



► NEWS BRIEF

HM, PRESIDENT OF IRAN REVIEW BILATERAL COOPERATION

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik made a phone call on Monday to President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran. During the telephonic conversation, aspects of bilateral cooperation and ways of promoting these were reviewed in various spheres. Views on the latest regional and international developments were also exchanged.

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Former PM Imran Khan wins big in Pakistan by-election

Tourism recovering, projects to boost sector: Minister

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's tourism sector is recovering steadily, according to H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

Giving details of several projects that are in planning and construction stages, H E Mahrrouqi tweeted that "there are indicators to show the recovery of the tourism sector in the sultanate".

He informed that some projects are in an advanced stage of implementation, while others are under construction.

"Oman Group will implement several projects and develop public facilities in a number of governorates. There will be an announcement on promising quality projects with foreign investments soon," he tweeted.

The minister shared images of projects on Twitter that will soon be implemented in cooperation with Omran Group, including the Itlatat Buraimi, Itlatat Ibrī, Al Abeela Park in Buraimi, Nizwa Gate, Nizwa Park, Yanqul Park and Dhank Park.

Spread over 264,418sqm, Itlatat Buraimi aims to provide hospitality, camping and recreation facilities. The project is expected to take 15 months to complete and cost RO900,000, while Itlatat Ibrī will be a global entertainment centre spread over an area of 36,162sqm costing RO600,000. It is expected to be completed in 24 months.



The parks in Yanqul and Dhank in Dhahirah governorate will be completed in 36 months and cost RO800,000. "The two parks aim to highlight the beauty of the respective areas and stimulate domestic tourism," H E Mahrrouqi said.

The first phase of the Al Abeela Park in Buraimi will take 12 months to complete, costing RO700,000 and spread over 181,210sqm. The Nizwa Gate project will cost RO350,000 and have a tourist information centre, including electronic screens that display the cultural history of Dakhliyah governorate.

Reacting to H E Mahrrouqi's tweets, Issa al Balushi tweeted that carnivals and festivals en-

hance the scope of cultural tourism. "Onset of the winter season is an ideal opportunity to hold such events in the governorates."

The minister replied, "There is no doubt about that. The ministry is planning to hold a number of events such as Heritage Festival in Dakhliyah, Desert Adventure in Bidiyah, Maritime Heritage Festival in Sur, and Frankincense Festival and Empty Quarter Festival in Dhofar."

Another citizen Abdul Hamid al Siyabi tweeted, "We hope to see the establishment of a zoo in the wilayat of Quriyat, as it is a prime location to attract domestic and foreign tourism investments."

In response, H E Mahrrouqi tweeted, "The Quriyat al Sahil project, which has been long overdue, will be launched soon and will contain some of these components."

Oman's hospitality industry is expected to record a year-on-year growth of 90.9 per cent, the fastest in the region, to reach US\$700mn in 2022.

The increase can be primarily attributed to an estimated 49.5 per cent growth in tourist arrivals during the year and lower base of 2021 as the sultanate continues to recover from the pandemic, according to Alpen Capital's GCC Hospitality Industry Report, published on August 3, 2022.



(Supplied photo)

102 projects worth RO1.3bn to boost food security

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 102 investment projects worth RO1.3bn have been identified for implementation by the private sector, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

In cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the National Programme for Investment and Exports Development (Nazdahir), MAFWR launched a series of meetings to tackle the challenges of food security projects in the sultanate on Monday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

The meeting on Monday was held under the auspices of H E Dr Khalfan bin Saeed al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

Ahmed Saleh al Harthi, Director of the Office of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit in MAFWR, said, "Most of the 102 investment projects identified will be implemented through private sector investments in the coming period. These projects will represent an addition to the domestic product and raise the level of self-sufficiency and food security upon completion."

