

Muscat Daily Anniversary - 13 years of genuine news service

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

Thirteen years ago today, the first edition of *Muscat Daily* hit the stands. As we celebrate years of achievements, we renew our commitment to our readers to continue delivering news that is relevant, reliable and up-to-date.

Muscat Daily has made a name for itself in a world saturated with fake news. With its authoritative voice, the paper has cut through the clutter to make sense of the news.

Many of our readers have testified that *Muscat Daily* is an

important part of their morning and because of this, we renew our vow never to let them down.

Muscat Daily has also fine-tuned the mix of news sought by our readers, striking a balance between reliable local reports and world news. Our sports and business news are also a dependable source of information used by industry leaders and policy makers.

While our online newspaper is active 24/7, to cater to a section of readers who have opted for a digital news feed, demand for our print edition isn't just strong but also growing. *Muscat Daily* is best enjoyed with your



morning cuppa!

A common element in the active feedback from *Muscat*

Daily's subscribers is the paper's engaging content catering to all communities. And the punctual-

ity and regularity with which our subscribers get their copy every morning at their doorstep.

The standout presentation and design of *Muscat Daily* with its striking orange-tinged appearance, adding to its allure, also often find favourable mention in the feedback we receive.

But it is our constant endeavour to improve and further enhance every aspect of the newspaper.

Over the past 13 years, *Muscat Daily* has proved that print media is here to stay. It will survive despite the challenges posed by digital options.

Zanzibar President to visit Oman on Tuesday

Muscat - Dr Hussein Mwinyi, President of Zanzibar, will pay an official visit to Oman starting Tuesday.

A statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court, said, 'To consolidate the long-standing relations and historical and cultural ties between the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar, Dr Hussain Mwinyi, President of Zanzibar will pay a multi-day visit to Oman starting on October 11, 2022. The visit aims to enhance the existing cooperation in several fields and push these towards broader and more comprehensive horizons in the service of common interests and in order to achieve more growth, development and pros-



Dr Hussein Mwinyi

perity.

'During the visit, aspects of existing cooperation between the two countries and ways to strengthen these will be discussed to achieve the desired goals and aspirations of the two peoples.'

ONA

► NEWS BRIEF

HIS MAJESTY PARDONS 325 PRISONERS

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, issued Royal Pardon to a number of prisoners convicted for various cases on Saturday. Of the 325 prisoners who were granted Royal Pardon, 141 convicts were foreign nationals. His Majesty's Royal Pardon coincides with Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) birthday and in consideration of the families of the prisoners.



Shahida Ahmed's *Through Brown Eyes* to release today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has praised Oman's efforts in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis and reviving the economy after the pandemic.

IMF said that higher oil prices, fiscal consolidation measures and progress on structural reforms are supporting a post-pandemic economic recovery in the sultanate.

An IMF mission, led by Daniel Kanda, conducted discussions in Muscat for the 2022 Article IV Consultation for Oman from September 20 to October 4, 2022.

In a statement issued at the conclusion of the IMF mission to Oman, Kanda said the sultanate's economic recovery is gaining traction, supported by revival in the hydrocarbon sector and relaxation of COVID-19 social restrictions.

"High oil prices, continued fis-



cal consolidation under the authorities' Medium-Term Fiscal Plan, and determined implementation of structural reforms under Oman Vision 2040 are expected to generate fiscal and external surpluses and support higher growth over the medium term," he said.

IMF now projects Oman's economic growth at 4.3 per cent for 2022, supported by increased

hydrocarbon production and continued recovery of non-oil economic activity.

"Omani authorities continue to press forward with a broad array of structural reforms under Oman Vision 2040, with the goal to achieve the strong, job-rich and sustainable private sector-led growth needed to offer opportunities to jobseekers and ensure higher living standards for

future generations," Kanda said.

"Oman's key priorities include enhancing labour market flexibility, boosting female employment, improving the business environment, advancing state-owned enterprises reforms, leveraging digitalisation, and continuing the implementation of green initiatives," he added.

IMF noted that elevated oil prices and fiscal consolidation

Oman's key priorities include enhancing labour market flexibility, boosting female employment and improving the business environment

DANIEL KANDA

under the authorities' Medium-Term Fiscal Plan have improved Oman's fiscal and external balances considerably.

"The overall central government fiscal balance improved by 12.8 percentage points of GDP to a deficit of 3.2 per cent in 2021, largely due to higher oil revenue, expenditure restraint, and the introduction of VAT. Fiscal and external surpluses are expected in

2022 and over the medium term," Kanda said.

He noted that Oman government's debt declined to 62.9 per cent of GDP in 2021 and it is expected to decline to about 44 per cent of GDP in 2022.

Commenting on inflation, Kanda said Oman's consumer price inflation has been contained thus far, partly reflecting administered prices and caps on selected fuel prices.

"Rebounding economic activity and elevated global inflationary pressures are expected to push up average inflation to three per cent in 2022 given the relatively high dependence on imports. Direct spillovers on the Omani economy from the war in Ukraine have been limited."

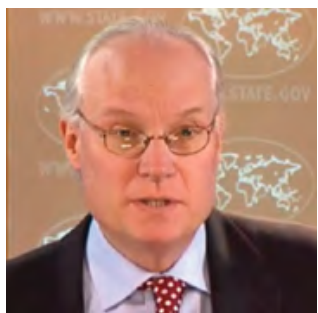
IMF, however, warned that the heightened global uncertainties, particularly from the war in Ukraine, continue to cloud the outlook, with downside risks dominating in the short run.

US values Oman's efforts for Yemen peace

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The United States of America valued the efforts made by Oman under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in backing the peace process in Yemen.

In a telephonic press briefing on Thursday, in which ONA took part, Tim Lenderking, US Special Envoy for Yemen, said the US is in constant communication and consultation with the Omani government in a bid to support security and stability in Yemen. He asserted that his country



Tim Lenderking

highly appreciates the benign Omani endeavours and keenness to forge a peaceful solution to the Yemeni crisis.

The US Envoy referred to a recent phone call between Sayyid

Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and his US counterpart, Antony Blinken, during which they discussed joint efforts to enhance security and support dialogue between the warring parties in Yemen.

As for the truce in Yemen, Lenderking explained that exaggeration of demands prevented a decision to extend the truce. He urged all Yemeni parties to make more concessions and place the interest of Yemen and its people above all else.

He stressed that the diplomatic approach adopted by the United Nations, the US and the

entire international community will continue in Yemen to reach a comprehensive political solution to the crisis.

He added that he will have a tour of the region soon within the framework of this diplomacy backed by the US.

Hans Grundberg, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, announced last Sunday that the Yemeni parties had not reached an agreement to extend the truce.

The UN Envoy urged all parties to meet their obligations towards Yemen and its people, and to pursue all avenues that could lead to peace.

1,500 Omani volunteers delegated for World Cup

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Almost 1,500 volunteers from Oman Scouts and Guides will attend FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Their primary job will be to make the mega sporting event a success by lending a helping hand in managing crowds in stadiums, overseeing seating arrangement, accommodation, and cleanliness and hygiene among other tasks.

Part of the Ministry of Education, the first unit of Oman Scouts and Guides was formed in 1932. In 1975, the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said issued a Royal Decree (No 10/75) to set up the headquarters of Oman Scouts and



Yaqoob Khalfan al Nadabi

Guides under his direct supervision.

About Oman Scouts and Guides' engagement in the World Cup, Yaqoob Khalfan al Nadabi, Director and Manager of Oman Scouts and Guides, Ministry of Education, said, "We have shared a cordial relationship with Qatar since time immemorial. We are happy to collaborate with



Hilal Ahmed al Kharousi

the Qatari authorities and delegate 1,500 of our members to the mega event."

He added that the volunteers are currently undergoing training in various aspects, including sports management, and will leave for Doha in the first week of November.

The volunteers include men and women between the ages 18

to 58 years.

Hilal Ahmed al Kharousi, a member of Oman Scouts and Guides, said, "We have been training for months and the time to leave for Qatar is finally nearing. We will leave in November and stay for a month in and around stadiums in Doha. This is our biggest and the most challenging event until now, where we will face people from all over the world. We need to learn about mannerisms and sensitivities of people from diverse backgrounds, which makes our training challenging."

Members of Oman Scouts and Guides have taken part in several big events in and outside Oman, including the recently concluded Ironman 70.3 Salalah.



Announcement



In implementation of the provisions of VAT Act and its Executive Regulations, the Tax Authority calls on taxpayers to file their tax returns for the third quarter of 2022 in accordance with the tax return form which is available on e-services portal www.taxoman.gov.om and attach all required financial statements to it, to no later than **30 October 2022** We hope all taxpayers comply with the deadline for submitting the return.

Building bridges

The French Embassy in Muscat has a new cultural attaché whose preparations for the job started when she was a little girl

Tridwip K Das
Muscat

Alix Fade's appointment as cultural attaché at the French Embassy in Oman in August was probably preordained. Following seven years in the art and luxury sector in Paris, she embarked on a journey to explore an old love - Arab culture and all things Arabic. Her tour of the region brought her to Oman, and within 24 hours she realised this was where she was meant to be.

Not much later, including periods of pandemic-induced lockdowns, there appeared a notice for an opening at the French Embassy in Muscat. The job was tailored-made for Alix. This is the kind of story that makes one believe in destiny.

Alix's job function includes supporting and developing the friendly ties between Oman and France and strengthening bilateral exchange through cultural action. "We have close co-operation in the educational sector and technical fields. Omani students are granted scholarships to study in France, French archeologists come to work in Oman; doctors from here train in France; French students of jurisprudence visit Oman... there are many such exchanges with the objective of building and improving skills." The two countries learn from each other's experiences, which Alix describes as "mutual enrichment" and "reciprocity in influences".

The question of how Alix landed the job results in a flood of memories; of a childhood when the seeds of her love for Arab culture were sown. "I am often asked why I am so interested in Arab culture and language. And for that, I start at the very beginning..."

GROWING UP ON UMM KULTHUM

She was raised in Brittany in a house full of art, books and curios from all over the world. One of her grandfathers, a distinguished colonel in the French army, served in North Africa and French Indochina (present day Vietnam); the other, a canal and port engineer, lived in Palestine, Egypt, Zambia and South Africa, among other places. "I grew up with these art objects and souvenirs, inspired by stories from the Far East, Africa and most of all the Arab coun-

tries. I remember being mesmerised by Umm Kulthum. We don't have Arab origins, but we were drawn to the culture." The exposure to different cultures

paintings for an auction house.

"Though I studied heritage restoration and history of art, I was also interested in interior decoration because you need a proper frame to put the restored art and a nice place in the house to display it," she says, explaining with a schematic diagram of a painting, then drawing a frame for it and a room around it with a window next to it. "And then you open the window and there is a world out there to explore," she speaks in poetic analogies.

IN CIRCLES

So in 2019, Alix set off on a yearlong tour

of the region to learn about the peculiarities within Arab culture in different countries and "how these can enter into a dialogue with my culture. I wanted to put my own culture in the context of these cultures. I started my journey in Jordan, then went to Palestine, Lebanon, the UAE, Oman and ended in Tunisia and Morocco in North Africa. I travelled in a circle; I love circles".

She travelled on her own and wrote about her journey - not only about Arab culture but the experiences of a single woman out on her own. Her aim was to show that the "friendship is real between Europe and the Middle East and

This is where I could belong... temporarily... basically, I was seduced by the people, the tranquility, the respect for nature... everything," she says, running out of words.

It was during that visit that she learnt about the Diwan of Royal Court's Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic Language to Non-Native Speakers in Manah. Back in Paris, she applied for admission and was accepted. Thanks to the basics of the language she picked up during her yearlong journey of the region, she was able to join Level 3. The complete programme consists of six levels, eight week each.

The college takes in about 40 students from different nationalities in a batch. "Sometimes, we couldn't speak in a common language. Some people didn't speak English. I had a friend from Korea, another from Turkey, who didn't know a word of English. So, we spoke in our different levels of Arabic, using a lot of body language to understand each other."

Alix loved the experience and after completing Level 3, she applied for Level 4 for which she was sponsored by the Omani Embassy in France. But two weeks into Level 4, COVID-19 struck, forcing her to pack her bags and return to Paris in March 2020 without bidding goodbye to anyone.

"It was very difficult to be away from Oman. So after the travel restrictions were lifted, I came back in December 2021 to see the places that I loved and say goodbye to the people I met. I thought that chapter of my life was a parenthesis that had to be closed in order to move on with all the experiences I had gained. But then I saw this ad on social media for a job in the French Embassy. Everyone said, 'Alix, this is tailor-made for you. Go apply.' I did and here I am."

PRONUNCIATIONS - A NIGHTMARE

About her level of proficiency in Arabic, Alix says she can hold a conversation like a "child". With an adult, she can say most of the things she wants to albeit in a childish vocabulary. "Pronunciations are my nightmare. I know the word in Arabic, I know how it's written but I can't pronounce it. There are difficulties in Arabic everywhere, but beauty is everywhere, too. So, it makes me want to go deeper."

While it may not be feasible to take time out from the cultural attaché's diary to complete the remaining six weeks of Level 4 that was disrupted by the pandemic, Alix is committed to furthering the dialogue between France and Oman and put her own culture in the context of Omani culture.

Alix is currently focused on exchanges between museums of France and Oman. "First as an exhibition in Oman and then in France; it will be of outstanding importance," she says without revealing more details and ending on a curious note.



(Tridwip K Das/Muscat Daily)

Pronunciations are my nightmare. I know the word in Arabic, I know how it's written but I can't pronounce it. There are difficulties in Arabic everywhere, but beauty is everywhere, too. So, it makes me want to go deeper

ALIX FADE

that we don't have to fear anything". She also took Arabic classes in every country she visited to understand the culture better.

And so she arrived in Oman, and in 24 hours she knew this was where she was meant to be. She had her "revelation" in Wadi Shab. She was standing on a rock 12m above the water, when an Omani gentleman invited her to jump in. "I am a bit afraid of water, so I said I can't jump. But he said, have faith. His voice seemed like the voice of Oman. I told myself, I should trust and jump, so I jumped."

LEAP OF FAITH

It was the proverbial leap of faith. "It's really difficult to explain; it was a very intimate feeling, like a spiritual connection with the country. I knew this was a call.



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WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

Ministry calls for people who face psychological issues not to be shy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To mark World Mental Health Day, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has urged people who face psychological issues not to be shy about consulting a psychiatrist.

The theme of World Mental Health Day 2022, which is observed on October 10 every year, as set by the World Federation for Mental Health is 'Make mental health for all a global priority'.

According to an official of MoH, many people struggling with mental health issues don't get help because they are ashamed and don't know that there are professionals and treatment for their help.

The World Health Organization has reported an increase in the prevalence of mental disorders. One in eight people had a mental disorder in 2019. Anxiety and depression were the most common types of mental disorders.

'Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were a lot more people in 2020 who had anxiety and depression disorders and in just one year, the numbers went up by 26 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively,' a WHO re-



Scientific studies have shown a relationship between the psychological state of an individual and his physical immunity; people who enjoy good mental health have better immunity and vice versa

DR HAMAD AL SINAWI



port said.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr Hamad al Sinawi, chairman of Oman Alzheimer's Society and consultant psychiatrist in the De-

partment of Behavioural Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said, "Some people are ashamed to visit a psychiatrist because they think that a men-

tally ill person is a crazy person and he has weak faith."

About the spread of mental illness, he said, "Unfortunately, there are some reasons such as

the lack of specialised psychiatrists in Oman and the lack of psychiatric clinics in remote areas. There are also some misconceptions about psychiatric treatment. Some people believe psychiatric drugs cause addiction, which is not true.

"Unfortunately, some also consider a mentally ill person as a person with envy or delusions. Some patients also turn to non-professionals or come late for treatment."

Urging people to seek help, he said, "People must realise that mental illness is a disease like any other disease, such as blood pressure and diabetes."

