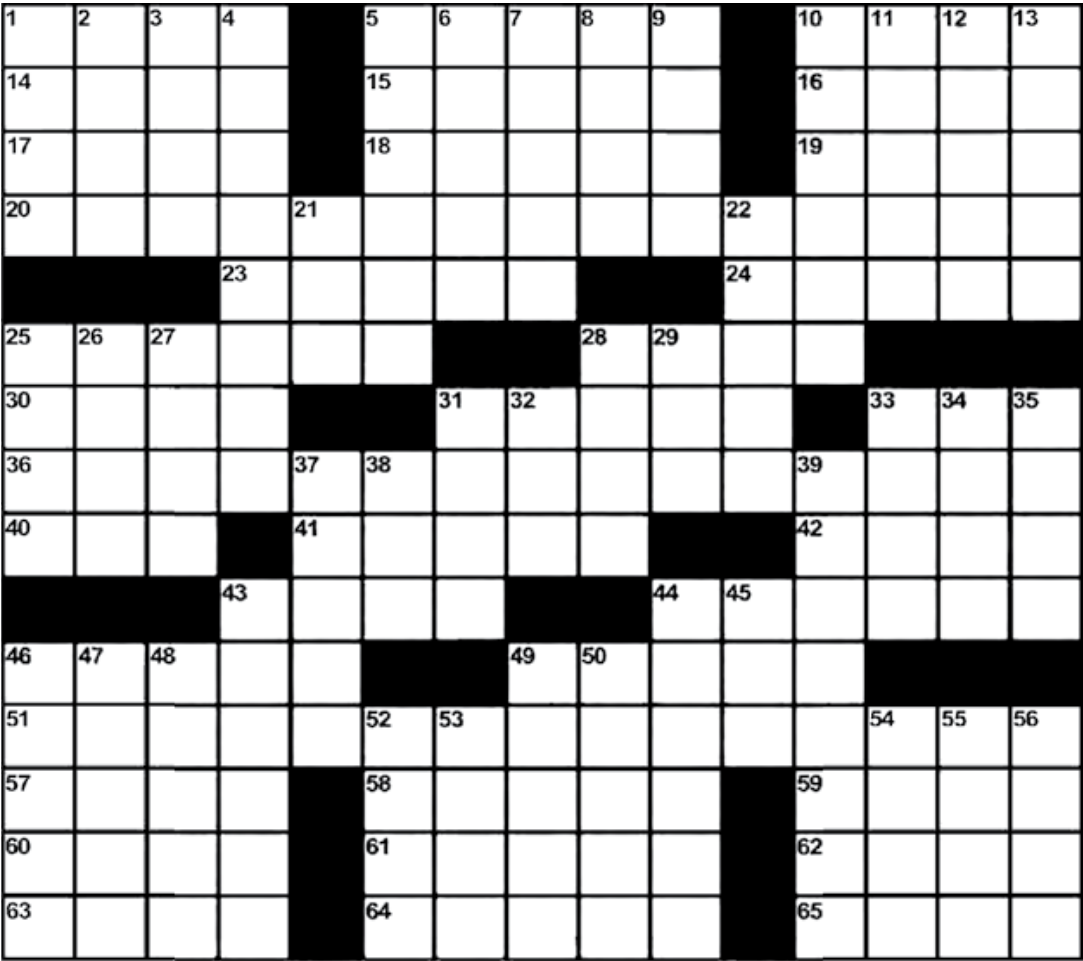
India's Interior Minister Amit Shah has promised a 'thorough, in-depth and impartial investigation' into the violence and has said the government 'stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of Manipur'.

But the Human Rights Watch group says that state authorities, led by Shah's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, have rolled out 'politically motivated, divisive policies that promote Hindu majoritarianism'.

Many say religious divisions are adding to the trouble.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1) Battle memento

5) They may be fine-toothed

10) Provide provender for

14) Ear part

15) Reproductive organ

16) Turnpike toll unit

17) Type of code

18) Plastic wrap brand

19) Start of a south-of-the-border cheer

20) Water x 3

23) Yard or garage events

24) Media component

25) Evolution, for one

28) Anonymous people

30) Ethiopian coin

31) Robin Hood's Tuck

33) \_ out a living (scrape by)

36) Water x 3

40) Stock holder

41) Temperamental

42) In midvoyage

43) Used a bell

44) "Animal Farm" author

46) Map within a map

49) Single piece of information

51) Water x 3

57) Limerick's land

58) Kayak's relative

59) Put down for the count

60) Three oceans touch it

61) Love, in Lourdes

62) Corp. bigwig

63) Pork, for one

64) Studious stereotypes

65) Game based on world conquest

DOWN

1) Rib order

2) Seed site, sometimes

3) Emulating a sleepyhead

4) Suck up again

5) Expensive

6) Irregularly round

7) Crumbly earth deposits

8) Dundee hill

9) Lip-\_ (mouth the words)

10) Party handouts

11) Fate of a certain shah

12) Keebler's crew

13) Darlings

21) Lifeboat item

22) Puccini genre

25) Cookbook amt.

26) Long walk

27) Ireland nickname

28) Like auto shop floors

29) Slap cuffs on

31) Former prince?

32) Obviously chafed

33) Last word in a threat

34) Stabilizing part

35) List-lengthening abbr.

37) Fine fiddle

38) He played Opie

39) Congressman, for one

43) Do again

44) Alternatives

45) Bitterly regret

46) Certain construction

girder

47) "Let's make some \_!"

48) Neighbor of Israel

49) Fund contributor

50) Not silently
- 52) Observatory function

53) Hardly heart-pounding

54) Prepare to take off

55) Watchful pair

56) Plymouth landmark

24th June
- NOTE PAD
- 
- YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE
- ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19  
A family member who has been under a lot of pressure needs some relief, and you could be the one to give it to them. If they live far away, ask them to come visit you for a while. A change of scenery might be just the ticket to get them feeling perky again. If they live in your neck of the woods, make a date with them. Just the two of you. It's time to reacquaint yourself with a person you've known for so long. You don't know them nearly as well as you think you do.