According to Harthi, the meet-

The total annual food consumption cost of 2021 was RO2.7bn

YOUSUF AL RIYAMI

ings aimed to shed light on the most important challenges faced by food security projects in the sultanate and to find a mechanism to prevent and reduce the impact of these challenges on future projects.

Mohammed bin Saud al Raisi, Supervisor of Food Security Department of Nazdahir, said, "The meetings will help develop sustainable solutions for future projects, identify new investment opportunities, develop sustainable solutions to the general challenges of projects, and discuss new investments."

Yousuf bin Mohammed bin Thani al Riyami, Director General of Directorate General of National Statistics at National Centre for Statistics and Information, informed that the total annual food consumption cost of 2021 was RO2.7bn and inflation rate of foodstuff is five per cent.

The value of food imports in 2021 amounted to RO1.9bn, led by cereals and cereal products, while the value of food exports was RO600mn, led by fish and fish products.

UK remains largest FDI contributor in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The United Kingdom continues to be the largest foreign direct investment (FDI) contributor to Oman and the country's total direct investments in the sultanate totalled US\$19.6bn in 2021. This accounted for more than 40 per cent of total FDIs, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The 2021 figure was an eight per cent increase over the 2020 investments. At the end of the first quarter of 2022, Oman recorded US\$46.6bn worth of total FDIs, an increase of 19 per cent over the same period of 2021. The oil and gas sector remained the biggest recipient of FDIs.

In order to attract more foreign investment, MoCIIP - in cooperation with the British Embassy in Muscat - held the Oman-British Investment Forum at Grand Hyatt Muscat on Monday under the patronage of H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. It was attended by Sir Alan Duncan, board member of Anglo-Omani Society, H E Bill Murray, British Ambassador to Oman, and several businessmen from both sides.



We're re-engineering our approach to business, streamlining procedures and rolling out enterprise-friendly initiatives and it's delivering results

H E QAIS AL YUSEF

The forum aimed at exploring investment opportunities in Oman, increase Omani non-oil exports, attract investments, and introduce the sultanate's investment environment.

Addressing the forum, H E Yusef said, "We're re-engineering our approach to business, streamlining procedures and rolling out enterprise-friendly initiatives and it's delivering results."

He stressed that the current economic stimulus plan is based on five main axes, including providing incentives related to taxes

and fees and others that improve the business and investment environment to support small and medium enterprises, besides offering incentives for the labour and employment market to enhance the performance of economic activities and attract foreign investments.

He added that the ministry has developed the 'Invest in Oman Portal', trial opening of which will be held at end of the year. The portal aims to attract investors and introduce them to the investment incentives and the industrial, free and economic zones in the sultanate. Account managers will be allocated for investors to complete all procedures. The portal will have 14 government agencies.

"The ministry seeks to facilitate the business environment, improve the services provided, support the national industry and Omani products, besides promoting investment opportunities, attracting investments and enhancing exports," H E Yusef said.

On his turn, H E Murray highlighted areas of investment and business cooperation between the two countries. He also called on investors from Oman and the UK to boost investments in the energy sector and utilise the sultanate's ports, economic zones and free zones.



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF
HEALTHSERVICES



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health - Directorate General of Health Service AL Dhahira Governorate of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2638/2022	Proposed Extention Of Offices For Directorate Of Engineering Affairs In Irh At Aldhahira Governorate	Thursday 27/ OCT /2022	Before 9 am on Tuesday 22/ NOV /2022	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board-third grade.	R.O 25/= Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to the Tender Committee in the DGHS before one day of date submission
- The DGHS is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via

Telephone: 24402200

Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.



International Monetary Fund (IMF) has praised Oman's efforts in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis and reviving the economy after the pandemic. It stated that higher oil prices, fiscal consolidation measures and progress on structural reforms are supporting a post-pandemic economic recovery in the sultanate.

While 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.

Muscat Daily readers responded to the questions: Have you seen improvement in the economic situation? How has it made life better for you?