Dr Sinawi also advised people to avoid frustrating news and rumours. "Scientific studies have shown a relationship between the psychological state of an individual and his physical immunity; people who enjoy good mental health have better immunity and vice versa."

He also informed that those suffering from anxiety can request psychological counselling from specialists through virtual clinics that allow them to speak with a doctor or psychotherapist via video conferencing within safe programmes that preserve the privacy of patients.

Newly amended visa medical check-up procedures from Nov

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, has directed amendments to procedures of visa medical check-up when applying for new or renewing residency visas in the sultanate, in addition to cancelling related fees at private health institutions with effect from November 1.

The new amendments stipulate that the visa medical check-up application form should be requested from Sanad Offices for a fee of RO30 followed by a medical examination in any private medical fitness centres for which there is no charge.

The residence visa medical check-up results will be uploaded and approved electronically by the Ministry of Health. The applicant can collect the report within 24 hours.

Earlier, visa medical check-up in private health institutions involved a fee in addition to a fee for MoH approved re-

sults.

The new decision reflects MoH's keenness to regulate visa medical check-up services in a streamlined and cost-effective manner.

In June, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) appealed to MoH to exempt expatriate workers from medical examination fee in its efforts to support the private sector. The request was raised at OCCI Dhahira branch's third

meeting of 2022 headed by Saif bin Said al Badi, head of OCCI Dhahira.

Badi said, "OCCI values the Royal Directives to provide facilities to small and medium enterprises, which in turn will enhance their capabilities and resources. It will also help them grow and increase their contribution to the GDP."

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, expatriate workers were required to get a check-up done at MoH medical centres for visa processing and were charged RO30.



OMAN SCIENCE FESTIVAL BEGINS TODAY



The six-day long Oman Science Festival - in its third edition, under the slogan 'Together we live the passion for science' - is starting at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday. The festival aims to infuse scientific temperament among the students and general members of the society in an interactive way that may stimulate creative thinking, innovation and scientific research (ONA)

Conference to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on economy, society

Muscat - A three-day conference to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country's economy and society will start at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Monday.

H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, will attend the conference that is being organised by the Humanitarian Research Centre with representation of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry Research Chair for Economic Studies.

"The conference comes within a series of events held by the university and will continue for three days," said Dr Majid bin Saeed al Busafi, director of the centre and head of the conference's main committee, adding that it aims to bring together



The conference comes within a series of events held by the university and will continue for three days

DR MAJID AL BUSAFI

scholars, researchers, and policymakers from various sectors to discuss policy measures taken by

governments and individuals to mitigate the economic and social consequences of the pandemic or any such crises that may occur in the future.

The conference is an international platform for exchanging views, visions and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the economic, financial, social and other sectors.

The main topics are the impact of the pandemic on the economy, business and society, in addition to its impact on financial policies, international trade, logistics, public policy, and global responses to COVID-19.

The conference will also evaluate the effectiveness of the political measures taken by governments to mitigate the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

PDO becomes region's first company to be accredited by Britain's prestigious APM charity

Muscat - Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has become the first company in the Middle East to be accredited by the Association for Project Management (APM) - a British professional organisation for project and programme management.

This accreditation confirms that the PDO project management competence development system is at par with other major international capital-intensive organisations. 'As such, senior PDO project managers who have gone through the company's competence development scheme will have a fast-track to attaining the coveted Chartered Project Professional (ChPP) status,' said PDO in a press statement.

"This is a great achievement and not only showcases the standard to which we work but will showcase that our leaders in PDO have reached a level of competency that competes at a global level," PDO's technical director Sami Baqi said.



Ali Cox, the organisation's head of Project Management expressed delight having this milestone achieved and thanked the APM for their diligence through this process. "The safe and effective delivery of capital projects is central to our business, and we are confident that this accreditation will help our future project leaders to be equipped for the

opportunities and challenges this entails," Cox added.

Milla Mazilu, Board Chair at the APM said, "We are delighted to see APM's chartered standard being adopted by PDO. This demonstrates a commitment to high standards and ethics in project delivery that will add value to their team, customers and stakeholders for years to come."

The accreditation by the only chartered membership organisation for the project profession was presented to the PDO team at a ceremony held in London. The event was attended by PDO's Ali Cox and project delivery manager Said Maktoomi, besides the APM's Mazilu, its director of Membership and Business Development Rebecca Fox, deputy CEO Mark Hepworth and other team members.

UK Government Department for International Trade (DIT) representative, Sarah Chidgey, the head of International Education in the Services and Skills Directorate, was also present at the award ceremony. "This is an exciting collaboration between the UK and Oman," she said. "DIT's education team, as part of the International Education Strategy, promotes the UK's vocational training system overseas, including the chartered status, as a hallmark of quality. I am sure this partnership will make a real difference to employees of PDO."

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Moody's upgrades outlook on Oman ratings to 'positive'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global credit rating agency, Moody's Investors Service, has upgraded the outlook on Oman's issuer rating to 'positive' from 'stable' and affirmed its long-term issuer and senior unsecured ratings at 'Ba3'.

Moody's also affirmed the government of Oman's (P)Ba3 senior unsecured medium-term note program rating.

The change of outlook to 'positive' reflects the strengthening of Oman's debt burden and debt affordability metrics during 2022, mainly as a result of elevated oil prices and the prospect that this improvement could be sustained in the medium-term, Moody's said in a statement.

Oman's balance sheet repair that has already taken place this year restores the fiscal space that the sovereign had lost during 2020. Meanwhile, the prospect that oil prices remain elevated for the next few years affords the government additional time to advance its fiscal and economic reform agenda,' Moody's said.

The affirmation of the 'Ba3' ratings reflects Moody's view that, despite the fiscal and current account improvements since 2020, Oman's structural vulnerability to potential future declines in oil demand and prices remain very high, exposing the sovereign to reversals of the improvements in government debt and debt affordability metrics.



Moody's rating action also applies to Oman Sovereign Sukuk SAOC, a special-purpose vehicle domiciled in Oman, whose obligations, in Moody's view, are ultimately the obligation of the government of Oman. The en-

ue windfall for Oman, turning its large fiscal deficits in the past, averaging 9.6 per cent of GDP during 2014-21, into a material surplus.

Based on the assumption that oil prices average US\$105 a bar-

since 2015.

Moody's forecasts that Oman's government debt will decline to less than 45 per cent of GDP by the end of this year from 63 per cent of GDP in 2021. This reduction in the debt burden is below the level at the end of 2019 (52 per cent of GDP), more than fully reversing Oman's loss of fiscal space sustained during 2020 and increasing the sovereign's resilience ahead of the potential next oil price shock.

Although Moody's expects oil prices to remain volatile and eventually decline to US\$50-US\$70 per barrel in the medium term, the agency's near-term assumption is that the geopolitical risk premium due to the military conflict in Ukraine will keep oil prices elevated during the next two years, staying above the medium-term fundamental range well into 2024.

Moody's estimates that Oman's full-year fiscal surplus will be close to 6% of GDP this year, offering the government an opportunity to reverse some of the balance sheet deterioration it has sustained since 2015

ty's backed senior unsecured ratings and its backed senior unsecured medium-term note program rating were affirmed at Ba3 and (P)Ba3, respectively.

A surge in oil prices, Moody's said, has generated a large rev-

rel in 2022, Moody's estimates that Oman's full-year fiscal surplus will be close to 6 per cent of GDP this year, offering the government an opportunity to reverse some of the balance sheet deterioration it has sustained

Sohar International raises RO160mn through largest domestic rights issue

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Receiving an overwhelming response from investors, Sohar International Bank on Sunday announced a fully subscribed rights issue of RO160mn.

The funds raised through this rights issue will contribute to enhancing Sohar International's capital base in order to meet the bank's ambitious strategic growth objectives, the bank said in a press statement.

Sohar International issued RO160mn in new shares through a rights issue at 102bz per share (including 2bz per share as cost of issuance) starting on September 12, 2022.

The issuance was fully subscribed with strong investor appetite across government and corporate institutions, family offices and retail, according to the bank.

Ahmed al Musalmi, CEO of Sohar International, said, "The fully subscribed rights issue is a strong testament to the bank's capacity in attracting and raising adequate capital.

This is because Sohar International has not just demonstrated utmost resilience in times of uncertainty but has remained consistent in recording exceptional performance across all its operations.

Committed to acting as a catalyst for socio-economic progress and strongly aligned to Oman Vision 2040, the bank has



The funds raised through this rights issue will contribute to enhancing Sohar International's capital base in order to meet the bank's ambitious strategic growth objectives

also earned strong goodwill in the market because of its ground-breaking initiatives that have led to transformational change in the sector."

"The increase in capital base will further enhance the bank's position and help leverage market opportunities and expand

horizons while contributing to the country's progress," he added.

Sohar International's extraordinary general meeting held in August 2022 had approved the increase of the authorised share capital of the bank from RO400mn to RO1bn while amending Article 5 of the Articles of Association accordingly.

With well-defined policies and operations conducted in accordance with the predefined banking laws of the country, Sohar International ensures it adheres to international best practices.

In addition, through the rights issue, the bank has also provided an impetus to capital market activities. Sohar International's investment banking division acted as the issue manager and placement agent for the rights issue.

IMF chief warns of global recession

Washington, US - IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva has urged global policymakers to take concerted action to avoid a "dangerous 'new normal,'" as the risks of a worldwide recession are driven ever higher by repeated economic shocks.

In a speech ahead of the fund's annual meetings next week, the IMF's managing director said it was critical to "stabilize the global economy by addressing the most immediate challenges" - including rampant inflation.

Policymakers need to act together to "prevent this period of heightened fragility from becoming a dangerous 'new normal,'" Georgieva said.

But she warned the process will be painful - and acknowledged that if central banks move too aggressively to tamp down price pressures, it could trigger a "prolonged" economic downturn.

Finance ministers and central bank governors from more than 180 nations will gather next week in Washington for the first fully in-person meeting of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank since 2019, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The meetings come at a difficult time for the global economy, with the pandemic largely under control, but soaring prices and rising interest rates now threatening to reverberate around the globe and choke off nascent recoveries.

But the IMF chief said it is too soon for major central banks to pull back in the battle against inflation that has reached its highest in four decades.

Inflation remains "still stubborn, still persistent," Georgieva told AFP in an inter-



IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva

view.

"The risk of doing not enough is bigger than the risk of doing too much," she said. "Clearly they have to do more. They have to stay the course."

IMF plans to once again downgrade its 2023 forecast for the world economy, in the report due to be published this week for the annual meeting

'Shock, after shock'

Amid a "darkening global outlook... the risks of recession are rising," Georgieva said in her speech, noting that a third of countries are expected to see at least two quarters of contraction.

And "even when growth is positive, it will feel like a reces-

sion" because of rising prices eroding incomes.

The crisis lender plans to once again downgrade its 2023 forecast for the world economy, in the report due to be published next week for the annual meeting.

The fund in July slashed its growth forecast for this year to 3.2 per cent, and for next year to 2.9 per cent - the third consecutive downgrade.

"In less than three years we lived through shock, after shock, after shock," Georgieva said in her speech at Georgetown University.

Global supply snarls already were a challenge as demand surged following the pandemic slowdown, fueling inflation worldwide, and strains worsened in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine - Georgieva called it a "senseless war" - sending food and fuel prices soaring, which has spread to rising costs for other items.

"Far from being transitory, inflation has become more persistent," and acting before high

prices become entrenched is a key challenge for policymakers, Georgieva said.

Failure to win the battle will "undermine the foundation for growth" as rising prices create a tax on the poor, she told AFP.

But she warned, "the cost of a policy misstep can be enormous."

"Not tightening enough would cause inflation to become deanchored and entrenched," but central banks moving "too much and too fast - and doing so in a synchronised manner across countries - could push many economies into prolonged recession," she said in the speech.

"This is not easy, and it will not be without pain in the near term," she cautioned.

Debt distress

Georgieva stressed the need for fiscal policies to help the most vulnerable segments of society, but warned that efforts must be targeted "with a laser-sharp focus on lower-income households," to avoid acting against the current of monetary policy.

She cautioned against relying on price controls which are not affordable nor effective.

The pandemic forced many countries to take on more borrowing, and now many are already facing or at risk of debt distress amid rising interest rates. That "raises the risk of a widening debt crisis" which could further harm global growth.

To reduce the risk "large creditors such as China and private-sector creditors have a responsibility to act," she said, calling for "faster and more predictable" action on debt restructuring.

AFP

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MUSCAT DAILY

US job gains slow slightly, but not enough to ease inflation

Washington, US – US job gains slowed slightly in September, offering some good news for the Federal Reserve as it works to cool the economy, but official data released on Friday also showed wages continued to rise, underlining the challenge to tamping down rampant inflation.

President Joe Biden, who has seen his approval erode in the face of surging prices, cheered the data as a sign of "historic progress" in the economy, even while he said there is more work to do to help American families.

But the central bank likely will want to see more evidence of slowing price increases, which have soared at the fastest pace in 40 years, before pulling back on its aggressive interest rate increases. And economists say another big hike remains likely next month.

The economy added 263,000 jobs last month, showing a steady slowdown from the blistering pace in 2020 and 2021, the Labor Department said in the closely-watched report. The unemployment rate slipped two-tenths of a percentage point to 3.5 per cent.

Biden said the gain brings the total jobs created since he took office in January 2021 to 10mn.

"Our job market continues to show resilience as we navigate through this economic transition we're in," he said in a speech at a Volvo plant in Hagerstown,



A file photo shows 'We Are Hiring' sign is posted in front of a restaurant in Los Angeles, California (AFP)

Maryland.

Following the rapid turnaround from the worst of the pandemic, "we have to move from historically strong economic recovery to a more steady, stable recovery," Biden said.

Wages still rising

But he stressed, "We need to bring inflation down without giving up all the historic economic progress that working class and middle class people have made."

While the US president cheered the increase in wages caused by the strong labor market, that is of more concern for the Fed.

The report showed a 10-cent

increase in average hourly earnings in the month to US\$32.46. Over the past 12 months, average hourly earnings have increased by 5.0 per cent, still high but a slowing from the pace seen over the past year.

The central bankers are watching closely to see if wages continue to accelerate, which would fuel further inflationary pressures.

The Fed has raised the benchmark lending rate five times this year and said more tightening will be needed to get inflation down, but it acknowledges that the process could cause a painful economic slowdown.

"A moderation in job and wage growth will be welcome

developments for Fed officials. However, these data do not change the near-term course of monetary policy," Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics said in an analysis.

Fed officials in recent comments have made it clear that no single data report will change their trajectory since it will take time for inflation to get back down to the two percent goal, which will require more rate hikes.

Worker shortage?

Robert Frick, corporate economist with Navy Federal Credit Union, called the September data "a Goldilocks jobs report."

He said it was "cool enough

to make the Fed happy that the 'tight' labour market is loosening, and warm enough to satisfy most Americans looking for work, or looking to switch jobs for higher pay."

Jason Furman, a former White House economist, said only two "surprisingly low" inflation reports before the November 1-2 policy meeting could cause the Fed to pivot its stance.

"And while economic forecasting can be difficult, I'm reasonably confident the chances of that happening are precisely zero per cent," Furman tweeted.

US employers continue to complain that they have difficulty filling open positions, and the Fed wants to see signs of an easing in the tight labor market.

The data showed notable gains in the leisure and hospitality sector and in health care, and a decline in government jobs.

The unemployment rate, which edged up in August as more workers came off the sidelines to join the labor force, slipped back last month, and the participation rate was barely changed at 62.3 per cent as the pool of available workers was about steady.

Hurricane Ian, which caused massive devastation, especially in Florida, "had no discernible effect" on the data, which was collected before the storm made landfall.