**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22  
Now is definitely not the time to be modest about how great you are! Someone is curious about one of your recent accomplishments, and they want to know more details about how you did what you did. If you downplay everything, you'll sell yourself short. So be up front and honest about how hard you worked. Don't worry, it won't come off as egotistical. It will come off as intelligent. You know how to tell it like it is without coming off too cocky.

**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21  
If you can be flexible with your friends, then you need to be just as flexible with your family. It's important to treat all the people you care about equally. It's not always easy, and many would say it's not even possible. But if you show people that you're at least trying to work with them, that's all that matters. So if a date has to be rescheduled, then it has to be rescheduled. It's not the end of the world if plans have to be revised.

**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20  
You don't need an excuse to have a major celebration! It's a good day to indulge in an impromptu party with your nearest and dearest. Everyone's feeling sunny and has some reason to raise a glass and cheer. And their schedules are open. Best of all, you won't have to spend a lot of money in the process. Find a place where you can all gather and share the good times you're having. It's great to have positive news, but it's even better to have such awesome people to share it with!

**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22  
Do you want to get your way today? Then speak up early and ask for it! Being aggressive is not a bad thing right now, especially since you know how to be aggressive and agreeable at the same time. Your diplomacy skills can work wonders for you now, so employ them frequently in every situation. And remember that people like to be liked, so don't skimp on the flattery either. Warm them up with a genuine compliment.

**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19  
Your position in your social circle is about to skyrocket, so get ready! You've got the connections and the ideas to make your friends amazingly happy right now, and they know it. Have a little bit more faith. You are still very much loved by your friends! They will prove it to you soon enough when they start calling about what to do next weekend. It's time to pull out that plan you've had in your back pocket. You know, the one you thought they'll never go for. This time they will.

**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21  
The sun feels like it's shining a little bit brighter today, doesn't it? Your mood is lightening. While your thoughts may not be clear, your goals are. Put a plan together for today so you can make the most of it. Avoid wasting any time on the couch. You don't have to get social if you don't want to, but you do have to keep active. Your mind will be buzzing all day long. You'll be seeing things in new ways and attracting people who could be very good for you.

**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22  
The Universe has a wonderful gift for you today, namely, the ability to appreciate the smaller things in life! Big, fancy cars are fine, but that crazy little two-seater in the parking lot is what will stay imprinted on your mind all day long. Size isn't nearly as important to you right now as style, and this fresh outlook is something you should cultivate. Too many people are focused on quantity, not quality, right now, and they really need to hear what you have to say.

**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18  
It's time to get social! You put lots of effort into your professional life, and now you need to start putting just as much effort into your personal life. Your mission is to accept any and all invitations without hesitation, no matter how unexciting they might sound. You are definitely one of the celebrities in your social circle right now, so take advantage of the spotlight while you have it. You can have fun with your people and relax for a while even if you're not all in the same place!

**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20  
Why not do something that raises a few eyebrows today? You've got the creativity required to throw people for a loop, so why not use it? Shocking people or breaking the rules is a good thing to do right now, especially if you can gain an advantage over other people in the process. Take a little bit of a selfish perspective today and do something that benefits you and you alone. Just make sure you don't make powerful people angry at you!

**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22  
Today, you could get a call or email that contains crucial information about one of your most precious relationships, and it will cause you to breathe a huge sigh of relief. What you've been worrying about isn't something you need to be worrying about after all. You can now go back to your previously scheduled life. This incident should serve as a gentle reminder that you should stop taking on the problems of other people all the time. They can handle things on their own.

**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21  
Feed your mind whenever you can today, and don't give it any junk thinking! Gossip, trends, celebrity news, and other types of shallow input won't do much to improve your mood or give you many good things to talk about. Turn the channel to the news station and education yourself about what's going on in the real world. Skip reality television and instead pick up a good book. You don't have to swear off the silly stuff forever, but you do have to remind yourself how smart you are.
- 
- TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE
01. What is a mermaid's purse?

A. A walrus's genitalia

B. A species of seaweed

C. A type of jellyfish

D. The casing that surrounds the egg or eggs of a shark, skate or chimaera

02. In geology, what are nappe formations?

A. A complex fold system of shifted sheets of rock

B. Breaks or faults in otherwise continuous sheets of rock

C. Abrupt changes in level

D. Tablerocks

03. What date is "Singles' Day" in China?

A. 13 February

B. 1 January

C. 11 November

D. 21 February
- Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. C
- KIDS COLOURING
- BOGGLER

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| G | S | E | Y |
| L | E | O | K |
| N | H | E | O |
| N | O | L | R |

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

# PERFECT START

Ary Borges scores World Cup hat-trick as classy Brazil blow away debutants Panama

Adelaide, Australia - Ary Borges hit the first hat-trick of this Women's World Cup as Brazil crushed debutants Panama 4-0 in a scintillating opening to their campaign on Monday.

Far tougher challenges lie ahead - they face France next - but this was an impressive start for a Brazil side who have featured at all eight previous Women's World Cups but never won it.

The stylish victory in Adelaide on Monday sent Brazil to the top of Group F after Jamaica surprisingly held France goalless on Sunday.

The 23-year-old attacking midfielder Borges, who plays for Racing Louisville in the United States, was the undoubted star of the show, scoring three and setting up the other.

A constant threat coming in off the right, she pounced twice from close range in the first half to leave Brazil in total control at the break and Panama never looked like getting back in it.

Some of the Panama players and fans were in tears during their national anthem, underlining what it means to them to be

at the World Cup for the first time.

But this was a debut they will probably want to forget as Swedish coach Pia Sundhage's Brazil put on an exhibition of flowing, attacking football.

They racked up five attempts on goal in the opening 10 minutes and the pressure told in the 19th minute when Borges nodded in unmarked at the back post for a simple close-range header.

Six minutes before the break she scored her second.

Panama goalkeeper Yenith Bailey saved her initial downward header but the rebound went right back to Borges and she slammed the ball into the net.

Any hope Panama had of getting back into the match was extinguished only three minutes into the second half and it was

the best goal of the tournament so far.

A fluid team move took the ball to the ever-dangerous Borges, who rolled the ball behind her with her studs, allowing Bia Zaneratto to fire into the back of the net.

Borges put the seal on a hugely impressive personal and team performance by nodding in her third - and Brazil's fourth - 20 minutes from time, the ball flying through the middle of Bailey's legs.