ECONOMY ON REBOUND



Ruskeen S
Private sector employee

Compared to other countries, Oman's recovery is phenomenal under His Majesty's leadership. The retail sector is witnessing movement and real improvement. The sluggish phase of business has gone.

Sameer Alam
Businessman

Oman has been wise and did not panic in the bad times. I am indeed very happy with the progress though it has been slow and steady. There have been regulations on prices and we didn't see any price hike.

Sravan Mudumbai
Private sector employee

While the world is busy combating post-pandemic difficulties, like supply chain disruptions and now inflation, Oman has been resilient and focusing on growth while keeping inflation in check. This is mainly due to the price stability in energy and fuel, inexhaustible supply of migrant work force at prevailing rates and inflation being largely a depoliticised issue.

I have been able to continue to sustain as usual in these global difficulties and have feeling better as the near future doesn't look uncertain.

Yousuf al Zadjali
Government employee

We have undergone challenging times but with the vision and foresight of the government, we have managed to overcome it. The IMF is right in its appreciation for the overall progress of Oman. We have seen new devel-

opments immediately after the pandemic, including high-end luxury resorts and big malls among others.

Reema Bhatia
Teacher

Oman's economy has been boosted. Key priorities include enhancing labour market flexibility, boosting employment, vaccinating all people and improving the business environment. The tourism industry plays a lead role. The markets are normalised and there's positivity in the people for a better life ahead. The Omani economy registered a relatively stronger growth rate in 2022.

Abdullah al Kindi
Salesman

The best thing that we have observed in the last few years after pandemic is that inflation is under control in Oman unlike other countries. There is hardly any price hike and even if there is, it's nominal and of none essentials.

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

More than 500 tonnes of food are wasted in Oman annually. What is the best way to reduce food wastage in the sultanate?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by Muscat Daily. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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Partial solar eclipse on Oct 25

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman will witness a partial solar eclipse on October 25, according to the Omani Astronomical Society (OAS).

Al Julanda Mas'oud al Rawahi, head of the Social Communications Committee of OAS, said, "The partial solar eclipse will start at 2.50pm. The eclipse will reach its peak at 3:57pm and end at 4.58pm. The partial solar eclipse will last around two hours and seven minutes. All will be able to observe it in Oman in the case of clear weather."

According to Rawahi, the phenomenon will be observed in different parts of the sultanate. It will be 36 per cent eclipsed in Muscat, 22 per cent in Salalah,



35 per cent in Nizwa, 37 per cent in Sohar, and 41 per cent in Musandam.

"We urge people to follow safety procedures and appropriate viewing equipment to monitor the eclipse. It should not be viewed with the naked eye, as it can cause damage," he said.

Viewing the sun while it is

partially obscured during the eclipse can damage the retina of the eye, Rawahi explained.

"OAS, in cooperation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and relevant authorities, will organise mass viewing events of the celestial event, details of which will be announced later on the society's social media accounts."

INVITATION TO TENDER



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

Tender No.	: 2022-ENG-SOW-0046
Tender Title	: Fire Suppression system for IT rooms
Scope	: Supplier shall do turnkey basis: Fire Suppression system for IT rooms and final PACDA approval.
Tender No.	: 2022-ENG-SOW-0028
Tender Title	: Reduce Green Anode Density Variation
Scope	: Supplier shall do turnkey basis a new crushing facility in the Paste Plant to reduce Green Anode Density Variation.

Document Issue Date	: 25 October 2022	Last Date For Applying	: 24 October 2022
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Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

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Prominent dance academy to present 250 performers



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Delicious Dance Academy (DDA) of Muscat is preparing for a gala tenth anniversary celebrations on October 21, with over 250 students from the academy presenting a dance fiesta at the Qurm Amphitheatre in the capital city.

Titled 'DDA LA FEST 2022', the event is expected to attract over 5000 spectators, said the organisers.

Speaking during a press-conference on Saturday, a spokesperson for the academy said that the main attraction of the evening would be the 'electrifying performances' by over 250 DDAites.