AFP



US President Joe Biden

US says 'all options' on table in response to OPEC+ cuts

Washington, US – The White House on Thursday said "all options" are being considered after the OPEC+ group's decision to cut oil production, despite US arguments that this will raise fuel costs and endanger world economies. President Joe Biden's administration is angry at ally Saudi Arabia for overseeing Wednesday's move by the OPEC cartel and an additional group of 10 exporters led by Russia to cut production by two million barrels a day in a bid to boost oil prices.

The decision came as Biden leads international efforts to isolate major energy producer Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, while also working to tamp down US consumer prices ahead of midterm elections next month.

"Disappointment. We're looking at what alternatives we may have" to counter the expected price hikes, Biden told reporters.

Biden said there were "a lot of alternatives."

These could include further

releases from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve, potentially increased US domestic drilling, and more drastic measures, including limits on exports.

Officials remain guarded on what the next move will be but Biden's chief economic advisor, Brian Deese, told reporters aboard Air Force One that "we need to look at... what tools are necessary."

Asked whether this could include a ban or limit on exports of US production, Deese said "the president has directed that we have all options on the table - and that will continue to be the case. And so that's how we're approaching this question."

Deese also declined to rule out an idea being debated in Congress for a law stripping sovereign immunity in antitrust suits, something which would potentially allow the US government to take the oil cartel members to court.

AFP

Judge halts Twitter-Musk case, sets October 28 deadline to close deal

New York, US – A US judge on Thursday suspended litigation in the saga over Elon Musk's proposed US\$44bn takeover of Twitter, giving the parties until October 28 to finalize the on-again, off-again megadeal.

Delaware Judge Kathleen McCormick, ruling on a Musk request to freeze the case that had drawn a biting retort from Twitter, said a trial originally scheduled to begin in 11 days could be rescheduled for next month if a deal is not finalised.

"If the transaction does not close by 5pm on October 28, 2022, the parties are instructed to contact me by email that evening to obtain November 2022 trial dates," McCormick said in the order.

The move buys time for a potential reconciliation between two parties that began squabbling as soon as Musk sealed an agreement in April to purchase the influential social media site for US\$54.20 per share.

With an October 17 trial date on Twitter's breach-of-contract suits against Musk looming, the unpredictable Tesla boss did an about-face on Tuesday, reviving his US\$44bn takeover plan on condition the Delaware court halt the lawsuit against him.

Twitter said Tuesday it expects to close the buyout deal at the US\$54.20 price in a statement that did not address Musk's demands over freezing the litigation.

Legal briefs filed earlier Thursday shed further light on prickly proceedings characterized by mutual distrust.

"There is no need for an expedited trial to order Defendants to do what they are already doing and this action is now moot," said a filing prepared by Musk's attorneys that alluded to his latest offer.

"Yet, Twitter will not take yes for an answer. Astonishingly they have insisted on proceeding



In this photo illustration, a phone screen displays a photo of Elon Musk with the Twitter logo shown in the background, in Washington, DC (AFP)

with this litigation, recklessly putting the deal at risk and gambling with their stockholders interests."

The filing said Twitter had opposed a suspension on the "theoretical possibility" of lack of financing for the transaction, adding that Musk has access to financing to close the deal "on or around October 28."

Twitter refuted those arguments, noting that Musk's side had still not committed to a closing date and calling Musk's latest appeal "an invitation to further mischief and delay," Twitter attorneys said in a filing to the Delaware court.

"Trust us," they say, "we mean it this time," Twitter lawyers said in a brief that described Musk as seeking an "indefinite" time frame to close the deal.

"The obstacle to terminating this litigation is not, as Defendants say, that Twitter is unwilling to take yes for an answer. The obstacle is that Defendants still refuse to accept their contractual obligations."

"Until Defendants commit to close as required, Twitter is entitled to its day in court to... prove Defendants' breaches so as to ensure complete relief in the event the closing should for any

reason not occur," they said.

Analysts say the litigation provides leverage to Twitter against the risk of another shift by Musk.

US media have reported that the talks are stuck in part on Musk's assertion that the deal is contingent on billions of dollars in debt financing by major banks.

Twitter "thought they had a deal before," said Adam Badawi, a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley. "So to actually accept something from (Musk), it's going to have to be as ironclad as it possibly can."

But experts were eyeing the latest court twist as beneficial for Musk.

"I think it's definitely an advantage to him. I mean, he obviously very much wanted to delay this," Ann Lipton, a law professor at Tulane University, told AFP.

But she noted the advantage would shift to Twitter should Musk not seal the deal by October 28.

"If somehow that doesn't happen, I think that Twitter will have a stronger case that he's been acting in bad faith all along, which... justifies whatever equitable remedies would be appropriate for that," Lipton added.

AFP

IMF releases \$1.3bn aid for Ukraine

Washington, US – The International Monetary Fund announced Friday it will provide US\$1.3bn in emergency aid to Ukraine through its new food crisis assistance program.

The package will help meet Ukraine's "urgent balance of payment needs... while playing a catalytic role for future financial support from Ukraine's creditors and donors," the IMF said in a statement.

"The scale and intensity of Russia's war against Ukraine that started more than seven months ago have caused tremendous human suffering and economic pain.... Real GDP is projected to contract by 35 per cent in 2022 relative to 2021 and financing needs remain very large."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had unveiled the IMF's aid earlier Friday. "The money will go to Ukraine



today," he said on Twitter, thanking the crisis lender's managing director Kristalina Georgieva and its executive board.

The IMF also said Ukrainian authorities "deserve considerable credit for having maintained an important degree of macro-financial stability in these extremely challenging circumstances."

For her part, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva

said that key policies have been geared toward safeguarding priority expenditures and preserving financial stability.

"Creditors and donors - through the relevant Executive Directors at the Fund - have signaled that they intend to continue financially supporting Ukraine to help achieve a balanced growth path and medium-term external viability," she added.

Last week, the World Bank granted Ukraine US\$530mn in additional aid to "meet urgent needs created by Russia's invasion." The bank said it had already mobilized almost US\$13bn in emergency funding for Ukraine, US\$11bn of which had already been disbursed.

The same day, the US Congress approved a new US\$12.3bn aid package for Ukraine, including US\$3.7bn in military equipment. The United States has given a total of US\$65bn to Kyiv since Russia invaded in February.

President Vladimir Putin announced late last month that Russia had annexed four regions in Ukraine's south and east. But Kyiv's forces in recent weeks have been pushing back against Russian soldiers across the frontlines, including in parts of Donetsk.

AFP

Samsung Electronics forecasts 32% decline in third quarter profits

Seoul, South Korea – Samsung Electronics expects operating profits in the third quarter to fall 31.7 per cent, the South Korean tech giant said in a statement Friday, after a global economic downturn hit demand for consumer electronics.

The latest forecast is the company's first projection of a year-on-year decline in profit for nearly three years.

Operating profit for July to September was predicted to reach 10.8tn won (US\$7.7bn), down 31.7 per cent from 15.8tn won a year earlier, the world's major maker of smartphones and memory chips said in a statement.

But the company said it expected sales to increase by 2.7 per cent from the same period last year to 76tn won.



The firm is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung Group, by far the biggest of the family-controlled conglomerates that dominate business in Asia's fourth-largest economy, and is crucial to South Korea's economy.

Until the second quarter of this year, Samsung, along with

other tech companies, significantly benefitted from strong demand for electronic devices - as well as chips that power them - during the pandemic.

But the global economy is now facing multiple challenges, including soaring inflation, rising interest rates and a growing threat of a broad debt crisis.

The situation has been exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine - which spurred a surge in energy prices and pushed global food prices up - along with China's adherence to a strict zero-Covid policy.

"If you look at the current macroeconomic environment, the demand for consumer segment such as smartphones, PCs remains weak," Neil Shah, an analyst at Counterpoint research, told AFP.

And "almost a third of the Samsung's revenues and almost 70 per cent of operating profits comes from semiconductor divisions and particularly memory," he added.

The company is expected to release its final earnings report at the end of this month.

AFP

Madayn organises ‘Walking for Good Health’ walkathon



As part of its social responsibility activities to enhance the spirit of initiative and cooperation among community members, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates ‘Madayn’, represented by its Social Responsibility Department, organised the third edition of ‘Walking for Good Health’ walkathon at Raysut Industrial City.

The walkathon aimed at encouraging the companies based at Raysut Industrial City to contribute with financial donations to charitable organisations in the sultanate, spreading awareness on the role of sports and physical activities in lifestyle change, and spotlighting the significance of physical activities and walking exercise, particularly for people with diabetes and heart disease.

Besides the general members of the community, Al Noor Association for the Blind (Dhofar), Omani Bahjah Orphan Society and Oman Cancer Association (Dhofar) participated in the event, which was sponsored by several companies including Dhofar Pharmaceutical Industries, Raysut Steel Industries, A’Saffa Foods, National Cable Factory, Salalah Mills, Salem Mohiyaddin bin Saif and Bros Company, Salalah Medical Supplies Manufacturing, Oman Industrial Investment, Peace Land Trade and Cont, Jawharat Al Fanar, Oasis Water Company, Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives Company, and Lifeline Hospital.

Ooredoo announces 10GB for RO2 with Sabbahi plan

Ooredoo is giving Hala prepaid customers 10GB of data to chat, share, post and snap all day long for just RO2 with the new Sabbahi plan. Enjoy 8GB of night-time data available from 11pm-8am, and a further 2GB to use during the rest of the day for a 24 hour period, giving the ultimate combination of great value and seamless connectivity.

Customers can track their usage, recharge, and customise their service through the award-winning Ooredoo App by choosing from a wide variety of add-ons for voice and data, said a press statement. The popular Hala prepaid plans come with an option for every need and every budget and include a free SIM as Ooredoo continues to make it easier and more rewarding to stay connected. Customers can subscribe to the offer through the Ooredoo App or by dialling *555*28#, the company said.

Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company SAOG (Ooredoo) was founded and registered in the Sultanate of Oman in December 2004. The services were launched in March 2005, originally operating under the name Nawras. “Ooredoo provides individuals and businesses with cutting edge digital products and services, so that customers can enjoy the Internet,” it added.

OPAZ, MCSY preparing for AMAD DUQM 2022 event



The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY) are preparing for the AMAD DUQM 2022 event to be held in November.

Both the parties will hold a press conference on Tuesday to reveal the ongoing preparations for the event, which will be hosted by the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), a press release said. The nine-day event will see more than 30 youth activities in various fields, including culture, sports, innovation, technology, sustainability and entertainment, the release added.

The press conference will be held at the Innovation Factory in Muscat to reveal the details of the activities that are being prepared in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. This event is aimed to attract over 20,000 youth. Further details about the facilities, provided by the two organising parties for AMAD DUQM 22, in regards with the event, accommodation facilities and activities will be announced during the press briefing.



Businessmen prioritise OCCI Board of Directors elections

As the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) prepares for the elections to its Board of Directors, business tycoons from Oman are seeking larger participation of business leaders in the polls that may enhance the contribution of more people to Oman’s growth story.

‘The Royal Decree (No. 56/2022) regarding the elections of the OCCI Board of Directors emphasised the fact that OCCI is the official representative of the private sector,’ a press release said, stressing the point that ‘the Royal Decree gave everyone the right to participate in this important democratic event in a way that ensures the success of this process and achieves its future goals’.

The Decree (No 56/2022) on the OCCI System is an evidence that the sultanate is moving steadily towards achieving Oman Vision 2040 goals following themes namely ‘Man and Society’, ‘Economy and Development’.

‘With regard to ‘Economy and Development’ theme, the sultanate has been keen to enhance the participation of the private sector in the economic growth and development by giving it the opportunity to express its voice, views and proposals and communicate them through the right channels to decision-makers,’ the press release added.

An individual seeking entry as a candidate ‘should be an Omani national except for those nominating for membership of the OCCI Board from among the representatives of public shareholding companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, and foreign investors holding investor residency’.

‘The candidate should have been a member of OCCI for a period of no less than five years. Other conditions include that the age is not less than (30) thirty



Sheikh Salem bin Ahmed al Ghazali

Gregorian years, and he should not be an employee in one of the units of the state’s administrative apparatus and other public legal persons, or a paid worker in the private sector inside or outside Oman - with the exception of the nominees from among CEOs in public shareholding companies.’

OCCI new system also states that in order for the registered member to cast his vote at OCCI election, he must have paid OCCI annual subscription fees and should have at least one Omani worker at his company, or be a holder of a Riyadh card from the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development.

The legislator defined the OCCI roles and responsibilities which include proposing the general strategy regulating the activities of the private sector, setting the necessary plans which should be in line with the general policy of the state, expressing opinion on the legislation regulating private sector activities and other economic legislations before issuance, submitting proposals for amending the laws in force, and referring proposals related to the development of the commercial, industrial and economic sectors to the concerned au-



Sheikh Ali bin Hamad bin Saif al Kalbani

thorities.

OCCI’s roles also include preparing studies, research and reports concerned with evaluating and developing the performance of various commercial, industrial and economic sectors, diagnosing problems, identifying challenges, building strategic partnerships with universities and research centers to develop all sectors, and encouraging registered members to participate in conferences, workshops, seminars and related courses organized by OCCI or governmental or non-governmental agencies. The roles also include seeking to amicably settle commercial disputes that may arise among OCCI members.

“The Decree (No. 56/2022) issuing the OCCI system came with fundamental changes that serve the private sector and enhance its participation in the economic development of the Sultanate of Oman. This includes changing OCCI Board of Directors membership composition,” said Sheikh Salem bin Ahmed al Ghazali, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Golden Group Holding.

“The Royal Decree stated that the membership of the OCCI Board of Directors shall be five members from the

Governorate of Muscat, ten chairmen of OCCI branches in addition to five members representing the public joint stock companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange and one member representing foreign investors holding an investor residence permit. These fundamental changes support the private sector and enhance its influence in decision-making,” Ghazali added.

“We hope that this election process will bring positive results that achieve the goal behind these changes and contribute to activating OCCI’s roles in the socioeconomic development process taking place in the sultanate,” he concluded.

Sheikh Ali bin Hamad bin Saif al Kalbani of Al Kalbani Group underlined the significance of the OCCI elections in boosting the country’s economic growth.

“The OCCI elections enhance and complement the elections of the Shura Council and the municipal councils,” said Kalbani, the Chairman of the Al Kalbani Group’s Board of Directors.

The sultanate is preparing to organise a democratic economic event in all governorates - the elections for the OCCI Board of Directors and its branches in the governorates.

“This democratic event is expected to play a major role in accelerating economic growth and progress and contribute to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

“These elections are an opportunity for all companies and institutions to cast their vote, ensuring that we have qualified and efficient members at OCCI’s Board of Directors. These elections also guarantee an honourable representation of the private sector at the local and international forums,” Kalbani added.

Oman group joins Southampton FC International Academy Partner programme

ABQ Education Group is delighted to join Southampton Football Club’s portfolio of International Academy Partners, marking the club’s first partnership in the Sultanate of Oman.

The partnership will see Southampton FC working with ABQ’s three international schools: ABQ Azzan Bin Qais, ABQ Seeb and ABQ Sohar over the next three years to support the schools’ football development programmes, as well as boost their educational objectives on and off the pitch.

ABQ Education Group chairman Al Zubair Muhammad al Zubair said, “Through its innovative teaching methods, ABQ has always strove to be the best academic schools in Oman. Along with being the leader in international school education, we also aim to be the frontrunner in school sports and our partner-



ship with Southampton FC will help us to achieve this goal. I am extremely pleased with this partnership and look forward to many opportunities for our students and outstanding sports achievements from our schools.”

Mark Abrahams, Director of Business & Community Development said, “The Southampton Way has the development of young people at its core which aligns with ABQ’s values and aspirations for their students. ABQ is the largest international school operator in Oman and their unique operator model, The ABQ Way, has developed a consistent standard for all academic and non-academic activities in each of their international schools which is in line with our own approach. We are looking forward to working in Oman for the first time, and especially with the ABQ staff, students, and parents

in the years to come.”