The 37-year-old forward Marta, arguably the greatest women's footballer of all time, came off the bench for Brazil in the closing stages but will have to wait a while longer if she is to become the first player to score at six World Cups.

AFP



Brazil's Ary Borges (R) celebrates after scoring against Panama in their Women's World Cup Group F match in Adelaide on Monday (AFP)

*Far tougher challenges lie ahead - they face France next - but this was an impressive start for a Brazil side who have featured at all eight previous Women's World Cups but never won it*

## Ruthless Germany hit six, Italy down Argentina

Melbourne, Australia - Alexandra Popp scored twice as Germany thrashed Morocco 6-0 to launch their Women's World Cup title bid in style Monday, while Italy triumphed in a feisty encounter with Argentina thanks to an 87th-minute winner.

In the last match of day five of the tournament in Australia and New Zealand, Brazil face debutants Panama hoping to make a statement of their own.

The lower-ranked teams at the first 32-team Women's World Cup have generally held their own so far, indicating a closing of the gap in women's international football.

But two-time champions Germany blew away Morocco -- the first Arab team at a Women's World Cup -- in Melbourne to record the biggest win of the tournament so far.

The Germans are among the favourites once again, along with holders the United States, England, Spain and France, and they showed why with a clinical per-



Germany's Alexandra Popp (2R) scores against Morocco in their Women's World Cup Group H match in Melbourne on Monday (AFP)

formance in front of a near sell-out crowd of more than 27,000.

In their 32-year-old skipper Popp they have one of the best goal-scorers around and she

took full advantage of some poor Morocco defending with simple close-range finishes.

Klara Buehl made it three straight after half-time to end the

match as any kind of contest, before two own goals and a late sixth from Lea Schueller.

Colombia face South Korea on Tuesday also in Group H, in the

final match of the first round of group games.

**Super sub**

Argentina had never won a game at the Women's World Cup after appearing at three previous finals - and the wait goes on after going down 1-0 to Italy in a fiery clash that yielded six yellow cards.

Juventus veteran Cristiana Girelli was Italy's heroine, coming on as a substitute in the 83rd minute and scoring the winner with a superb header just four minutes later in front of nearly 31,000 fans in Auckland.

"I am really happy for me and my teammates because we deserved the victory," said Girelli, who scored a hat-trick against Jamaica at the 2019 World Cup.

"To win in that way, even though we had to suffer, is important," added the 33-year-old, surely now a contender to start the next match against Sweden even if she had no complaints about being an impact substitute.



Casey Phair

## South Korea coach shuts down 'hype' over teenage US-born forward

Sydney, Australia - South Korea coach Colin Bell is desperate to protect 16-year-old United States-born attacker Casey Phair from "hype" ahead of her potential debut at the Women's World Cup on Tuesday.

Bell called up the rookie for his South Korea squad for Australia and New Zealand, in a move that made headlines in the United States, Korea and beyond.

She is not expected to start for South Korea's World Cup opener against Colombia on Tuesday in Sydney, but could be a secret weapon off the bench if they are chasing the game.

Speaking at Monday's pre-match press conference, the Englishman Bell did his best to shut down questions about the teenager, who only turned 16 late last month.

"She did very well when she came in training with two other young players that we had," the 61-year-old said, when asked what role Phair could play at the tournament.

"So now she's in the squad,

then we just take it day by day, so I don't really want to hype up a young player too much before she's even played.

"That's why I've been safeguarding her from the media."

Asked a second time about Phair, Bell replied: "Like I say, we'll see. I am here to talk about the match tomorrow."

Phair, born to an American father and Korean mother, is the first player of mixed descent to make the senior South Korean women's football squad.

She was previously involved with youth squads for the US national team.

Bell may be desperate to shelter her, but speaking earlier this month, Phair shared her excitement at playing at the World Cup.

"I feel really proud and honoured to be given this opportunity," she told reporters at South Korea's national football centre, according to Yonhap news agency. "I'm ready and willing to do whatever it takes to help the country."

AFP

## Making World Cup debut 'crazy' for US rising star Thompson

Auckland, New Zealand - Alyssa Thompson was just a starry-eyed 14-year-old when she watched the 2019 Women's World Cup final on television at her aunt's house -- now the United States forward is playing at the tournament.

The Los Angeles native came on for her World Cup debut as a late substitute in the holders' 3-0 win over Vietnam in Auckland on Saturday.

She was just 14 when now-teammate Megan Rapinoe and the Americans won 2-0 against the Netherlands - the United States' opponents on Thursday -

in 2019 to retain the trophy. "I was at my aunt's house and I was watching it there because we didn't have TV at home," Thompson, now 18, told reporters in Auckland. "I was surrounded by my whole family, we were watching the game and I just remember how intense the game was, how back and forth it was, and I was really nervous for the team."

Goals by Rapinoe and Rose Lavelle gave the USA their second straight title and their fourth overall that day. They are favourites to retain the trophy this year in Australia and New Zealand despite Thompson being

one of 14 players on coach Vlatko Andonovski's roster appearing at the finals for the first time.

"In that moment I wasn't really thinking that the next one I was going to be at because I felt so young, so it felt so far away," said Thompson, who plays her club football for Angel City.

"But being here now is crazy to me," added Thompson, who made her full international debut against England at Wembley in October last year.

She came on for her World Cup debut against Vietnam with the USA leading 2-0 thanks to two Sophia Smith goals.



Alyssa Thompson

# NO STOPPING VINGEGAARD

Danish ace wins second successive Tour de France

Paris, France - Jonas Vingegaard won his second successive Tour de France on Sunday after Jordi Meeus claimed the final stage honours on the Champs-Elysees in Paris.

Denmark's Vingegaard of the Jumbo-Visma team crossed the finish line after the 21-day race 7min 29sec ahead of Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar, the champion in 2020 and 2021.

Pogacar's UAE teammate Adam Yates of Great Britain rounded out the top three podium.

Vingegaard's winning margin was the largest since 2014 when Italian Vincenzo Nibali took the fabled champion's yellow jersey by 7min 39sec.

"I enjoyed fighting for this win with 'Pogi' and Yates, but now I'm just looking forward to having a nice dinner here in Paris with my family," said the champion.

"It was a long, hard race and one day ran into another but there's a feeling of being proud and happy.