The academy has also planned a programme with the specially challenged children of the Indian School Muscat to express themselves through dance

A SPOKESPERSON

"This event is the fruit of several months of hard work and planning put together with an ultimate goal of being able to provide the best platform for our students to showcase their talent and to just dance to their hearts content," said the spokesperson.

This year DDA LA FEST is set to be more festive than ever as the academy completed ten successful years of 'teaching, growing, and creating a bigger family',

another member said.

"DDA has never been a one-man show. It always displayed dedicated team-work. The members have been together for the longest of times - from those who have lasted for years to few fresh faces. No matter what, their teamwork is what has led us to the success and growth of the institution."

This year DDA will host the two times National Award win-

ner Padma Shri Shobhana, an acclaimed artist from the Indian film industry and a noted exponent of Indian classical dance as the chief guest. The academy has also planned a programme with the specially challenged children of the Indian School Muscat to express themselves through dance.

DDA started their journey in 2012 with an aim to introduce a new dance culture in Oman. At DDA, professional instructors offer training in different forms of dance such as hip hop, semi classical and contemporary, including those from the Bollywood - the Mumbai Film industry.

The free-entry event managed by Axis Events will start at 7pm, the organisers said.

Housing ministry reduces real estate fees by almost 50%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to stimulate the real estate sector, H E Dr Khalfan Said Mubarak al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, issued a ministerial decision, amending the licensing fees for various activities linked to the real estate.

The latest decision aims to encourage engagement of citizens in the sector by reducing the fees for six services related to the sector by 50 per cent, the ministry said.

The charge for a real estate brokerage registration card has been brought down from RO500 to RO200 in the Muscat governorate, and from RO300 to RO150 for the rest of the country. Similarly, the fees for the renewal of this card was

reduced from RO200 to RO100 in Muscat, and RO100 to RO50 in the other governorates. The replacement of the card would also cost less, with the fees brought down from RO100 to RO50 in Muscat, and RO50 to RO25 in the rest of the country.

One-time real estate brokerage card would henceforth cost RO25 instead of RO50 in Muscat, and RO15 instead of RO25 in other governorates, while the renewal of this card would cost RO15 instead of RO25 in Muscat, and RO10 instead of RO15 in the rest of the country.

For any replacement of this card, one would have to pay RO10 instead of RO25 in Muscat, and RO10 instead of RO15 for other governorates.

The real estate brokerage

system aims to create an integrated database of the real estate companies in the country. This includes the verification of the performance of companies in terms of services, rates of commission, and the volume of investments.

In addition to monitoring performance of the real estate companies and their services, the system has been put in place to ensure transparency in transactions and to combat the phenomenon of random and part-time brokers.

The system also aims to classify real estate companies according to a professional framework, creating an encouraging environment for real estate development, in addition to providing actual prices of real estate for various purposes.

MAFWR issued 871 water licences in September

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as 871 water licences were issued in September this year, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

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

In the last two years, the ministry changed regulations based on level of available water and likely changes in the situation.

According to MAFWR, the maximum number of licences - 288 - were issued in Dhahirah followed by 163 in Dakhliyah, 119 in South Sharqiyah, 109 in south Batinah, 95 in North Batinah, 36 in South Sharqiyah, 29 in Buraimi, 16 in Muscat, nine in Dhofar, five in Al Wusta and two in the Musandam governorate.

"The ministry deals with licence requests based on the technical requirements and gives conditional approvals in coordination with other government agencies," an official said.

The ministry issued 5,774 water licences during the first six months of this year. It is carrying out inspections to check and limit drilling of random and unlicensed wells. Digging unlicensed wells attract a fine of RO2,000 and one year imprisonment.

140 blood units needed per day: MoH

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Approximately 144 units of red blood cells are needed every day in Oman, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH), even though the Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) raised the blood donation rate across the country.