The partnership will see a range of exciting opportunities for the ABQ community to engage with Southampton FC’s Coach and Player Development Programme. Areas of focus include access to the SFC Curriculum, the online resource library, and Coach Education/Player Development Webinars.

Southampton FC Academy staff will also visit Oman each year to work with the coaches and players, with opportunities for both staff and students to visit Southampton through SFC’s Player Development Tour Programme.

ABQ Education Group Chief Executive Office, Humayun Kabir said, “A healthy balance of academics and extracurricular clubs is key to a successful learning experience and this partnership offers ample opportunities for

personal development.

Southampton FC has a proven track record of developing players from beginners to elite level. This initiative echoes our commitment to provide the well-rounded education for our students to flourish after school.”

Nibras al Mijawi, an ABQ school parent commented, “The unique opportunity for the children to experience the benefits of an elite club such as Southampton FC in Oman demonstrates ABQ’s commitment to the students. This is a wonderful initiative.”

Southampton FC has a growing portfolio of International Academy partners which supports like-minded clubs and schools with their ambitions on and off the pitch. For further details on the ABQ partnership or for enquiries contact global@saintsfc.co.uk.

Abu Dhabi’s glitter impresses basketball legend O’Neal

Basketball legend Shaquille O’Neal has only been in Abu Dhabi a few days, yet he is already making friends - and long-term plans.

As an ambassador for this week’s NBA Abu Dhabi Games, the former Orlando Magic and LA Lakers star is visiting the UAE capital for the first time and is clearly impressed by what the city has to offer revealing he is considering laying down roots.

Taking a break between his duties around the Milwaukee Bucks and Atlanta Hawks games at Etihad Arena, ‘Shaq’ also met with Dmitry Bivol, the WBA Light-Heavyweight World Champion, who is training in the emirate ahead of his title fight at Abu Dhabi’s Etihad Arena against undefeated Gilberto ‘Zurdo’ Ramirez on November 5. “It’s a beautiful place. It’s my second time in this part of the world and this place is fabulous,” he said.



Meethaq Islamic launches new Visa Credit Cards

Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has announced that it has launched new VISA Platinum and Gold credit cards for its customers enhancing its existing cards proposition. The launch of the cards is another step undertaken by Meethaq to demonstrate its commitment towards serving its customers in a better way.

To encourage customers to sign up and benefit from the new VISA credit card features, Meethaq Islamic Banking is waiving the 1st year annual fees on these cards for a limited period subject to customers signing up for both primary and supplementary credit cards.

Meethaq is delighted to offer the new VISA Credit Cards to its customer base. VISA is well known for their cutting-edge electronic payments platform that facilitates billions of transactions worldwide every year,” said Sami Arfah Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager - Meethaq Personal Banking.



Oman Air ties up with MHA, British School of Excellence

In partnership with Oman Air and The British School of Excellence, Muscat Hospitality Academy (MHA) announces a unique opportunity for Omani female students to enrol for Preparatory Cabin Crew Training. The programme duration is for six months and will encompass academic and practical training with world-class experts and coaches who provide students with the necessary credentials to secure a guaranteed job from Oman Air.

The training programme includes specialised courses covering in-flight service, the tools and equipment used on board, industry terms and phrases, and the rules and regulations governing air service operations. Participants will receive world-class training which will incorporate subjects such as Workplace Safety, Grooming, Deportment & Etiquette, Mindset & Emotional Intelligence, Communication Skills, Service Excellence, Food & Beverage Service, Aviation Knowledge, Intermediate and Independent Business English Skills training. Upon successful graduation, the students will receive official certification from the MHA and The British School of Excellence, that qualifies them to work for Oman Air. Entry requirements include a high school certificate and English language proficiency, and age must be between 21 and 28 years.



Gap in awareness causes heart failure in region: SHA study



Study calls for urgent implementation of and adherence to region-specific recommendations

Urgent action is needed to stop and reverse the steep rise in heart failure happening across the Middle East and Africa (MEA). This was the warning issued by a group of regional experts, who collectively outlined the primary gaps in awareness, diagnosis and prevention of heart failure in the region and agreed on a set of recommendations for policymakers to take forward. Their conclusions have been published in the Journal of the Saudi Heart Association.

The paper highlights that heart failure is associated with significant morbidity and mortality and considerably impacts patients’ quality of life, as well as incurring a substantial economic burden, with a total estimated cost of US\$1.92bn.

It notes that the average age a person will develop heart failure in the MEA region is significantly lower than elsewhere: Africa (53 years), Middle East (56.4 years), North Africa (58.79 years), Asia (60 years) and Europe (70 years).

The experts point to risk factors such as diabetes, obesity, smoking and socioeconomic transition, marked by a sedentary lifestyle, lack of physical activity and high consumption of fatty foods, as the main contributors to the higher prevalence of heart failure in the region. They also agreed that, in certain countries, high prevalence of existing infectious diseases such as tuberculosis shifts the focus and resources from non-communicable diseases like heart failure.

On the World Heart Day this year, the paper’s lead authors have reiterated



their recommendations and stressed the ongoing, wide gaps and unmet needs in awareness, prevention, and diagnosis of heart failures in countries across the Middle East and Africa.

“Heart failure is a serious and growing threat to health in the Middle East and Africa, but it does not have to be this

way. Policymakers across the region must act now to prioritise heart failure and associated diseases, through better training for health workers, national registries to ensure the collection of quality data and improved access to novel therapies,” said Dr Ahmed Bennis, Professor of Cardiology, Department of Cardiology in Casablanca, Morocco.

“For the first time, experts from across the Middle East and Africa have published a set of region-specific measures to tackle heart failure in efforts to save lives and livelihoods. AstraZeneca is committed to playing our part and supporting health authorities to turn these recommendations into concrete actions,” said Dr Viraj Rajadhyaksha, Area Medical Director for Middle East and Africa, AstraZeneca.

The paper points to the lack of community-level awareness and a high prevalence of associated conditions such as hypertension and diabetes, compounded by poor accessibility and affordability of healthcare, as major barriers to the prevention of heart failure in the region.

It urged policymakers to take the certain steps that it identified to reverse current trajectories.

Suggestions include prioritisation of heart failure and its associated comorbidities alongside other infectious diseases, development and implementation of region-specific clinical guidelines on heart failure, creation of local data registries on heart failure, training of health workers in early identification of high-risk patients, improvement of access to advanced diagnostics and train primary care health workers to use the available technology and enhancement of access and insurance for novel therapies.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds gears up to usher in festive season

With a strong retail network of over 285 outlets spread across ten countries, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer in the world, has announced the much-awaited festive season offers to add more sparkle to customers’ celebrations.

Customers can get assured gold coins with gold & diamond jewellery purchases, in line with the festive tagline, ‘With you in all your celebrations’, that the brand unveiled in their latest festive film, the group said in a press statement.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds will also be showcasing a stunning array of festive jewellery collections in gold, diamond and precious gems, designed to be an alluring attraction to customers. The limited period offer can be availed across all Mal-



abar Gold & Diamonds outlets in the Middle east, Far east and the USA from October 6 to October 23.

For every diamond or precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO500, customers will get free 1gm Gold Coin and for diamond and precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO300, they will be eligible for ½ gm Gold Coin.

Embracing the spirit of the season, the Festive jewellery collection that the brand has unveiled puts forward an exquisite



collection of gold & diamond jewellery designed to enthrall jewellery lovers. The special design has been made available across a wide range of sub-

brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraaaz, Ethnix and Divine, comprising of 22k gold, diamonds and precious gem jewellery. Elegant designs crafted in contemporary fashion have also been introduced in the 18K gold category. To top it all up, the brand will also be hosting Special Buy counters at all showrooms that offer an exclusive range of jewellery at amazing discounts.

“It is the festive season and as communicated in our latest film, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is with our customers in all their celebrations. As part of this, we have made all possible efforts to incorporate the design preferences of all our customers while launching our Festive collection,” said Shamlal Ahamed, MD - International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

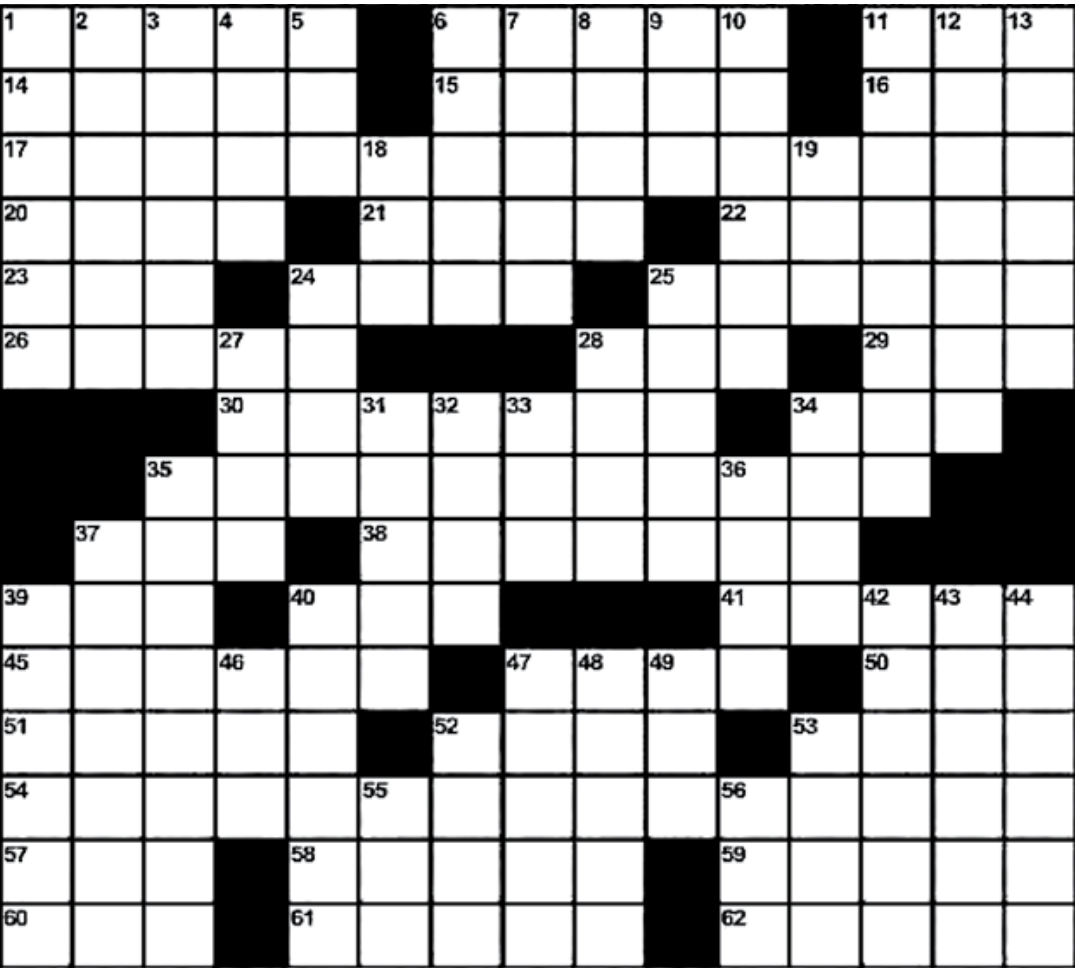
“This is a strong testament to

our commitment to ensuring that our customers get to indulge in their celebrations with all the pomp and vigour they can muster. Furthermore, we are providing our customers with even more reason to celebrate as they get to take home free gold coins with each jewellery purchase,” he added.

To protect customers from the fluctuating gold rates, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has also introduced a ‘Pay 10%’ advance campaign, wherein customers can block the prevailing gold rates by paying just ten per cent as advance, valid till October 23.

If the gold rate goes up during this period, customers can purchase at the blocked rate and if the rate happens to go down, customers can draw mileage from the low rates, the company said.

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) "... la vista, baby"
 - 6) Burst into flower
 - 11) Impressive degree
 - 14) Up and moving about
 - 15) Book, in France
 - 16) Height for Heidi
 - 17) Thingamajig
 - 20) Unaccompanied
 - 21) Golden calf, infamously
 - 22) Catcher in the Rhine?
 - 23) Chapter of history
 - 24) Football props
 - 25) Fair-haired chaps
 - 26) Continue without interruption
 - 28) _ Jewellers
 - 29) Acquire
 - 30) Annoying
 - 34) Pre_ (major for future doctors)
 - 35) Any one
 - 37) Prefix with "solve" or "respect"
 - 38) Somersaulting drinking vessel?
 - 39) Couple thousand pounds
 - 40) The Almighty
- 41) "Over my dead body!"

45) Make lovable

47) "It's OK after all" in editing

50) Eggs, to Nero

51) Parts of necks

52) "Boy, am I tired!"

53) Deep drink

54) Definitely old enough

57) Driller's syllable

58) Man of fables

59) "It follows that ..."

60) Take in, as sights

61) Singer LaBelle

62) Barely defeated

DOWN

1) Parts of ship bows

2) Not on board

3) German prison camp

4) Jazz great Puente

5) Rainbow shape

6) Fan part

7) Long vehicles, for short

8) Charlotte Motor Speedway, e.g.

9) "The Two Towers" monster

10) Contemptibly small, as a tip

11) Fake an illness to avoid work, e.g.

12) Affected by glare

13) Most suitable

18) Flee quickly

19) DiCaprio of films

24) "Desperate Housewives" star Hatcher

25) Brunch selection

27) Sounds of the disgruntled

28) Door feature, often

31) 19-down, for one

32) Sound of a bad joke?

33) Suffix with "skeptic"

34) "A_ fonnality"

35) Throat

36) Come up for air, as a whale

37) Former Winfrey rival

39) Agents' cuts, often

40) Valve in some fire-places

42) Making promises

43) Show proof of

44) Frayed and worn

46) Always, poetically
- 47) Fire a weapon

48) Speeds, to a conductor

49) Certain mama on a farm

52) Sound uttered by the secretive

53) Place for a shovel

55) "Nay" opposite

56) Common title starter
- NOTE PAD**
- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E | L | F | _ | L | A | B | A | N | E | I | D | E | R | |
| N | E | O | E | D | U | C | E | _ | U | S | U | R | Y | |
| T | A | R | _ | F | O | R | E | V | E | R | M | O | R | E |
| E | V | E | N | T | _ | R | E | D | O | _ | _ | _ | _ | |
| R | E | Q | U | I | T | E | _ | R | I | P | O | F | F | |
| _ | U | N | S | E | A | T | _ | T | E | N | O | R | S | |
| S | P | A | _ | T | A | T | A | R | _ | U | R | A | L | |
| C | A | R | L | _ | K | O | R | E | A | _ | S | E | M | |
| A | U | T | O | _ | N | O | B | L | E | _ | S | E | T | |
| B | L | E | A | C | H | _ | T | E | S | T | E | E | _ | |
| B | A | R | M | I | E | S | _ | L | O | C | K | E | T | S |
| _ | R | A | P | T | _ | H | E | A | R | T | _ | _ | _ | |
| F | O | R | E | C | L | O | S | U | R | E | _ | B | U | Y |
| B | A | N | A | L | _ | R | A | S | E | R | _ | L | E | E |
| I | R | A | T | E | _ | T | R | A | P | S | _ | E | S | S |

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You have a very sharp eye today, so use it! You will be everyone's hero if you look closely at any out-of-the-ordinary events and expose the truth for all to see. Sure, there are problems at hand that are obvious to everyone, but you have an ability to see the problems behind the problems and call out those responsible. Today, you will finally begin to believe that you were born to be a leader, because people are beginning to follow you so enthusiastically.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Follow the recent advice a friend or family member gave you and polish up your diplomacy skills. The spotlight will be shining brightly on you at some point during this day, and you must be prepared to act the part of the charming leader. You will get a lot further with other people if you remember that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. If you can keep smiling (especially when you don't necessarily feel like it), then you will hit a home run.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