"Winning for the second time is amazing with all the Danish people here. I hope to come back to take a third win, at least try it."

Despite finishing runner-up, Pogacar was happy to focus on the positives.

"Considering everything it's been a great Tour, I have to be



Jonas Vingegaard celebrates after winning the Tour de France on Sunday (AFP)

happy with that," Pogacar said after picking up his best young rider jersey for the fourth time.

"We have two guys on the podium, and I won two stages and the white jersey. I love cy-

cling," he said.

The final stage was won by outsider Meeus of the Bora team, with Jasper Philipsen denied a fifth stage win on this Tour right at the line in a photo finish.

"What a wonderful finish, it's been such a high level Tour," said the surprise stage winner.

The world's greatest bike race provided tense drama with spectacular backdrops as Vingegaard

and Pogacar remained separated by seconds until the Dane edged ahead with a sensational individual time trial last Tuesday.

The following day, on a 28km climb to the ski resort of

Courchevel, Pogacar cracked, shouting "I'm gone, I'm dead" before Vingegaard killed off the race with a sensational final climb.

The event had been billed as a showdown between the defend-

ing champion Vingegaard and Pogacar, who has won the Tour twice and now come second twice.

Tour director Christian Prudhomme used boxing terms to describe the struggle.

"They went 15 rounds and then there was a punch in the gut, a knee on the floor and a knock out punch," he said Sunday.

All time great Eddy Merckx told AFP the pair had delivered a thrilling show.

"Pogacar is a more complete rider, but in the high mountains at least, Vingegaard remains the stronger," he said.

"I don't know what happened to me. I took on too much this year and after two weeks I started to look as white as this shirt," said runner-up Pogacar, pointing to his best under-25 rider's white jersey.

Pogacar started well enough, taking minor advantages in the Basque hills until Vingegaard attacked on the first mountain stage in the Pyrenees to take the overall leader's yellow jersey.

And while Pogacar clawed back a few seconds here and there, the defending champion never relinquished the lead all the way to Paris.

Runner-up in 2021, the softly-spoken Vingegaard was the only rider to challenge the Slovenian prodigy in the high mountains.

In 2022, he went one step higher and won the title at altitude, and it proved to be the case again in 2023, but with a Tour of such poise and dominance his claim to be targeting a third straight title must be taken seriously.

AFP



Akshay Bhatia of the US celebrates with the trophy after winning the Barracuda Championship on Sunday (AFP)

## Bhatia downs Rodgers in Barracuda playoff for first PGA Tour win

Los Angeles, United States - American Akshay Bhatia birdied the 72nd hole to force a playoff then edged Patrick Rodgers with a par at the first playoff hole to claim his first US PGA Tour title at the Barracuda Championship.

Bhatia, 21, shook off two early bogeys and a double-bogey at the fifth hole, making six birdies the rest of the way to score nine points under the Modified Stableford scoring system that awards points for birdies and eagles and deducts them for bogeys and worse.

That took him to 40 points, pulling him level with overnight leader Rodgers who couldn't get his own birdie putt at the 72nd hole to fall for the win. Rodgers had stretched his lead with three birdies in the first eight holes.

But he had two bogeys and just one birdie coming in, finishing with six points as Bhatia surged into contention.

Rodgers, a 31-year-old seeking a first tour title, got a terrible break when they returned for the playoff to 18, where his solid tee

shot landed in a sandy divot.

His shot out was in deep rough short of the green as Bhatia blasted a superb drive down the fairway, then gave himself a birdie chance. He ended up tapping in for a par that was enough for the win after Rodgers's bogey.

"I can't even talk," said Bhatia, whose runner-up finish at the Puerto Rico Open had given him temporary tour status. The win gives him full tour member status and he's now qualified for the season-ending FedEx Cup playoffs. Bhatia admitted that he "felt uncomfortable" in the early going at Tahoe Mountain Country Club in Truckee, California.

"I made a really bad double, I hit some really bad shots," the Californian said. "Then I just kind of made some really nice putts on eight and nine and then started hitting some really good shots coming in."

It was an agonizing end to the week for Rodgers, who now has four runner-up finishes on tour without a win.

AFP

## China takes centre stage at world championships

Fukuoka, Japan - China got their campaign up and running at swimming's world championships on Monday, claiming two gold medals to banish the memory of a forgettable showing at last year's competition.

China won only one individual gold in the pool last year in Budapest but they doubled that tally in the evening's first two races in the southern Japanese city of Fukuoka.

Qin Haiyang got things started with victory in the men's 100m breaststroke, taking advantage of dominant Olympic champion Adam Peaty's absence from the competition. Zhang Yufei followed that up with gold in the women's 100m butterfly, beating Olympic champion Maggie MacNeil into second place in a field chock-full of talent.

"Last year the whole team didn't perform very well, and we worked hard and tried to be ready for these championships," Zhang said.

"We learned from last year. It was an opportunity for us.

"Hopefully we can get more gold medals in the next six days,"



China's Zhang Yufei celebrates after winning the women's 100m butterfly at the World Aquatics Championships in Fukuoka on Monday (AFP)

she added.

Qin came home in 57.69sec to finish ahead of Italy's Nicolo Martinenghi, American Nic Fink and Arno Kamminga of the Netherlands, who all tied for second on 58.72.

Britain's Peaty, the world record-holder and twice Olympic champion in the event, skipped the competition to focus on his mental health.

Qin set his sights on winning more gold in the 50m and 200m breaststroke.

"Tonight went the way I

thought it would," the 24-year-old said.

"This is just the start for me because I still have the 50 and the 200 to come."

Zhang, the silver medallist at the Tokyo Olympics, finished in 56.12sec, ahead of MacNeil on 56.45 and American Torri Huske on 56.61.

Australia's Emma McKeon was fourth in a star-studded line-up, and Zhang said her opponents "gave me a lot of strength".

AFP

## PSG say Saudi's Al Hilal can talk to Mbappe after 300-million-euro bid

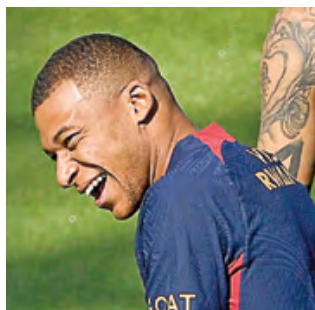
Osaka, Japan - Paris Saint-Germain have given Saudi club Al Hilal permission to speak to Kylian Mbappe after tabling a world record 300-million-euro (\$333 million) bid, a source close to the negotiations told AFP on Monday.