A statement issued by MoH said, 'DBBS raised the voluntary blood donation rate to 96 per cent at the level of the central blood bank, in addition to increasing the number of collected blood units to 14 per cent in 2021, compared to 2020.'

The DBBS organises many blood donation campaigns in co-operation with different authorities. The number of blood donation campaigns is more than 300 each year. Of around 300 such campaigns held last year, 260 were organised to collect blood from donors.

'The DBBS carefully selects blood donors to ensure the safety and quality of blood and its components. After collecting the blood, it separates the components and preserves for distribution to the health institutions', MoH said.

Despite the increasing number of blood donors responding to campaigns over the past years, the demand for blood



BLOOD COLLECTION STATISTICS

95.5% voluntary blood donation conducted in 2021
67884 blood donors in MoH institutions
81% Omani blood donors in 2021

32754 blood units collected in Central Blood Bank in 2021, compared to 28613 blood units in 2020
14% rise of collected blood units in 2021

units and its components is steadily on the rise from ten per cent to 15 per cent annually.

Before 2020, the daily requirement for blood was not more than 100 units per day in the Central Blood Bank, but currently, the need for blood has gone up to 140 units per day.

'The cases that require transfusion of blood or one of its com-

ponents include those injured in road accidents or disasters, bleeding during surgeries, malignant blood diseases, bone marrow failure, some cases of genetic blood diseases, some cancerous tumours, and in some cases of childbirth,' MoH stated.

However, all are not allowed to donate blood - some are prevented from donating temporar-

ily, while others are permanently barred.

'The temporary cases include those persons - who underwent transfusion of blood or one of its components within one year, who donated blood less than three-months ago, whose tooth was extracted 72 hours before donation, who has mouth, nose, or under skin bleeding (if it is not a medical condition), who had a minor operation in less than six-months before the donation, and pregnant women or those who have delivered one-year ago.

The permanent cases include those infected with communicable diseases such as AIDS or any type of viral hepatitis or syphilis, persons suffering from cancer, heart diseases, epilepsy, diabetes, or any other diseases that need continuous treatment, persons with blood diseases like anaemia and thalassemia, and persons infected with allergic diseases such as asthma or have drug allergies.

There are 13 blood banks and centres of the Ministry of Health (MoH) across the Sultanate of Oman.

In addition to the Central Blood Bank in Bousher, there are blood banks in hospitals in Rustaq, Sohar, Buraimi, Ibri, Nizwa, Ibra, Jalan Bani Bu Ali, Sur, Salalah, Khasab, Dibba and Masirah.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Internal Tender Committee, Ministry of Labour, invites the following Bidding:

Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Last date for electronic purchasing	Documents fee (RO)
04/2022	Submitting offers for renting and operating car cleaning activity for the ministry's employees	Sunday 27/11/2022 at 10:00 am	R.O 25/=

- Specialized establishments can obtain documents of bidding number (4/2022) from the Department of Treasury, third floor of the ministry's building at Airport Heights starting from 18/10/2022.
- Each bid is to be attached with a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of (1%) of the value of the tender for the Ministry of Manpower, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of the tender.
- Bids are to be submitted in closed envelopes sealed with red wax and addressed to His Excellency Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and the name and number of the tender must be written on the envelope with no reference to the bidder.
- Bids shall be placed in the box designated for tenders at the Secretariat of the Internal Tender Committee on the third floor of the Ministry building at Airport Heights, up to a maximum date set before the auction, provided that the bids are opened at 11:00 am on the same day.

(The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest price or of any tender)

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*Rates as on October 17

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Bankrupt Sri Lanka slashes fuel prices

Crisis-hit Sri Lanka slashed fuel prices on Monday, the second cut in as many weeks, after the World Bank warned that the economy will shrink an unprecedented 9.2 per cent this year.

The energy ministry said the price of petrol will be reduced by 40 rupees to 370 rupees (US\$1.02) a litre from Monday night after a similar 10 per cent reduction earlier this month, according to an AFP report.