The routine of your daily life might not be inspiring you much right now, so today is a good day to explore some stimulation. The good news is you can easily put yourself into a different frame of mind by putting yourself into a different situation. If long-distance travel isn't possible, go for a walk alone in a different part of town, take a long drive to a weekend destination, or visit a clothing store that isn't your usual taste. It's all about experiencing new things.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Try to remove yourself from the equation today. Step out of the fray, let everyone else continue on without you, and see what happens. It is time that the people around you realized that you are a bigger piece of the puzzle than they may have been giving you credit for. Turning away from the rat race will also let you refocus on your personal goals. Remembering special memories will buoy your confidence and spark some much needed inspiration.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you have any travel or complicated plans coming up soon, today would be a great time to complete the details. It is important for you to nail down your schedules, dates, and reservation confirmations as soon as you can because forces beyond your control could throw a wrench into things. If you don't have any major plans on the horizon, use your free time to finish up household chores, work on your budget, or schedule medical appointments.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Planning is not always glamorous or exciting, but it's necessary for just about everything you want to do in life. There will be a bit of a schedule crunch, so putting some time into planning your day will pay off. You'll experience less stress and more joy if you know where you need to be and when you need to be there. Be sure to double-check details like addresses, times, and confirmation numbers. If you do any traveling today, you might be in for a nice surprise.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's time to do a little personal inventory on your life. Friends, family, romance, work goals. It's important right now for you to take note of the objective facts about your personal reality. Once you see everything from an impersonal point of view, certain patterns and facts should become obvious. You will be able to get a growing understanding of your situation and make the tiny adjustments you need in order to create better balance and harmony in your everyday routine.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

There might be a bit of a power play going on early in the day. How you approach it will greatly influence the rest of your day, so give solid thought to whether or not you want to fight for what you believe in. It's a good time to take control, but taking control will increase the stress level of the day. And keep in mind that you can still influence the way things go without being the big boss. Working from the outside can be effective.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Today, after all the morning's activities wind down, you might get a strong sense that something new is beginning. There is real renewal in the air right now, and you can easily grab some of it to get your own thing going if you really have the drive. That idea or scheme you've been playing with is more possible than ever right now, so get in contact with all the members of your dream team and find out how soon everyone can get together and start making things happen.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you're wondering why you're not getting all the respect you think you deserve, stop to consider if you're asking for it. Sometimes you have to make a big noise about your accomplishments just so other people can notice and be able to make an even bigger noise. Today, climb up on a rooftop and shout out to the world about your latest accomplishment (or just send a tactfully worded email, whichever seems more practical). Start tooting your own horn!

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Today will bring a lesson in flexibility. Transformations can be amazing things, but they can also be frustrating things. After all, when everything around you changes, it can be difficult to adjust. Up is suddenly down, black is suddenly white, and nothing makes much sense. So if you're feeling a little lost right now, hold on to your family and friends for your bearings. They will always be able to remind you of who you are and what is most important in life.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Spending some time by yourself will help you focus on the things that really matter and will last. Today, finding the time to get away from the rest of the world will be in your best interests and help your emotional health. Escapism can be found in many places: parks, movie theaters, even the kitchen. An afternoon spent baking cookies might be the perfect way to have some alone time that makes you feel productive too.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What is the stapes bone known as?

- A. Anklebone
- B. Stirrup
- C. Jaw
- D. Funnybone

02. The 2008 British film "Slumdog Millionaire" directed by Danny Boyle is an adaptation of what 2005 novel?

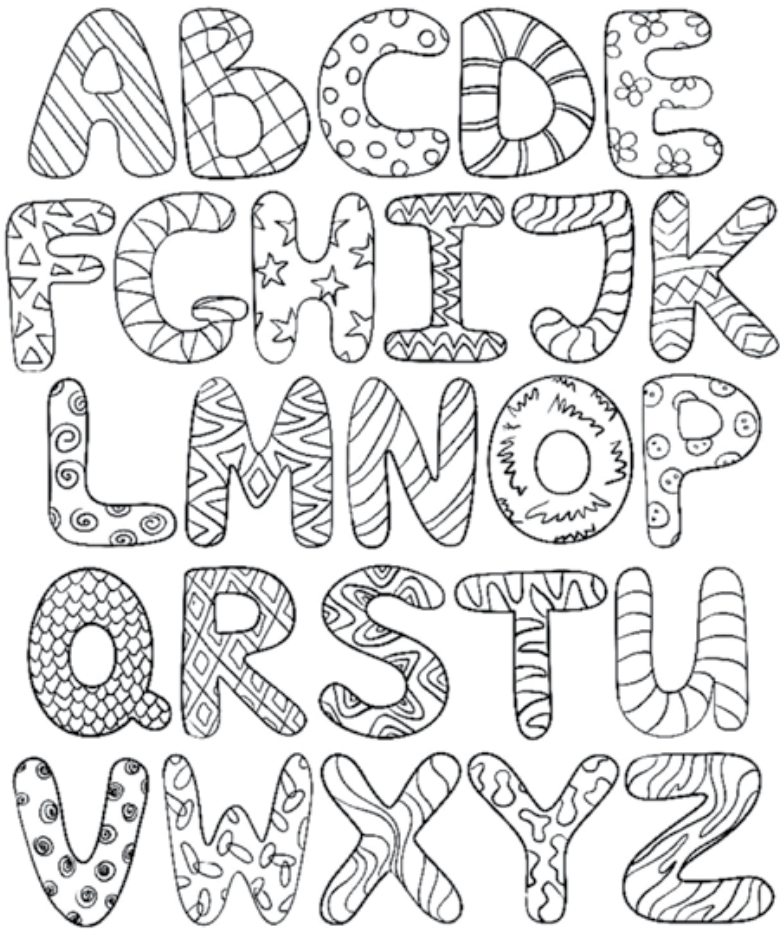
- A. "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy
- B. "Q & A" by Vikas Swarup
- C. "Kim" by Rudyard Kipling
- D. "Baumgartner's Bombay" by Anita Desai

03.Dodge Morgan, who became famous in 1986 at age 54 when he sailed solo around the globe without stops in 150 days (breaking the record of 292 days), had become a millionaire by operating a company that manufactured what from 1971 to 1983?

- A. Hula Hoops
- B. Frisbees
- C. Radar detectors
- D. Turbochargers

Answers: 1.B 2.B 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	U	T	A
D	R	R	O
I	E	G	Y
I	V	E	L

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

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

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

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

North Korea fires more ballistic missiles

The launch came just hours after a US aircraft carrier wrapped up joint drills off the Korean peninsula

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into the sea early on Sunday, Seoul's military said, the seventh such launch in two weeks, just hours after a nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier wrapped up joint drills off the Korean peninsula.

Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have ramped up combined naval exercises in recent weeks, infuriating Pyongyang, which sees them as rehearsals for invasion and justifies its blitz of missile launches as necessary 'counter-measures'. With talks long stalled, Pyongyang has doubled down on its banned weapons programmes, firing an intermediate range ballistic missile over Japan last week, with officials and analysts warning it has completed preparations for another nuclear test.

South Korea's military said on Sunday it had 'detected two short-range ballistic missiles between 0148 and 0158 (1648-1658 GMT) fired from the Munchon area in Kangwon province towards the East Sea', referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

The missiles 'flew approximately 350km at an altitude of 90km', Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement, calling the launches a 'serious provocation'. Tokyo also confirmed the launches, with the coast guard saying the missiles had landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone.

Japanese senior vice defence minister Toshiro Ino said Tokyo was analysing the missiles, adding that 'either one of them has the possibility of being a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM)'.

Seoul said last month it had detected signs the North was preparing to fire an SLBM, a weapon Pyongyang last tested in May. The US military's Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement that they were 'consulting closely with our allies and partners', adding that the launch highlighted the 'destabilising' nature of North Korea's missile programmes.

Drills, drills, drills

North Korea's missile tests usually aim to develop new capabilities,



People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on Sunday (AFP)

ities, but its recent launches, 'from different locations at different times of day, may be intended to demonstrate military readiness', said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

"The Kim regime is trying to coerce Seoul, Tokyo and Wash-

ington to abandon their trilateral security cooperation."

At an emergency meeting of Seoul's National Security Council following the missile test, however, South Korean officials vowed to strengthen that cooperation, according to a statement. The recent spate of

launches is part of a record year of weapons tests by isolated North Korea, which leader Kim Jong Un last month declared an 'irreversible' nuclear power, effectively ending the possibility of denuclearisation talks.

Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have ramped up joint military

drills in response, with the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier and its strike group redeployed to the area last week.

On Thursday, Seoul's military said it had scrambled 30 fighter jets after 12 North Korean warplanes staged a rare formation flight and apparent air-to-surface firing drills.

Go Myong-hyun, a researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said North Korea was trying to claim that the nature of its sanctions-busting weapons tests were the same as the defensive joint drills between the allies.

"North Korea is trying to give equivalence through its continued missile launches," he told AFP.

No new sanctions

Analysts say Pyongyang is emboldened to continue its weapons testing, confident that gridlock at the United Nations will protect it from further sanctions. Last week, the UN Security Council held an emergency meeting to discuss Pyongyang's launch over Japan, which officials

and analysts said was a Hwasong-12 that likely travelled the longest horizontal distance of any North Korean test.

But at the meeting, North Korea's longtime ally and economic benefactor China blamed Washington for provoking the spate of launches, with Deputy Chinese Ambassador to the UN Geng Shuang accusing the United States of 'poisoning the regional security environment'.

US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield called for the 'strengthening' of existing sanctions on North Korea, something China and Russia vetoed in May.

The council has been divided on responding to Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions for months, with Russia and China on the sympathetic side and the rest of the council pushing for punishment. "To Kim's benefit, there are other contingencies occupying the slate of US policymakers, which involve his two primary backers, Russia and China," Soo Kim, an analyst at the RAND Corporation, told AFP.

AFP

Thai nursery massacre families pray to free children's souls

Na Klong, Thailand - Mourning families knelt on Sunday outside a Thai nursery where their children were murdered, performing a Buddhist ceremony to put their souls at rest.

Sacked police officer Panya Khamrab killed 36 people - 24 of them children - on Thursday in a gun and knife rampage in north-eastern Nong Bua Lam Phu province, in one of the kingdom's worst-ever mass killings.

Saffron-robed monks led prayers for the dead on Sunday on a second day of ritual mourning at a temple close to the nursery in Na Klong district, a quiet farming area torn apart by Thursday's bloodshed. Earlier, families wept as they knelt outside the nursery in a ceremony to help release their children's souls. Some clutched their children's portraits, beloved toys and favourite food, which they placed outside the compound as offerings. Around a low fence surrounding the single-storey, pink-roofed nursery where just a few days ago youngsters played



People take part in a Buddhist ceremony to call the souls of the children, who were killed in a mass shooting, in Na Klong on Sunday (AFP)

happily, piles of flowers built up. The sweet aroma of incense scented the air as the assembled crowd, including many well-wishers from the close-knit local community, bowed their heads in prayer, a low crackle of thunder echoing in the distance.

Officials solemnly carried children's treasured possessions out of the nursery to return to families - favourite blankets and much-loved toys, each carefully

placed in name-tagged bags.

"When I see the tears of the families, I just feel very sad... I can't describe it. I feel really bad (about) what's happened in my hometown," Rutt, 57, told AFP after joining her fellow villagers in supporting the bereaved.

The carnage began when the attacker forced his way in during the children's nap time at about 12:30pm (0530 GMT) on Thursday, opening fire with his own

legally owned 9mm pistol and slashing with a knife.

Afterwards, the 34-year-old went home to murder his wife and son before taking his own life, police said, ending the rampage at about 3pm. Most of the victims died from knife injuries or gunfire, and relatives told AFP of the horrific wounds inflicted on their little ones. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, who was due to join prayers on Sunday evening, has ordered a swift investigation and police have said they expect to interview about 180 witnesses in the coming days.

Panya was sacked as a police sergeant earlier this year for drug abuse and locals say they suspected he was a methamphetamine addict, although preliminary tests found no drugs in his system.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn met survivors and relatives at a hospital late on Friday in a rare public interaction for the monarch, who is officially regarded as semi-divine.

AFP

Festival of lights: Thousands throng Myanmar's Shwedagon

Yangon, Myanmar - Thousands of Buddhist devotees thronged Myanmar's Shwedagon Pagoda to mark the full moon of the Thadingyut festival on Sunday, some offering prayers for a country plunged into turmoil by last year's coup.

The three-day festival marks Buddha's descent from heaven and is normally marked by riotous fireworks displays, with candles and colourful lanterns lighting up streets and homes.

Early morning crowds lined up in commercial hub Yangon to pray at the towering, gold-plated Shwedagon pagoda, Myanmar's most important Buddhist site. Local chronicles say it contains strands of the Buddha's hair.

Crowds packed in shoulder-to-shoulder to file up escalators and ascend the pointed structure that dominates the skyline of the country's largest city.

Inside the main complex crowds shuffled along in gentle circumambulation, some stopping to take selfies, light candles or burn incense.

Others stood aside to say



Buddhist devotees visit Shwedagon pagoda to mark the full moon of the Thadingyut festival in Yangon on Sunday (AFP)

quiet prayers.

"We haven't come here for years and so we left home early to avoid crowds but there were already many people at the pagoda," said a man from Yangon's Thone Gwa township. He did not want to give his name.

"I think people are struggling in their daily lives and they wanted to come out from home."

The country has been in tur-

moil since the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021, with fighting continuing across many regions and the economy in tatters.

To mark Thadingyut last year the junta announced an amnesty for hundreds of protesters detained since the coup, sending families rushing to prison gates and sparking joyful reunions across the country.

AFP

Several missing in Nigeria boat accident

Lagos, Nigeria - Many people were missing and 15 had been rescued after an over-loaded passenger boat capsized in southeast Nigeria, emergency services said on Saturday.

The accident on Friday occurred on the Niger river near Umunnankwo in Anambra state, an area devastated by floods.

"It's not clear how many people boarded the ill-fated boat at the time of the mishap," Chukwudi Onyejekwe of the State Emergency Management Agency told AFP.

"We have rescued 15 people while many are missing," he said.

He said no dead had so far been recovered, but added that the search and rescue operation was ongoing.

Local media however said 85 people had boarded the boat at the Onukwu bridge.

AFP

Americans flock to Florida, even as hurricanes intensify

Cape Coral, US - There's nothing in the world that would convince Cape Coral resident Kenneth Lowe to leave - not even having to empty his home of flood water a week after Hurricane Ian pummeled the city.

"Southwest Florida is my heaven on earth and hurricanes come with South Florida. So you just have to take it," the 28-year-old tells AFP, standing in a street strewn with debris.

"It's my favourite place, it's worth it."

Experts warn the frequency of supercharged hurricanes and floods in this climate-prone region is only expected to increase over time - but the population of the southeastern United States continues to rise.

The paradox is especially striking in Cape Coral.

Between 2010 and 2021, its population grew by 33 per cent to 204,000 people, according to census data. Founded in 1958, it embodies the Florida dream that many come looking for.

Navigable canals criss-cross



This file photo shows a dump truck dumping its load during emergency repairs to restore road access in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian in Matlacha, Florida on October 03 (AFP)

the region, connecting to the Caloosahatchee River, which gives way to the Gulf of Mexico. This affords many people the chance to enjoy a house on the water, and even space for a small boat.

But developing Cape Coral meant first draining the swamp it was built on - and destroying the mangroves and coral reefs that acted as natural defenses against

waves and storm surges.

The city was pulverised by Ian, which intensified especially rapidly, fueled by warm waters and high humidity.

A study in Nature Communications earlier this year found that due to climate change, Atlantic hurricanes dump around 10 per cent more water during their rainiest three-hours.

In the streets of Cape Coral,

dozens of residents are now piling up their belongings in front of their homes: beds, cupboards, refrigerators that have become unusable.

"We will just rebuild and, hopefully, it will be another 100 years before the next big one," said Tamara Lang, 56.