The Riyadh-based club has made a formal offer by letter, the source said, but such a transfer could only be made with the agreement of Mbappe who has never expressed an interest in moving to the fast-growing Saudi league. "The club has given permission to Al Hilal to speak with Mbappe. That's the request of the letter and that's been granted," the source said.

Mbappe has one year left on his contract with PSG, who want him to leave now rather than for nothing next summer.

But Mbappe, 24, is refusing to sign a new contract and the French champions believe he has already struck a deal to move to Real Madrid next year.

The source said Real Madrid were among a group of clubs



Kylian Mbappe

*The club has given permission to Al Hilal to speak with Mbappe. That's the request of the letter and that's been granted*

which had also expressed an interest in Mbappe. "In the group so far that have expressed their interest there are Manchester United, Inter Milan, Barcelona, Tottenham and obviously the Saudi club and Real Madrid."

## Wilson to the rescue as Newcastle draw 3-3 with Villa

New York, United States - Callum Wilson scored a second-half equalizer as Newcastle recovered from a two-goal deficit to secure a 3-3 draw with Aston Villa in their Premier League pre-season friendly in Philadelphia on Sunday.

Newcastle, the surprise package of the Premier League last season after securing a top-four finish and a ticket to the Champions League, were rocked early on after Villa took the lead after just seven minutes through Ollie Watkins.



Douglas Luiz of Aston Villa collides with Matt Ritchie of Newcastle United during their friendly match in Pennsylvania on Sunday (AFP)

Villa midfielder Emi Buendia split the Newcastle defence with a fine run before passing to Watkins who controlled deftly to fire home a low finish.

Buendia doubled the Villa lead four minutes later with a rasping finish to beat Newcastle goalkeeper Martin Dubravka and make it 2-0. Newcastle however hit back on 28 minutes when a long ball by Jacob Miller caught the Villa defence napping, allowing Elliot Anderson to control before tucking away a low shot.

The Magpies, who will play

Villa in their opening Premier League fixture on August 12, leveled on the stroke of half-time, with Swedish international Alexander Isak burying a rebound from close range. Newcastle manager Eddie Howe and Villa counterpart Unai Emery made a flurry of substitutions at half-time but it was the impressive Buendia who struck next.

Another surging run by the Argentine launched a Villa counter-attack which ended with teenager Omari Kellyman firing a shot off the foot of the post.

# ON THE OFFENSIVE

Ashwin double strike boosts India's Test sweep bid

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago - Ravichandran Ashwin snared two wickets for India but the West Indies showed a measure of resistance in reaching 76 for two after being set a daunting victory target of 365 on the fourth day of the second and final Test on Sunday.

A day packed with action at Queen's Park Oval in between short, sharp showers saw Mohammed Siraj scything through the lower half of the home side's first innings in the morning to earn his team a 183-run lead.

Blistering half-centuries by India captain Rohit Sharma and wicketkeeper-batsman Ishan Kishan then facilitated a swift second innings declaration at 181 for two off just 24 overs.

Ashwin, destroyer of the West Indies in the first Test in Dominica with an 11-wicket match haul, removed home skipper Kraigg Brathwaite to a top-edged sweep and then had debutant Kirk McKenzie lbw without scoring.

However the obdurate Tagnarine Chanderpaul, very much in the mould of his celebrated father Shivanarine, stayed to the close with vice-captain Jermaine Blackwood.

A target of 289 more runs on a final day pitch should be a step too far for the Caribbean side, es-



India's Ravichandran Ashwin (2R) celebrates with teammates after dismissing Kraigg Brathwaite of West Indies on the fourth day of their second Test on Sunday (AFP)

*Ashwin, destroyer of the West Indies in the first Test in Dominica with an 11-wicket match haul, removed home skipper Kraigg Brathwaite to a top-edged sweep and then had debutant Kirk McKenzie lbw without scoring*

pecially given the greater experience, competence and confidence of an Indian side pressing for a 2-0 series sweep at the start of the new World Test Championship cycle.

In humid conditions at the start of the day, Siraj claimed the last four wickets to finish with his

best Test figures of five for 60 as the West Indies crashed from an overnight position of 229 for five to 255 all out, their last five wickets tumbling for just 26 runs.

**Rain delays play**  
Steady rainfall has wiped out the prospect of any play before lunch

on the final day of the second and final Test between the West Indies and India at Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad on Monday.

West Indies are set to resume at 76 for two in their second innings having been set a victory target of 365.

AFP



**Australia captain Cummins eyes series win as Ashes retained**

Manchester, United Kingdom - Australia captain Pat Cummins insists his side's ambition to win a Test series in England remains undimmed after they retained the Ashes in a rain-marred draw at Old Trafford.

Persistent rain meant Sunday's final day of the fourth Test was washed out without a ball bowled as England were denied the chance of a series-levelling win in a match they had dominated.

The result ensured Australia, as the holders, kept the Ashes at 2-1 up with one match left in the series - regardless of the result of the fifth Test at The Oval starting on Thursday.

Even so, Australia will still have to avoid defeat in London if they are to secure their first Ashes series win in England since 2001.

"It is a bit of a strange one," Cummins told reporters. "As a group, proud we have retained the Ashes but it has not been our greatest week."



Pakistan's Naseem Shah (R) celebrates with Babar Azam after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews

## Shafique, Masood propel Pakistan after bowlers shine

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Abdullah Shafique and Shan Masood smashed half-centuries to help Pakistan take the opening day honours after they bundled out Sri Lanka for 166 in the second Test on Monday.

Pakistan, who lead the two-match series 1-0, reached 145-2 at stumps, trailing Sri Lanka by 21 runs in Colombo.

Shafique, on 74, and skipper

Babar Azam, on eight, were at the crease when bad light stopped play for the day.

Shafique put on a second-wicket stand of 108 with the left-handed Masood, who made 51, to put Sri Lanka on the backfoot with their attacking play.