Lang moved from Chicago and bought her house in Cape Coral just a few months ago -

and says she didn't factor hurricanes into her decision. But she too has no intention of leaving.

"We love it here," she said. "This has been our happy place since we got it."

Rapid growth

According to sociologist Mathew Hauer, who studies the impacts of climate change on society, people are not adequately informed about the risks they are taking on.

"If people really understood the flood risk of properties, we'd see changes in where people are purchasing homes and where they're choosing to live," said Hauer, an assistant professor at Florida State University.

Another problem: flood zone maps drawn up by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are out of date, says Gavin Smith, a professor of landscape architecture and environmental planning at North Carolina State University.

"It should be viewed as a minimum standard, but they're often

used to regulate the where and how of development," he told AFP.

Census data reveals a population explosion in the coastal counties of North and South Carolina, as well as Georgia. Florida itself added 2.7mn residents between 2010 and 2020.

"It's one of the fastest growing regions in the US," said Hauer, adding: "I don't see any sign yet that the trend toward migration down into the Sunbelt is going to turn."

But according to a paper he published in Nature Climate Change, if sea levels rise around three feet (0.9 metres) between now and the end of the century, some 4.3mn people in the continental United States would be forced to move.

Coastal residents of Florida make up about half that figure.

Retirees from northern climes - including seasonal migrants known as snowbirds - have long been drawn to the 'Sunshine State.'

AFP

Iran state TV hacked with image of supreme leader in crosshairs

Paris, France - Hackers backing Iran's wave of women-led protests interrupted a state TV news broadcast with an image of gun-sight crosshairs and flames over the face of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in footage widely shared online on Sunday.

In other anti-regime messages, activists have spray-painted 'Death to Khamenei' and 'The Police are the Murderers of the People' on public billboards in Tehran. "The blood of our youths is on your hands," read an on-screen message that flashed up briefly during the TV broadcast on Saturday evening, as street protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini, 22, again rocked Tehran and other cities.

"Police forces used tear gas to disperse the crowds in dozens of locations in Tehran," state news agency IRNA reported, adding the demonstrators 'chanted slogans and set fire to and damaged public property, including a police booth'.

Anger has flared since the death of Amini on September 16, three days after the young Kurdish woman was arrested by the notorious morality police for an alleged breach of the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women. "Join us and rise up," read another message in the TV hack claimed by the group Edalat-e Ali (Ali's Justice).

It also posted pictures of Amini and three other women killed in the crackdown that has claimed at least 95 lives according to Norway-based group Iran



This grab taken from a video made available on twitter on Sunday shows a part of a video superimposing crosshairs and flames on the face of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, over the portraits of Mahsa Amini and three other women killed, which interrupted state television live news broadcast (AFP)

Human Rights. Another 90 people were killed in Iran's far south-east, in unrest on September 30 sparked by the alleged rape of a teenage girl by a police chief in Sistan-Baluchestan province, said IHR, citing the UK-based Baluch Activists Campaign.

One Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps member was killed on Saturday in Sanandaj, Kurdistan province, and a member of the Guards' Basij paramilitary force died in Tehran from 'a serious head injury following an armed attack by a mob,' IRNA said - in killings that raised the death toll among security forces to 14.

'So many protests'

Iran has been torn by the biggest

wave of social unrest in almost three years, which has seen protesters, including university students and even young schoolgirls chant 'Woman, Life, Freedom'.

"Videos coming out from Tehran indicate that there are so many protests, in every corner of the city, in small and big numbers," said US-based campaigner and journalist Omid Memarian on Twitter.

In Amini's hometown Saqez, Kurdistan, schoolgirls chanted and marched down a street swinging their hijab headscarves in the air, in videos the Hengaw rights group said were recorded on Saturday.

Gruesome footage has emerged from the state's often bloody response, spread online

despite widespread internet outages and blocks on all the major social media platforms.

One video shows a man who was shot dead at the wheel of his car in Sanandaj, Kurdistan's capital, where the province's police chief, Ali Azadi, later charged he was 'killed by anti-revolutionary forces'. Angry men then appear to take revenge on a member of the feared Basij militia, swarming him and beating him badly, in another widely shared video.

Yet another video clip shows a young woman said to have been shot dead in Mashhad in the country's northeast.

Many on social media said it evoked footage of Neda Agha Soltan, a young woman who became an enduring symbol of the

Iranian opposition after she was shot dead at protests in 2009.

'Not afraid anymore'

In the face of the violence and the online restrictions, protesters have adopted new tactics to spread their message of resistance in public spaces.

"We are not afraid anymore. We will fight," read one large banner placed on an overpass of Tehran's Modares highway, seen in images verified by AFP.

In other footage, a man with a spray can is seen altering the wording of a government billboard on the same highway from 'The Police are the Servants of the People' to 'The Police are the Murderers of the People'.

AFP



Israeli security stand guard at the cordoned off entrance of the Shuafat refugee camp in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem on Sunday (AFP)

Israeli forces hunt east Jerusalem checkpoint attacker

Jerusalem - Israeli forces on Sunday hunted a Palestinian suspected of killing a 18-year-old military policewoman in east Jerusalem, an attack that left another Israeli in critical condition from a gunshot wound to the head.

The shooting at a checkpoint by the Palestinian refugee camp of Shuafat in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem came amid spiralling violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Hours earlier, two Palestinian teenagers were shot dead in an Israeli raid in the West Bank, as the United Nations warned that 'mounting violence' in the occupied Palestinian territory was 'fueling a climate of fear, hatred and anger'.

Police said the alleged Shuafat gunman, a 22-year-old Palestinian resident of east Jerusalem, was driven to the checkpoint by an accomplice. He got out of the car, opened fire and ran into the camp as the driver sped away.

The dead Israeli soldier was identified as Noa Lazar.

Prime Minister Yair Lapid said on Sunday his 'heart' was 'broken' by her death.

"We won't rest until bringing the despicable murderers to justice," Lapid said before Israeli Jews were set to mark the Sukkot holiday.

Another Israeli, a 30-year-old man, was taken to Hadassah hospital in serious condition after being shot in the head, the medical centre said in a statement.

Two additional border officers were lightly wounded by shrapnel, police said.

Police cordoned off the area near the checkpoint and officers remained at the entrance and exit of east Jerusalem.

Three Palestinians in their 20s from east Jerusalem were arrested on suspicion of 'involvement in the attack', police said.

'Devastating consequences'

Earlier on Saturday, two Palestinian teenagers were shot dead in an operation by Israeli forces in Jenin, the northern West Bank flashpoint city.

The Palestinian health ministry announced the killing of 'two citizens by occupation (Israeli) bullets in Jenin', as Israeli troops carried out an arrest there. Eleven others were wounded. The ministry named those killed as Ahmad Daragh-meh, 16, and Mahmud as-Sous, 18. The Islamic Jihad militant group praised the teenagers as 'its martyrs'.

Israel's military said troops had entered Jenin to detain a 25-year-old Palestinian it said was a member of Islamic Jihad and suspected of shooting at troops in the area. "During the activity, dozens of Palestinians hurled explosive devices and Molotov cocktails at IDF (Israeli military) soldiers and shots were fired at them," an army statement said, adding that soldiers had targeted 'armed suspects'.

In response to attacks on Israeli civilians earlier this year, Israel's army has been conducting near daily raids in the West Bank that have left dozens of both Palestinian fighters and civilians dead.

Following the latest deaths in Jenin, the Palestinian presidency called on Washington to 'exert serious pressure on Israel to stop its all-out war against our Palestinian people'.

Israeli action 'will push matters towards an explosion and a point of no return, which will have devastating consequences for all', said Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for president Mahmud Abbas, in a statement published by the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

AFP

French Nobel winner urges protest against Macron

Paris, France - French author Annie Ernaux, who was awarded the Nobel Literature Prize this week, signed an open letter on Sunday supporting a mass protest against President Emmanuel Macron called by the country's left-wing opposition.

Organisers of the demonstration on October 16 accuse Macron of failing to tackle soaring prices for energy and other essentials, and insufficient action against climate change.



Annie Ernaux (AFP)

"Emmanuel Macron is seizing this inflation to widen the

wealth gaps, and boost the profits of capital, at everyone else's expense," said the letter in the *Journal du Dimanche* newspaper.

"And this shock is allowing this government of the rich to open a new phase: attack the pillars of our solidarity, the heart of our social protection - first with employment benefits, and now the pension system."

Ernaux, 82, was listed first and among the most prominent of the 69 signatories that in-

cluded fellow authors as well as economists, professors and activists. Macron, a former investment banker, had hailed Ernaux's winning of the Nobel, calling her voice 'that of the freedom of women and of the forgotten'.

But the unusual public criticism from a writer whose profoundly intimate and feminist works have achieved widespread acclaim in recent years could bolster anger over his plan to make the French work

longer. Huge strikes greeted his first attempt to push back the retirement age from 62 to 65 two years ago, before he called off the pensions overhaul with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

His government, which does not have a majority in parliament, has vowed to consult with unions and other parties on a reform it considers urgent, but insists a bill will be voted on in the coming months.

AFP

Protesters glue hands to cover of Picasso painting

Sydney, Australia - Two climate activists glued their hands to the perspex cover of Picasso's anti-war painting 'Massacre in Korea' in a Melbourne art gallery on Sunday, police, protesters and the gallery said. The painting emerged unscathed. The black-clad activists were shown with their hands pressed against the painting in a room of the National Gallery of Victoria in images shared on social media by the Extinction Rebellion movement.

A man wearing a T-shirt with the Extinction Rebellion symbol - an hourglass in a circle - stood alongside them.

On the ground at their feet lay a black banner reading 'Climate Chaos = War + Famine'. "It is believed three protesters entered the ground level of the gallery before a man and a woman glued themselves to a protective covering of a Picasso painting," said a Victoria Police spokeswoman.

The protesters - a 49-year-old woman from New South Wales and a 59-year-old man from Melbourne - were 'removed from the painting' more than an hour after their action was believed to have started, the police spokeswoman said. The pair, along with a 49-year-old Melbourne man, 'have been arrested and are assisting police with their enquiries', she said.

Police later said they had been released 'pending further inquiries'. The gallery said it had called the police and closed the exhibition to the public during the protest.

"The protesters' hands were safely removed from the perspex with no harm to the work," said a spokesperson for the National Gallery of Victoria. The 1951 work by Pablo Picasso 'shows the horrors of war', Extinction Rebellion Victoria said on its Facebook page.

AFP

UK ministers urge party to back under-fire PM Truss

London, UK - Four ministers in Liz Truss's government on Sunday urged Conservative colleagues to back the embattled UK prime minister following a punishing week that exposed deep divisions within the party.

Interior minister Suella Braverman, former finance minister Nadhim Zahawi, Commons leader Penny Mordaunt and environment minister Ranil Jayawardena all wrote articles for Sunday newspapers warning that they would soon find themselves in opposition unless the party united quickly.

Braverman wrote in *The Sun* On Sunday, 'Those working with Labour to undermine our prime minister are putting the Conservatives' chance of victory at the next election in real danger.

"So the choice for my colleagues and for us as party is simple - Back Liz or get (Labour leader) Keir Starmer, hand-in-hand with (SNP leader) Nicola Sturgeon."

Braverman, however, was one of several ministers who went against Downing Street directions during her speech at the



Britain's Prime Minister Liz Truss (AFP)

chaotic Tory Party conference this week. Zahawi wrote in the *Mail* On Sunday that the govern-

ment had made mistakes unrolling its fiscal policy, which led to a humiliating climbdown over

a plan to cut income tax rates for the top earners. But he said that 'now is the time' to rally behind Truss, again warning that rebels risked ushering in a Labour government 'propped up' by the SNP.

Fresh polling by Opinion for the *Observer* has put Truss's personal approval rating at minus 47.

In a sign of her fallibility, cabinet ministers are reported to be joining forces to demand Truss rules out mooted plans to raise benefits in line with wages rather than inflation, *The Sunday Times* reported. Former leadership rival Mordaunt was one of those who spoke out on the issue during the party conference. But she struck a conciliatory tone in a *Sunday Telegraph* article.

"You measure leaders when they are in the ring dazzled by the media lights taking punch after punch and taking the hard decisions required," she wrote.

"All my colleagues have a part to play in delivering for the British people. Division will only play into the hands of those who would take our country in the

wrong direction."

Jayawardena meanwhile wrote in the *Sunday Express* that Tory MPs must 'get behind' the PM. "We need to back Liz Truss - or get Keir Starmer in Nicola Sturgeon's pocket."

Starmer has vowed not to make an electoral deal with the SNP, which favours Scottish independence from the rest of the UK, and said Labour would rather form a minority government.

Former culture secretary Nadine Dorries is one of those Conservatives taking aim at Truss's government.

She warned again on Sunday that the prime minister would have to change course on certain key policies or see the party's polling deficit, currently sitting around 30 points behind Labour, worsen. "I'm still one of Liz's biggest supporters," she told BBC on Sunday. "Now is the time, while we have a new PM and administration, to reflect on what's gone wrong and reverse that poll deficit.

"What we don't need is a disruptor. We need a unifier."

AFP

New deadly Russian strike hits Ukraine city

The attack came a day after a bridge linking Russia with the Crimea peninsula was partially destroyed

Kyiv, Ukraine - An overnight Russian missile strike killed at least 12 people in Zaporizhzhia, authorities said on Sunday, in the latest deadly attack to hit the southern Ukrainian city that President Volodymyr Zelensky called 'absolute evil'.

The reports came a day after a key bridge linking Russia with the annexed Crimea peninsula was partially destroyed by an explosion, and as the Kremlin replaced its top general amid major battlefield setbacks in Ukraine.

Zelensky said 12 people had died and 49 people, including six children, were in hospital after Russian missiles again hit Zaporizhzhia. City council secretary Anatoliy Kurtev, provided a higher death toll of 17.

At least 17 people including a child also died when seven Russian missiles hit the centre of the industrial city earlier this week.

Regional official Oleksandr Starukh posted pictures of heavily damaged apartment blocks on Telegram and said a rescue operation had been launched to find victims under the rubble.

Zelensky denounced the 'merciless strikes on peaceful people' and residential buildings as 'absolute evil' perpetrated by 'savages and terrorists'.

Divers were to inspect the waters beneath the giant Crimea bridge on Sunday a day after a truck bomb ignited a massive fire on the road and rail link, killing three people.

"We are ordering the examination by divers, they will start work from six in the morning," Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnulilin announced.

'First results' of Russia's inspection of the bridge were due



A rescuer with a hose extinguishes a fire in a residential building damaged after a strike in Zaporizhzhia on Sunday (AFP)

on Sunday, he added.

Russia on Saturday said traffic had resumed over the strategic link symbolising the Kremlin's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

The 19km bridge was attacked at dawn, sparking celebrations from Ukrainians and others on social media, where dramatic footage showed it

burning with a road section plunging into the water. But Zelensky did not directly mention it in his nightly address and officials made no claim of responsibility.

Following the blast, the bodies of an unidentified man and a woman were pulled out of the water, likely passengers in a car

President Zelensky denounced the strikes on people and residential buildings as 'absolute evil'

driving near the exploded truck, Moscow said. Authorities had identified the owner of the truck as a resident of Russia's southern Krasnodar region, saying his home was being searched.

'Emergency situation'
The bridge is logistically crucial for Moscow, a vital transport link

for carrying military equipment to Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine.

It is also hugely symbolic. President Vladimir Putin personally inaugurated the structure in 2018 - even driving a truck across - and Moscow had maintained the link was safe despite the fighting.

While some in Moscow hinted at Ukrainian 'terrorism', state media continued to call it an 'emergency situation'.

Zelensky's adviser Mykhailo Podolyak posted a picture on Twitter of a long section of the bridge half-submerged. 'Crimea, the bridge, the beginning', he wrote.

But in a later statement, he appeared to suggest Moscow had a hand in the blast, noting the truck that detonated 'entered the bridge from the Russian side'.

The Kremlin's spokesman said Putin had ordered a commission to be set up to look into the blast.

Officials in Moscow stopped short of blaming Kyiv, but a Russian-installed official in Crimea pointed the finger at 'Ukrainian vandals'.

"There is an undisguised terrorist war against us," Russian ruling party deputy Oleg Morozov told the RIA Novosti news agency.

Military analysts said the blast could have a major impact if Moscow saw the need to shift already hard-pressed troops to the Crimea from other regions or if it prompted a rush by residents to leave.

Mick Ryan, a retired Australian major general now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said that even if Ukrainians were not behind the blast, it constituted 'a massive influence operation win for Ukraine'.

"It is a demonstration to Russians, and the rest of the world, that Russia's military cannot protect any of the provinces it recently annexed," he said on Twitter.

AFP

'Man-eater' tiger that killed at least 9 shot dead in India

New Delhi, India - Indian police have shot dead a tiger dubbed the 'Man-eater of Champaran' that killed at least nine people, in a major operation involving 200 people including trackers on elephants, officials said on Sunday.

The big cat had terrorised locals on the fringes of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Champaran in eastern India, killing at least six people in the past month including a woman and her eight-year-old son on Saturday. Even before the two latest kills, authorities had designated the tiger, reportedly a male three or four years old, as a 'man-eater', meaning that it could be shot.

Earlier attempts to tranquilise the animal had failed.

"Two teams went into the forest on two elephants on Saturday afternoon and the third one waited where we thought the tiger would exit - and we fired five rounds to kill it there," local police chief Kiran Kumar told AFP.

With local villagers beating tin containers, it took about six hours for the team - with eight shooters and about 200 forest department officials - to complete the operation, Kumar said. Officials said that large sugarcane fields made it easier for the tiger to stay hidden and attack local villagers and their livestock.

The victims included a 12-year-old girl dragged from her bed on Wednesday night, reports said.

Locals in the impoverished villages around the reserve in Bihar state stopped going out in the evening after the tiger's first attack maimed a teenager in May. But 'despite the lurking fear of tiger, it was not possible for us to confine ourselves in our homes as we needed to feed our cattle', Ram Kisun Yadav, a local villager told the *Hindustan Times* newspaper.

Locals celebrated after the animal was finally shot.

The big cat had terrorised locals on the fringes of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Champaran in eastern India

"It was a sleepless night for the whole village. We kept beating tin containers to shoo away the tiger if at all it was hiding near our village," villager Paltu Mahato told the *Hindustan Times*.

Conservationists blame the rapid expansion of human settlements around forests and key wildlife corridors for animals like elephants and tigers for an increase in man-animal conflict in parts of India.

Nearly 225 people were killed in tiger attacks between 2014 and 2019 in India, according to government figures.

AFP

Learn from history over nuclear threats: Pope

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis on Sunday urged the world to learn from history on the threat of nuclear war over Ukraine and choose the path of peace.

Looking back to the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, 'we cannot forget the danger of nuclear war that threatened the world at that time', the pope said during a canonisation mass in St Peter's Square. "Why not learn from history? Even at that time there were conflicts and huge tensions, but the way of peace was chosen," he said.

US President Joe Biden said on Thursday the world is facing nuclear 'Armageddon', warning that Russian President Vladimir Putin may use his atomic arsenal



Pope Francis leaves at the end of a canonisation mass at St. Peter's square in the Vatican on Sunday (AFP)

against Ukraine. The Vatican said around 50,000 faithful attended the mass on Sunday celebrating the elevation to sainthood of religious figures Giovanni Battista Scalabrini and Artemide Zatti.

The pope used the opportunity to offer prayers for the victims of what he called a 'mad act of violence' in Thailand.

And in recalling the work of Scalabrini, a 19th-century Italian bishop who founded a community that serves migrants and refugees, Pope Francis returned to a recurring theme of his papacy. "The exclusion of migrants is scandalous! Indeed, the exclusion of migrants is criminal, it makes them die in front of us," the pontiff said.

AFP

Flood evacuation warnings for Sydney residents

Sydney, Australia - Australian emergency services on Sunday issued flood evacuation orders for neighbourhoods in Sydney and beyond as river levels climbed after days of heavy rain.

Officials reported 28 flood rescues over 24 hours in the eastern state of New South Wales. "It is very dangerous out there on our roads and we are seeing a lot of flash flooding and obviously the rivers are still rising," NSW State Emergency Service commissioner Carlene York told a news conference.

A dozen flood evacuation orders were in place for low-lying neighbourhoods on the north-western fringes of Sydney and other parts of New South Wales, the emergency service said.

AFP

Julia makes landfall on Nicaraguan coast

Bluefields, Nicaragua - Hurricane Julia touched down on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast early on Sunday morning, the US National Hurricane Center said, carrying with it the threat of flash flooding and mudslides across Central America.

Maximum sustained winds were estimated at 85 miles per hour (140 kph) when the storm made landfall near the Laguna de Perlas area at 0715 GMT, the weather agency said.

Hours earlier in Bluefields, one of the main coastal towns expected to be buffeted by the storm, fishermen were busy safeguarding their boats as people rushed to buy groceries and withdraw money from ATMs.

Hurricane-force winds and heavy rains began to be felt by around midnight, according to AFP photographers in the city, while state media reported de-



Residents leave their house under pouring rain in Honduras, before the arrival of tropical storm Julia on Saturday (AFP)

tached roofs, fallen trees and power outages. Before reaching Nicaragua, Julia passed over a trio of Colombian islands, an environment ministry official told AFP, causing rain and lightning in the country's north.

While authorities reported no significant damage or casualties

on the islands, home to about 48,000 people, Colombian President Gustavo Petro put the area on 'maximum alert' and ordered hotels to open space for use as shelters.

Julia is classified as a Category One storm, on the low side of the five-tier Saffir-Simpson hurricane

wind scale. It is expected to move across Nicaragua on Sunday before traveling near or along the Pacific coasts of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala through Monday, the NHC said.

Nicaragua has evacuated some 6,000 people in Laguna de Perlas, in the Miskito keys located off the coast, and in other zones. "We have to prepare with food, plastic, a little bit of everything, because we don't know what's going to happen," Javier Duarte, a cabinetmaker in Bluefields, told AFP.

The municipality of some 60,000 inhabitants has many flimsy structures.

The NHC said that 'life-threatening flash floods and mudslides' were possible due to heavy rain 'over Central America and Southern Mexico through early next week'.

AFP

Hey big spenders: Qatar woos the rich with luxury World Cup



A general view of the Katara Towers in the Qatari city of Lusail, which will host the FIFA World Cup final (AFP)

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - With deluxe match packages selling for thousands of dollars and five-star hotels doing a brisk trade, a sheen of glamour coats Qatar's World Cup despite football's working-class roots.

A penchant for luxury in the energy-rich Gulf state, which has one of the world's highest GDPs per head, has rubbed off on an unusually high-end edition of a tournament for the masses.

If you're able to spring \$4,950 for a VIP ticket to a group game, you can enjoy drinks, a six-course meal and entertainment at a lounge overlooking the halfway line at Lusail Stadium, north of Doha.

In Dubai, an hour's flight away and expected to be a major destination, an official World Cup package costs \$1,500 for four nights in a shared room

Those with bottomless budgets in the resource-rich region have attractive accommodation options too, with one third-party site offering \$4,000-a-night hotel rooms and \$26,000 for a "head of state" suite - with a 30-night minimum stay.

Things are a little different for ordinary fans.

Cheaper options include a steel bed in a shared room in the semi-desert near the capital at

\$84 a night, or accommodation on docked cruise ships from \$179 to \$800.

Stadium crowds will include Qatar's migrant labourers, who were offered some tickets at 40 riyals (\$11) to watch a sport whose players and core supporters are traditionally blue-collar.

The hordes of ticketless fans that usually descend on a World Cup will be reduced in number, as only ticket holders and up to

three guests each can enter Qatar during the November 20 - December 18 tournament.

Many supporters will stay elsewhere in the Gulf and board the estimated 100-200 World Cup shuttle flights a day from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman.

Even those options do not come cheap.

In Dubai, an hour's flight away and expected to be a major destination, an official World Cup package costs \$1,500 for four nights in a shared room, including one return flight to Doha but no match tickets.

The Qatar World Cup is at least compact, with all eight sta-

diums in and around Doha - eradicating the cross-country travel needed at previous editions such as Brazil 2014 or Russia 2018.

Sue Holt, executive director of Expat Sport, the UAE agent for the official World Cup package provider, said there was a range of accommodation "to suit most budgets". The United States, Britain, France, Mexico, China and India were among the countries where fans were showing most interest in packages for the UAE, she said.

"Sports tourists generally tend to be older and travel in groups, which can be families, friends or sporting groups," she said.

Saka punch floors Liverpool as Arsenal storm back to the top

London, United Kingdom - Arsenal returned to the top of the Premier League and plunged Liverpool's into turmoil as Bukayo Saka's double inspired a thrilling 3-2 win on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side have emerged as title challengers and this hard-fought success at the Emirates Stadium was another significant statement of intent.

The Gunners took the lead inside the first minute through Gabriel Martinelli before Darwin Nunez equalised for Liverpool.

Saka put Arsenal back in front late in the first half. Although Roberto Firmino equalised after the interval, Saka's nerveless penalty sealed Arsenal's eighth win from their nine league matches.

The Gunners are one point clear of champions Manchester City, who had taken pole position with a win over Southampton on Saturday.

Last weekend's 3-1 win over Tottenham added to the growing feeling that Arteta has built a team worth taking seriously. The way they refused to be denied by Liverpool underlined that impression.

While Arsenal are on the up, Liverpool are in turmoil after their worst start for 10 years.

Without a win in their last



Bukayo Saka scores Arsenal's second goal against Liverpool in their English Premier League match at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday (AFP)

three league games, Jurgen Klopp's men are languishing 14 points behind Arsenal in 10th place. They look a shadow of the side that came within two games of an unprecedented quadruple last season.

Those painful near-misses in the Premier League title race and Champions League final appear to have left Liverpool with a hangover.

Klopp had already conceded it was unlikely they would win the title after such a disappointing start and few would disagree now.

Although Klopp rejects claims his intense management style has worn down his players, on the seventh anniversary of the German's appointment, the sight of Liverpool with only two wins from eight league games is jarring.

Responding to Arteta's plea to show "no fear", Arsenal tore into Liverpool as they launched a blistering counter that gave them the lead after just 58 seconds.

Saka led the raid as he picked out Martin Odegaard's run and the Dane slipped a pin-point pass through to Martinelli, who got behind Trent Alexander-Arnold for a clinical finish from eight yards.

AFP



Paris Saint-Germain's Spanish defender Sergio Ramos (L) receives a red card from French referee Pierre Gaillouste on Saturday (AFP)

PSG rescue point at Reims after Ramos sees red for 28th time

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain salvaged a point with 10 men as they drew 0-0 at struggling Reims on Saturday but still increased their Ligue 1 lead after Marseille lost 2-1 at home to last-place Ajaccio.

Both PSG and Marseille rested starters with an eye on midweek Champions League games and their showdown next Sunday.

Marseille came a cropper, despite Dimitri Payet's 100th Ligue 1 goal. PSG escaped with a draw, despite Sergio Ramos' 28th career red card.

reer red card.

PSG coach Christophe Galtier made five changes from the team that drew 1-1 away to Benfica in midweek and his side spent much of the first 40 minutes on the back foot.

"I know Sergio Ramos well, I am not convinced that the insult that came out was in the direction of the referee. It is a training-ground insult that you hear a lot on the field in Spain. The referee took it personally and sent him off," said Galtier.

Militao takes Real Madrid top of La Liga, Atletico scrape win

Madrid, Spain - Eder Militao's early goal earned Real Madrid a comfortable 1-0 win over Getafe on Saturday to take them top of La Liga.

Carlo Ancelotti's side lead Barcelona by three points, ahead of Celta Vigo's visit to Camp Nou on Sunday.

Elsewhere Angel Correa's brace gave Atletico Madrid a 2-1 win over Girona, while new Sevilla coach Jorge Sampaoli earned a creditable 1-1 draw against third-place Athletic Bilbao.

Real Madrid secured their first clean sheet of the season in La Liga at the Coliseum as they took home the three points.

Karim Benzema did not train on Friday and was not included in Real Madrid's match-day squad. The club hope the French forward will be at full strength for the Clasico next weekend.

The striker failed to score in the two matches he has played since his return from a thigh injury and it didn't take Los Blancos long to move in front without him.

Militao headed home from Luka Modric's perfect corner in the fourth minute. It was the ideal way for the Brazilian defender to



Real Madrid's Eder Militao (R) scores against Getafe at the Coliseo Alfonso Perez stadium on Saturday (AFP)

celebrate his 100th appearance for the club.

Borja Mayoral should have levelled against his former side but was unable to turn home Fabrizio Angileri's cross-shot as Getafe bit back after Madrid's intense start.

Madrid put together a slick team move before the break which ended with David Soria

saving a Rodrigo header, before Vinicius Junior drew a penalty - or so he thought.

The Brazilian was clumsily felled in the area by Luis Milla but VAR spotted the ball had gone out of play in the build-up.

Madrid were foiled again when Rodrigo dinked the ball over Soria following a ricochet into his path, but the goal was

disallowed for offside.

Getafe did their best to keep Madrid at arm's length, with Vinicius at his silky best on the ball, albeit too far from goal to do more damage. With Rodrigo showing his talent too, it will be hard for Ancelotti to work out whom he might drop to fit Benzema back into the side.

AFP

Italy to face England in Euro 2024 qualifying

Frankfurt, Germany - Reigning champions Italy were drawn on Sunday to face England, the team they beat in the final last year, and Ukraine in qualifying for the 2024 European Championship.

Euro 2024, hosted by Germany, will be Italy's chance to regain some pride after they failed to qualify for the World Cup finals which kick off in Qatar in six weeks' time.

France, who will defend their world title in Qatar, were drawn to face the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland in Group B while Spain's opponents in Group A will include Scotland and Erling Haaland's Norway.

Portugal and Cristiano Ronaldo, who will be 39 by the time the finals kick off, go into a Group J including Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iceland.

Croatia, the losing World Cup finalists in 2018, are in Group D with World Cup qualifiers Wales as well as Turkey.

Denmark, another team going to Qatar, have Finland, Slovenia and Northern Ireland among the teams in their Group H.

AFP

INDIA VS SOUTH AFRICA

COMPREHENSIVE WIN

Shreyas Iyer, Ishan Kishan star as India hammer South Africa in the second ODI

Ranchi, India - Shreyas Iyer hit a century and Ishan Kishan made 93 to power India to a seven-wicket win over South Africa in the second one-day international on Sunday and keep the series alive.

Chasing 279 for victory, the hosts depended on a 161-run third-wicket partnership between the left-handed Kishan and Iyer, unbeaten on 113, to achieve their target with 25 balls to spare in Ranchi.

The bowlers led by Mohammed Siraj set up victory after they choked the opposition runs in the final overs and kept South Africa down to 278-7 despite a 129-run stand between Reeza Hendricks (74) and Aiden Markram (79).

The three-match series remains level at 1-1 with the decider on Tuesday in New Delhi.

India lost their openers including skipper Shikhar Dhawan for 13 after getting starts but Kishan and Iyer stood firm to revive the chase and take the attack to the opposition.



India's Shreyas Iyer celebrates after scoring a century against South Africa in their second one-day international in Ranchi, India, on Sunday (AFP)

"I must say that Ishan and Shreyas, the way they created that partnership was great to watch," said Dhawan.

"The ball was coming on nicely

but it was keeping low. So our plan was to take on the bowlers in the first ten overs. But once the dew came into the picture, it was skidding on."

Kishan took on Anrich Nortje in one over to smash the pace bowler for a four and two sixes, but missed out on a maiden international hundred when he fell to

Bjorn Fortuin.