Bowlers set up Pakistan's dominance after leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed and fast bowler Naseem Shah shared seven wick-

ets between them to dismiss the hosts in the second session. In reply, Imam-ul-Haq fell early for six, but Shafique and Masood hit back with a steady flow of boundaries as Pakistan went about with nearly six runs an over for a large part of their innings so far.

Shafique, who was dropped by Prabath Jayasuriya on 42 off his own bowling, reached his fifty with a majestic six.

## Weary Djokovic withdraws from Toronto ATP Masters

Toronto, Canada - World number two Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the ATP Toronto Masters due to fatigue, Tennis Canada said on Sunday.

The announcement comes a week after the 23-time Grand Slam champion from Serbia fell to Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in the final at Wimbledon.

His withdrawal deprives the US Open tune-up tournament that starts on August 7 of a four-time champion.



Novak Djokovic

"I have always enjoyed my time in Canada, but after speaking with my team, we believe this is the right decision to take," Djokovic said in a statement released by Tennis Canada.

"I would like to thank Karl Hale, the Tournament Director, for understanding this decision. I really hope I can return to Canada and Toronto in the coming years to play in front of great fans there."

Alcaraz denied Djokovic a record-equalling eighth Wimbledon title last week, handing him his first defeat on the All England Club's Centre Court in 10 years.

The Spaniard's victory also

ended 36-year-old Djokovic's chance of a calendar Grand Slam after his triumphs at the Australian Open and French Open took his tally of major titles to a men's record 23.

Wimbledon quarter-finalist Christopher Eubanks will now gain automatic entry into the Toronto main draw.

The American defeated fifth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas and 12th-seeded Cameron Norrie en route to the last eight at Wimbledon.

don.

Hale acknowledged that Djokovic, who won the Canadian title in 2007, 2011, 2012 and 2016, would be missed.

"Of course, we're disappointed that Novak won't be playing at the National Bank Open this year," Hale said in a statement. "He's an incredible player and one we know our fans were eager to watch at Sobey's Stadium."

AFP

## Croatia win Hopman Cup for first time since 1996

Paris, France - Croatia won the Hopman Cup for the first time since 1996 on Sunday when Donna Vekic and Borna Coric inspired victory over Switzerland in the final in Nice. Vekic, ranked 22 in the world, defeated number 157 Celine Naef 6-3, 6-4.

Then Coric, the 15th-ranked player in the world, comfortably saw off Leandro Riedi, ranked at 160, by 6-1, 6-4.

Croatia last won the Hopman Cup 27 years ago when Goran

Ivanisevic and Iva Majoli teamed up to beat Switzerland who then featured Martina Hingis and Marc Rosset. Roger Federer led the Swiss to victory in 2019 when the tournament was last played in Perth, Australia.

It was then replaced by the ATP Cup before returning to the schedule in Nice this year.

**Zheng Qinwen wins maiden WTA title**  
China's Zheng Qinwen captured

her first WTA title on Sunday with a three-sets victory over Jasmine Paolini of Italy in the Palermo clay-court final.

The 20-year-old Zheng, ranked at 26 in the world, came through 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 against her 52nd-ranked opponent, registering her 20th match win of the year. It was Zheng's second career final after finishing runner-up in Tokyo last year.

She becomes the 11th Chinese woman to win a WTA singles

title and second in 2023 after Zhu Lin triumphed at Hua Hin in Thailand in February.

"I won my first WTA match here and also my first WTA title, but you probably don't know that I won my first ITF championship in Italy," said Zheng, whose three-hour semi-final win over Mayar Sherif of Egypt only ended in the early hours of Sunday.

"This is really special for me. This is my first WTA 250 championship. I will remember that."

The 27-year-old Paolini was playing her fourth three-set match of the week, having already knocked out top seed Daria Kasatkina in the quarter-finals.

**Mannarino champ**  
French veteran Adrian Mannarino ended Alex Michelsen's dream run in Newport Sunday, beating the 18-year-old American 6-2, 6-4 to capture the third ATP title of his career.



Croatia's Donna Vekic and Borna Coric celebrate after winning the Hopman Cup on Sunday

# Harman lands his biggest prize at British Open

**Hoylake, United Kingdom** - Unheralded Brian Harman, the US golfer with a passion for hunting, is celebrating the biggest trophy of his career after cantering to victory at the British Open on Sunday.

The unflustered world number 26 started his final round at soggy Hoylake five shots clear of his nearest challenger and ended up winning by six.

The left-hander made his big move in the second round on Friday, when he made a six-under-par 65 to surge to 10 under.

He showed his nerve after a wobble on Saturday and it was a similar story on the final day, when he dropped shots on two of his first five holes before hitting successive birdies.

Each time the gap closed Harman found a response, with his supreme putting game serving as the foundation for a final score of 13 under par.

Harman's first major victory at

the 151st Open is a remarkable achievement for a man who has won just twice on the PGA Tour - the John Deere Classic in 2014 and the Wells Fargo Championship three years later.

He has been close winning a major before. Leading going into the final round of the 2017 US Open, he was overtaken by

Open. Before the Open, the 36-year-old had finished in the top 10 five times in the 2022/23 PGA Tour season and had been runner-up three times, but was not among the favourites at Hoylake.

The American, whose previous highest ranking is 20, is aware he is not one of the star names in global golf, but that

*I like the grind. I've always appreciated the hard work that golf takes, and for me that's satisfying enough. I don't need anyone to think one way or the other about me*

BRIAN HARMAN

Brooks Koepka and had to settle for a runners-up spot alongside Hideki Matsuyama.

Harman, who enjoys links golf, gave a glimpse of his pedigree at the 2022 British Open at St Andrews, finishing joint sixth, and he tied for 12th at the recent Scottish

does not faze him.

"I enjoy what I do," he said. "I like the grind. I've always appreciated the hard work that golf takes, and for me that's satisfying enough. I don't need anyone to think one way or the other about me. Someone once told me one



US golfer Brian Harman poses with the Claret Jug after winning the British Open on Sunday (AFP)

time you should do the things that make you lose track of time, and for me, a lot of times when I'm practising hitting balls or putting when I'm at home, I lose track of time. That's how I know that I really enjoy it."