Iyer, who reached his second ODI ton with a boundary, kept up the attack despite struggling with cramps midway through the in-

nings and stood unbeaten with Sanju Samson, who made 30, to steer the team home.

Iyer and Samson put on an unbroken stand of 73 for a team

whose big guns, including regular captain Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, were missing after their Twenty20 side left for the World Cup in Australia.

'Pitch got better'

"I think we didn't expect the dew to play such a big part, that's why we opted to bat after we won the toss," South Africa's stand-in skipper Keshav Maharaj said.

"But credit to Shreyas and Sanju. We expected it to get slower and lower but after 20 overs the pitch got better."

Earlier Siraj returned figures of 3-38 from his pace bowling as South Africa, without unwell captain Temba Bavuma, managed just 57 runs in the final 10 overs.

The Proteas were 204-3 after 37 overs and looked likely to get more than 300 but the tables turned after Hendricks got out and then Heinrich Klaasen (30) and Markram fell in the space of three deliveries.

Siraj, who struck first with the wicket of Quinton de Kock, had Hendricks caught by debutant Shahbaz Ahmed to break the big stand. David Miller hit an unbeaten 35 off 34 balls but failed to provide an attacking finish to the innings. The loss puts South Africa in danger of missing out on direct entry into next year's 50-over World Cup in India.

They languish 11th in the Super League table. Only the top eight teams (seven and hosts India) earn direct qualification to the 2023 tournament.

AFP

England claim opening T20 against Australia

Perth, Australia - England went one up in their three-match Twenty20 series against Australia with a thrilling eight-run win in Perth on Sunday.

After Australia were set an imposing 209 for victory, the home side at one stage looked like pulling off an unlikely win on the back of a fine 73 from David Warner and some big hitting from Marcus Stoinis.

But some inspired fast bowling in the latter stages from Mark Wood (3-34) and Sam Curran (2-35) saw England home as Australia finished their 20 overs eight runs short.

Earlier, England openers Alex Hales and captain Jos Buttler smashed a new-look Australian attack to all parts of the ground in a brutal display of power hitting as they helped England to 208-6.

While Australia threatened several times, the English were able to strike at key moments to stay on top.

"Australia played really well - they put us under a lot of pressure," Buttler said. "We were



Sam Curran (L) and Harry Brook of England celebrate after their victory against Australia in Perth on Sunday (AFP)

favourites for large parts of that chase and we needed to take wickets, which is what we did."

Hales blasted 84 runs from 51 balls and Buttler 68 from 32 deliveries as Australia rested pace trio Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood and leg

spinner Adam Zampa.

Their replacements failed to come to terms with the powerful stroke play of the England opening pair, who hit 20 fours and seven sixes between them.

Buttler, back in the side after a two-month injury lay-off, showed

no signs of rust as he and Hales smashed 50 off the first five overs and brought up the 100 in just the ninth over. Nathan Ellis was the pick of the bowlers, taking 3-20 on a batting-friendly wicket with a lightning-fast outfield.

AFP

Conway guides New Zealand to T20 tri-series win over Bangladesh

Christchurch, New Zealand - Devon Conway showed why he will be New Zealand's key batter at the Twenty20 World Cup by top-scoring in an eight-wicket tri-series win over Bangladesh in Christchurch on Sunday.

Conway batted with control for his unbeaten 70 off 51 balls as the Black Caps chased down 137-8 at Hagley Oval with 13 balls to spare.

South African-born Conway continued a bright run of form that has seen him tally 294 runs in his last seven T20I innings, at an average just under 60.

The left-handed opener's career average has now climbed above 50, a rarity in the short-ended international format.

He put on 85 for the second wicket alongside captain Kane Williamson (30) before Glenn Phillips' quickfire 23 not out off nine balls rounded out New Zealand's first win of the tournament.



New Zealand's Devon Conway plays a shot during his match-winning knock against Bangladesh in Christchurch on Sunday (AFP)

Pakistan lead after the first round of matches, having beaten New Zealand by six wickets and Bangladesh by 21 runs. All three sides are using the week-long series to fine-tune for the World Cup in Australia this month.

Earlier, Black Caps legspinner Ish Sodhi became the fifth bowler to take 100 T20I wickets, remov-

ing top-scorer Najmul Hossain Shanto (33) in his first over to reach the milestone.

Sodhi dismissed Mosaddek Hossain soon afterwards to further halt the Bangladesh mid-innings momentum, aided by a miserly 2-14 from fellow-spinner Michael Bracewell.

AFP

Rookie Spaniard, 22, wins LIV event to bag monster \$4 million

Bangkok, Thailand - Unheralded Eugenio Lopez-Chacarra, who only turned professional in June this year, secured a massive \$4 million pay day on Sunday by winning the breakaway LIV golf tour event in Bangkok.

The Spaniard had not finished inside the top 20 previously at a LIV event but landed a monster cheque after carding a final round three-under 69 to hold off former US Masters champion Patrick Reed by three strokes at Stonehill golf club.

The 22-year-old followed up his opening two rounds of 65 and 63 to finish on 19-under par.

There was a three-way tie for third in the 54-hole event with Englishmen Paul Casey and

It's great. I'm playing with the best players in the world, and that's what I've wanted to do since I was little and I'm learning from each of them.

EUGENIO LOPEZ-CHACARRA

Richard Bland finishing on 15-under par alongside American Sihwan Kim.

"It's great," said Lopez-Chacarra who until a few months ago was still a college student.

"I'm playing with the best players in the world, and that's what I've wanted to do since I was little and I'm learning from each of them.

"It's been a dream, and I can't

be more excited for the next years to come."

The \$25 million event in Bangkok was the Saudi-backed LIV tour's first in Asia.

The deep pockets of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund have allowed LIV to offer eye-watering prize money.

The last place in Bangkok took home \$120,000 - but LIV have also drawn accusations of "sportswashing".



Eugenio Lopez-Chacarra celebrates after winning the LIV golf tour event in Bangkok

A host of top players have joined the series, plunging golf into a bitter civil war with the US PGA Tour banning players who sign for LIV.

And this week's event was overshadowed by a row over world ranking points, after LIV said it would be co-sanctioned by the developmental MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Tour but the official rankings body OWGR refused to recognise it and award points.

LIV has previously staged five events in its first season, but without any ranking points awarded for its players - including former world number one Dustin Johnson.

AFP



Shonal Kunimal with Oman Automobile Association manager Sanad al Rawahi

Shonal claims top honours in the first round of Oman RMC series

Muscat – Shonal Kunimal began his 2022-23 season in Oman on a victorious note as the 11-year-old claimed the top honours in the Mini Max category of the opening round of the Oman Rotax Max Challenge (RMC) Championship at the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) Muscat Speedway recently.

This is the first time that the OAA is organising a domestic Rotax Max Challenge series, which comprise three rounds in various categories.

Shonal, an Indian School Ghubra student, put in a solid display to take the top prize with the best lap time of 56.316 sec.

He was followed by another promising racer Adam Awan, who had the best lap time of 56.498 sec. Devansh Bandyopadhy (57.377sec) completed

the podium.

Earlier, Shonal dominated all three sessions in the qualifying and pre-final races.

"It was a good start to the new season. It also served as a good warm-up for the MENA Nations Cup 2022. I hope to continue with my good form and hope to claim the overall title," said Shonal.

Oman Automobile Association manager Sanad al Rawahi gave away the awards.

The second round will be held at the same venue on December 10 while the third and final round is scheduled for February 3, 2023.

Meanwhile, OAA is getting ready to host the biggest karting championship in the region, the MENA Nations Cup, for the third time later this year.

BULLISH TO THE MAX

Red Bull's Max Verstappen targets Formula One domination after second world title

Suzuka, Japan - Max Verstappen said he was capable of dominating Formula One for years to come after clinching his second straight world title at the Japanese Grand Prix on Sunday.

The Red Bull driver won a dramatic, rain-shortened race in Suzuka and claimed the championship when his nearest rival Charles Leclerc was relegated to third by a five-second penalty.

The flying Dutchman said it was a "crazy feeling" to lift the trophy for a second time -- then set his sights on ruling the sport for years to come.

"If I have a competitive car, I'm confident that we can keep this going," said the 25-year-old, who has won 12 of 18 races this season.

"It also depends on what the competition is going to come up with. I really believe in this group and I really hope that in the coming years we can enjoy a lot more wins and potentially of course championships."

Verstappen was only informed he had retained his title midway through the post-race TV interview, and even the driver himself was not sure.

Ferrari's Leclerc crossed the line second in front of Red Bull's Sergio Perez, but he was hit with a penalty after squeezing Perez in the final chicane and being deemed to have gained an advantage by leaving the track.

"I made a mistake and tried to minimise it," said Leclerc, who



Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen in action at the F1 Japanese Grand Prix in Suzuka on Sunday. (Below) Verstappen celebrates with the trophy (AFP)

I believe in this group and I really hope that in the coming years we can enjoy a lot more wins

MAX VERSTAPPEN



led the championship early in the season. "Huge congratulations to Max and Red Bull. Max has been incredible and it's a title fully deserved."

The amended result gave Verstappen an unassailable 113-point lead over Perez and made him only the third driver after Michael Schumacher and Sebastian Vettel to clinch the title with

four races to spare.

"I was told I was the world champion, we celebrated and then people told me 'no, you're still missing a point'," he said of the post-race confusion.

"Eventually we had enough

points so we were world champion again."

The Japanese Grand Prix was staged for the first time since 2019 because of the pandemic, but the race got off to a chaotic start in heavy rain.

Leclerc was quicker off the line than pole sitter Verstappen, who admitted he made "a terrible start", before the Dutchman regained the lead with a brave overtake around the outside of turn one.

"It was very close but that's what people like to see," he said. Ferrari's Carlos Sainz spun out on the first lap and the Williams of Alex Albon broke down prompting a safety car.

A red flag soon followed and forced the drivers back to the pit lane for almost two hours.

Verstappen resumed on a rolling start ahead of Leclerc and Perez and extended his lead with ease once the safety car dived back into the pits and track conditions began to improve.

AFP

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Djokovic takes 90th career title with Astana victory

Astana, Kazakhstan - Novak Djokovic claimed the 90th title of his career and the fourth of 2022 with a dominant straight-sets victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas in the ATP final in Astana on Sunday.

The 35-year-old Djokovic triumphed 6-3, 6-4 in 75 minutes to add to the trophies he won this season in Israel, Rome and at Wimbledon.

It was the ninth consecutive match victory for the fourth seed, who guaranteed himself a spot at the 2022 ATP Finals as a result of the win.

Fritz wins Japan Open

Taylor Fritz beat his friend and US rival Frances Tiafoe in two closely fought sets to win the Japan Open on Sunday, saying he had to play his "absolute best" to win.

Third-seeded Fritz claimed the title 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/2), and will break into the top 10 for the first time on Monday with a new ranking of eight.

AFP



Novak Djokovic celebrates with the trophy after defeating Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Astana Open final on Sunday (AFP)



Elise Mertens celebrates with the trophy after winning the WTA title in Monastir, Tunisia, on Sunday

Mertens wins seventh WTA title in Monastir

Monastir, Tunisia - Belgian Elise Mertens thrashed France's Alize Cornet to win her seventh WTA title and first this year in Monastir on Sunday.

The fifth seed romped to a 6-2, 6-0 victory in 80 minutes against Cornet, the third seed, in the inaugural tournament in Tunisia.

Mertens broke for a 3-2 lead in the first set, reeling off 11 straight games to wrap up the match. It was the 26-year-old's first title since Melbourne last

February and her first final since April 2021.

Krejickova champ

Barbora Krejickova clinched a second successive WTA title with a stunning straight sets victory over world number one Iga Swiatek in the Ostrava final on Sunday.

The world number 23 triumphed 5-7, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 to add the Czech trophy to her victory in Tallinn last weekend.

AFP

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Hubert Vaz

When you walk into the Art & Soul Gallery, at Water Front mall, in Shatti Qurm, this week, be prepared to be mesmerised by a unique collection of paintings conforming to three inter-related styles that together form a colourful cauldron of sorts which gets you into its sway instantly.

Convergences – a solo exhibition by Hector Hugo Quintanilla, a visiting Argentinian artist – was inaugurated on October 6 and will be on till October 15. The exhibition comprises 32 paintings created by the artist to showcase his engagement with three distinct styles of expressionism, neo expressionism and abstract expressionism.

Quintanilla, more than an artist, has been a journalist for the better part of his career. He is currently head of content, National University of Misiones (UNAM) and has been actively involved in teaching journalism as well effectively writing on varied subjects for a string of publications.

The artist, who never took up formal training in art, however, admits that he had been mentored by a popular artist who taught him the ropes and help him discover and develop his very own skill. And somewhere down the road as a journalist, the artistic side of himself went on ahead and emerge as a more promising side of his zeal for creative expression.

Quintanilla has, so far, held exhibitions at many prestigious galleries including Lucas Braulio Areco Museum, The Mate's Palace, Knowledge Park, Luxus Gallery (San Pablo, Brasil), Hansford and Sons Gallery (United Kingdom), Braque Gallery (Buenos Aires), Bar de Fondo Gallery (Buenos Aires), Juan Yaparí Mseum, Shopping Posadas, Sarmiento Gallery, Chaco Biennial of South American Art. He has also authored two books - The Storm and Other Tales and The Diary of a Poet.

Inspirations and instincts

Beginning his artistic career with realism, sketching and painting realistic images of people, animals, objects, landscapes, Quintanilla admits that he was, indeed, inspired by the work of the likes of legendary Spanish painter Pablo Picasso, American abstract expressionists

CONVERGENCES

Enclave of expressionism

A vibrant exhibition of paintings by Argentinian artist, Hector Hugo Quintanilla is currently on display at Art & Soul Gallery. The collection of paintings convey three styles – expressionism, neo expressionism and abstract expressionism

in the post World War II period – Pollock was one of them.

Impressionism and expressionism

Asked to explain the key distinction between impressionism and expressionism as two styles of modern art, both of which were prevalent since the 1950s, Quintanilla explained that impressionism involved recreating what already exists, as it is – like reproducing a photograph or a realistic setting on canvas. However, expressionism goes a step beyond that and adds the artist's own understanding and creative slant such that the painting has a deeper meaning or is a pointer to another aspect not clearly presented in the artwork.

"Expressionism helps me to get out of a realistic situation or event, as is reflected in daily news, and express a more meaningful thought that is connected with that particular event," he explained, however, admitting that expressions of the same same subject and their interpretations could vary among different artists.

As for the exhibits on display at the exhibition, Quintanilla disclosed that most of them were created around the same time but the inspiration behind each was different. He would work on one painting in the morning



like Jackson Pollock, and a few others, each of which had their own distinct style.

The current exhibition comprises display of paintings categorised on three different walls as expressionism, neo expressionism and abstract expressionism. While it might not be easy for the lay person to be able to identify the three styles clearly, it might be interesting to note that paintings categorised as expressionism are more easy to understand and reflect the artist's own subjectivity.

Neo expressionism comprises paintings that might appear as semi-abstract and usually convey a deeper, hidden message. These came to the fore in the 1970s when artists sought a more robust expression of their own creativity in diverse forms and vibrant hues. On the other hand, abstract expressionism involves a lot of gestural brush strokes and became popular in the 1950s, when American artists sought a new form of expression

and take up another in the afternoon as each would dictate its own presentation depends on how he felt at that time, he asserted, adding that he tends to paint abstract when he is more stressed – and that's why the colours come forth more vibrant in these.

About his visit to Oman, Quintanilla disclosed that he was invited by two friends – Paula and Mohammed – without any specific intention in mind. And, he readily accepted the intention as he has not been to any country in the middle east and was interested to discover something new.

His first visit to Oman has truly wowed him to a great extent, and he was happy to note that there is much inspiration for an artist all around the sultanate. Quintanilla also plans to come back to Oman again with the sole intention of creating a new series based on local inspiration, as the sights he has beheld, so far, have already laid the foundation for it.



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