Three-time major winner Padraig Harrington believes Harman has the "perfect chip on his shoulder". "He's a great player but is ignored just because he doesn't fit the mould, doesn't look the part," said the Irishman.

"I think that chip on the shoulder really drives him. I think he's a very determined, gritty person who wants to really prove himself."

Harman has hit the headlines at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club as much for his love of hunting as his golf and has been nicknamed the "Butcher of Hoylake".

The Georgia-born golfer said hunting had taught him "patience and strategy" for his sport.

AFP

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NECK PAIN



# ACHY BREAKY NECK?

- Herniated disk
- A spinal malformation

**Action for relief**  
Depending on the cause and severity of your pain, your doctor may recommend one or more of the following:

- Ice and/or heat at recommended intervals
- Pain relievers or anti-inflammatory medications
- Physical therapy
- At-home neck stretches and exercises
- Spinal manipulation or massage

**Physical therapy**  
Physical therapy is one of the most common treatments for chronic neck pain. The specific methods and exercises used in physical therapy, as well as the duration of the treatment plan, can vary from person to person. Physical therapy for neck pain is aimed at reducing pain and stiffness, improving head and neck range of motion, developing dynamic strengthening of the neck and its supporting musculature and developing strategies to prevent pain from recurring.

There are two forms of physical therapy - passive physical therapy (applying ice packs, heat therapy, massage therapy, ultrasound, electrotherapy) and active physical therapy (exercises and stretches to improve strength and flexibility in the neck)

**T**here's nothing too unusual about having an achy neck from time to time, especially after a long week of desk work. But if it tends to get chronic - one that lasts longer than three months - even simple movements can be a challenge. For neck pain that's consistently interfering with your daily life, don't wait to take action. Simply get moving to get rid of it.

If you suffer from chronic neck pain, an evaluation and treatment can help prevent some problems from becoming debilitating conditions that are more difficult to treat at a later stage.

- Underlying causes:**
- Osteoarthritis
  - Osteoporosis
  - A pinched nerve



## KEY NECK EXERCISES

The following five neck exercises are highly recommended for reducing pain and improving mobility of the neck:

### Neck Extension

Gently extend the neck by looking upward and bringing the head backward while keeping the shoulders and back stationary. Try to hold the stretch for 5 seconds before returning the head to neutral (starting) position.



### Neck Flexion

Gradually lower the chin toward the chest and look downward while only moving the head. Hold the stretch for 5 seconds before returning to neutral position. The neck flexion stretch is felt throughout the back of the neck.



### Lateral Neck Flexion

Slowly bend the head to one side, such as by bringing the left ear toward the left shoulder. During this stretch, the shoulders and back remain still while the neck flexes laterally to the side. Hold the stretch for 5 seconds, then return to neutral position.



### 180° Neck Rotation

While keeping the back straight and shoulders still, gradually turn the head to the left as far as it can naturally go without increasing pain. Once the head has reached its rotation limit, hold the stretch for 5 seconds before bringing it back to neutral position.



### 360° Neck Rotation

As in 'neck extension', extend the neck backwards by looking upward. From this point, rotate the head sideways towards the right side until it comes totally in front. Continue the sideways rotation towards the left until it comes to the starting point. Repeat.



# FAD DIETS...ARE THEY GOOD?



VANDANA CHAWLA

## NUTRITION & YOU

**A** very common statement that people often make is, 'I am on a diet.' The word diet has, somehow, lost its soft, innocent meaning.

As per the Webster dictionary, the term diet is, 'food and drink that a person, animal, or group usually consumes.' However, somewhere down the line, the word 'diet' has taken another meaning - food taken in restricted amounts to lose weight.

Losing weight for medical reasons or for maintaining healthy weight is the key to healthy life. But this should not come at the cost of affecting one's health or one's relationship with food.

Slowly, we have reached a state, where we are looking for quick-fix solutions in everything and this includes our food. From here starts the journey to fad diets or fast diets.

**What is a fad diet?**  
A diet that is marketed as the fastest way of losing weight is a fad diet. There are many such diets and some of them are promoted by celebrities. These include those based on eliminating certain foods that contain necessary nutrients which are very essential for maintain good health.

Some diets suggest foods that can alter the body chemistry as they feel that some hormones are the cause for weight gain. However, many of these diets lack complete scientific authori-

sation.

Nowadays, the most popular diets focus on macronutrients and working on combining these in different proportions. We see diets, like, high-fat-low-carb or low-fat-high-protein or low-carb-high protein diets.

To make diets look more appealing, the focus is on removing certain foods at specific times of the day or allowing certain foods only at certain times of day..

**What's wrong in following fad diets?**

- The first and foremost thing is that many of these diets do bring about initial weight loss. But this weight loss is mainly for losing lean muscle mass and fluid, not fat.
- Its very difficult to maintain this for lifelong as the rules laid down are so restrictive that one often starts with one cheat day in a

- week to gradually many in a week.
- People often get bored of the monotony and look for some other alternatives and lose interest.
- When diets play around with macro nutrients like, carbs, proteins or fats then hunger and fatigue cues are ignored, then this can result in a cycle of weight loss and regain. This is often termed as 'Yo-Yo' mechanism. Not only this mechanism disturbs inner metabolism but also affects our relationship with food, and as a result, food becomes the cause for negative feelings like, failure, lack of confidence etc.
- Moreover, some diets come with inclusion of some expensive foods

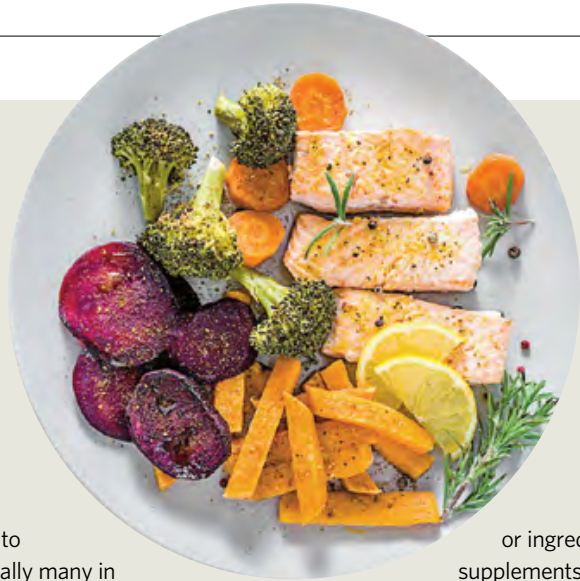
or ingredients or supplements, which are usually not natural but made in laboratories using chemicals which cause harm rather than doing good.

**Points to ponder**

- Before taking up a fad diet, one needs to:
- Find out the reason behind losing weight - is it health-related, about appearance or just fashionable.
- Check if it is worth trying out at the cost of one's health.
- Ensure if one follow this for the rest of one's life.

Watch out for more on different fad diets in coming editions.

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)



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HEART HEALTH

Weekend  
WORKOUTS

Don't sulk if you woke up late and missed your morning workout or had to attend an urgent meeting after work hours and couldn't hit the gym in the evening. You'd still be doing fine, if you undertook exercise or adequate physical activity on other days of the week or postponed everything for the weekend.

Activity guidelines from many leading medical groups — including the World Health Organization and the American Heart Association — have long recommended that people get at least 150 minutes of exercise per week for optimal cardiovascular health. However, guidance has been mixed about when people should exercise — and whether it matters if they spread workouts evenly across several days of the week or get most of their exercise on Saturdays and Sundays.

A new study, published in JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association), suggests that when it comes to heart health, the timing of exercise may not be as important as the amount of activity. Scientists examined data on almost 90,000 people who wore accelerometers to objectively measure their activity levels and found similar reductions in the risk of events like heart attacks and strokes for both, weekend warriors and people who did several workouts over the course of the whole week.

"Our findings suggest that it is likely the total duration of moderate to vigorous activity, rather than the pattern, that matters most for cardiovascular risk," says the lead study author, Shaan Khurshid, an electrophysiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School in Boston. "As a result, more concentrated activity appears to result in similar reductions in risk as more evenly distributed activity."

CONSISTENT EXERCISE BENEFITS

For the study, researchers had participants wear accelerometers for one week to see how much physical activity they got at moderate intensity — such as a brisk walk or biking on flat ground — or vigorous intensity — like a run or cycling on hills.

Almost 38,000 people were so-called active weekend warriors, meaning they got at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity (MVPA) and did at least half of their exercise on weekends. Roughly another 21,000 active people got at least 150 minutes of MVPA with less than half their exercise on weekends.



And about 30,000 participants were considered inactive because they got less than 150 minutes of physical activity.

After about six years of follow-up, both weekend warriors and active people were significantly less likely to experience cardiovascular disease events than participants who were inactive, according to the results.

Weekend warriors were 27% less likely to have a heart attack, 38% less likely to experience heart failure, 22% less likely to have a heart rhythm disorder known as atrial fibrillation, and 21% less likely to have a stroke, the study found.

Similarly, active people who spread their workouts more evenly over the week were 35% less likely to have a heart attack, 36% less likely to experience heart failure,

19% less likely to have atrial fibrillation, and 17% less likely to have a stroke.

TOTAL WEEKLY ACTIVITY

Even so, the results offer fresh evidence that it makes sense for exercise guidelines to emphasise the total amount of activity people get rather than the duration of individual workouts, says Peter Katzmarzyk, a co-author of an editorial accompanying the study in JAMA and the associate executive director for population and public health sciences at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

"This is why the public health recommendations have shifted over the years away from 30 minutes a day to 150

minutes per week," Dr Katzmarzyk says. "There was no strong evidence that physical activity needs to happen every day to accrue health benefits — and this study really shows that accumulating the same amount of activity over a couple of days per week, as opposed to spreading it out, has similar benefits."

Beyond this, people who struggle to get to 150 minutes of physical activity a week should be reassured that every little bit of exercise they get can help, even if they don't do long, intense workouts, says Gregory Katz, MD, a cardiologist and an assistant professor at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine in New York City, who wasn't involved in the study.

The most important thing is just to start moving, and it doesn't need to be a lot or high intensity, Katz says.



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Understanding Upper Gastrointestinal Bleeding

**DR ABDUL FATTAH AL SHADADI**  
Gastroenterologist and hepatologist

Upper gastrointestinal (GI) bleeding is a serious medical condition that involves bleeding in the upper digestive system, which includes the esophagus, stomach, and the first part of the small intestine - duodenum. Prompt medical attention and appropriate treatment are essential in managing upper GI bleeding.

CAUSES

There are several common causes of upper GI bleeding. Peptic ulcers, open sores in the lining of the stomach or upper small intestine, are often to blame. These ulcers can develop due to factors such as infection with Helicobacter pylori

bacteria or the use of certain medications like non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Liver disease can lead to the development of gastric or esophageal varices, enlarged veins in the lower esophagus that can result in severe bleeding. Other causes include gastritis (inflammation of the stomach lining), Mallory-Weiss syndrome (tearing in the esophagus), and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

SYMPTOMS

Recognising the symptoms of upper GI bleeding is vital for prompt medical intervention. Vomiting blood or material that resembles coffee ground is one of the most noticeable signs. Bright red blood in vomit or tarry black stools (melena) can also indicate bleeding. Additionally, individuals experienc-

ing weakness, lightheadedness, or fainting, along with these symptoms, should seek immediate medical attention.

TREATMENT

Treatment for upper GI bleeding depends on the severity and underlying cause of the bleeding. Initial measures may involve stabilising the patient through fluid and blood transfusions. Medications that reduce stomach acid production and promote healing may be prescribed. Endoscopy, a procedure that uses a thin, flexible tube with a camera on its tip, can help diagnose the source of bleeding and provide treatment options. In severe cases, surgical intervention may be necessary.

PREVENTION

Preventing upper GI bleeding involves managing underlying

conditions. For instance, individuals can reduce the risk of peptic ulcers by avoiding excessive alcohol consumption, quitting smoking, and managing stress levels. Proper management of liver disease and prompt treatment of infections like H pylori can also help prevent bleeding. Additionally, it is important to follow prescribed medication guidelines and consult healthcare professionals when using NSAIDs or similar drugs.

Upper GI bleeding is a serious condition that requires immediate attention. Recognising the symptoms and seeking timely treatment can help prevent complications. By understanding the common causes, being aware of the symptoms, and adopting preventive measures, individuals can take steps toward reducing the risk of upper GI bleeding.