But the price of regular petrol is still twice the amount before the start of the crisis last year while diesel is three and a half times more than what it was in December 2021.

Earlier this year motorists spent weeks to get fuel, contributing to weeks of protests that forced president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country in July and quit.

The wait at the pumps has reduced to a few hours in recent weeks, but fuel is still strictly rationed because of an enduring shortage of dollars needed to pay for essential imports.

Official annual inflation rates are running at close to 70 per cent.

Moody's affirms ratings of eight Omani firms

Our CorrespondentMuscat

Global credit rating agency Moody's Investor Service has affirmed the ratings of eight government-related issuers (GRIs) in Oman. Moody's has also changed these eight companies' rating outlooks to 'positive' from 'stable'.

The rating action on Omani government-related entities is a direct consequence of the recent rating action on Oman where the Ba3 government bond rating was affirmed and the outlook was changed to positive from stable, Moody's said in a statement.

Moody's affirmed the ratings of the following eight GRIs to Ba3 and revised their outlooks to positive from stable: Omantel, Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), Mazoon Electricity Company, Dhofar Integrated Services Company, Majan Electricity Company, Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC) and Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer).

The rating agency said the outlooks for these companies have been upgraded to positive from stable due to their close linkage to the government and high exposure to the domestic operating environment.

'The decision to change the outlooks to positive from stable reflects the strong credit links between these companies and the government. The ratings of these GRIs have strong credit

inter-linkages with the sovereign because of their significant exposure to the Omani government in the form of subsidies,' Moody's said.

The rating agency said it will be monitoring the impact of the reorganisation of Oman's electricity distribution and supply companies on the capital structures of these entities and their ability to optimize their capital spending.

Moody's said that the rating of Omantel is constrained by the rating of the Omani government because the company generates most of its cash flows in Oman.

As per Moody's, the rating of Omantel remains supported by the company's (i) dominant market position in the Omani telecommunications market; (ii) resilient operating performance, supported by the necessity-like consumer spending on telecommunications services; (iii) high Ebitda margin of above 40 per cent; and (iv) good liquidity.

Rating agency changed its outlook on Omantel, OPWP and six electricity sector companies to 'positive' from 'stable'

Madayn, Galfar sign RO5mn deal for road construction

Our CorrespondentMuscat

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and Galfar Engineering and Contracting Company on Monday signed an agreement for roads and infrastructure construction at Mahas Industrial City in Musandam Governorate.

The signing ceremony was held under the patronage of H E Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al-Busaidi, Governor of Musandam, and in the presence of Hamad bin Hamoud al Qasabi, acting CEO of Madayn.

The project, which will be developed on a construction area of 1mn sqm at a total cost of approximately RO5mn, incorporates internal road network of 7km, installation of 100 lighting poles, construction of a 75-meter bridge linking the entrance of the industrial city to the main road, and water and sewage networks of 5km and 4.5km, respectively.

Moreover, the project includes electricity and telecom services and networks, water tank with a capacity of 1,000 cubic metres, sewage collection tank, rainwater drainage channels with a width of 20 meters and a total length of 4 km, in addition to other works that shall enhance the infrastructure services and facilitate traffic movement at Mahas Industrial City.



Saudi Arabia defends oil policy in face of US charges

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia has rejected US accusations of aligning itself with Russia amid the Ukraine war by making oil production cuts to drive up crude prices, insisting it was purely a business decision.

"We are astonished by the accusations that the kingdom is standing with Russia in its war with Ukraine," the Saudi defence minister, Prince Khaled bin Salman, tweeted late Sunday.

The Saudi-led OPEC+ cartel - which includes Russia - has angered Washington by deciding to cut production by two million barrels per day from November, adding further pressure on soaring crude prices.

"It is telling that these false accusations did not come from the Ukrainian government," Prince Khaled wrote. "Although the OPEC+ decision, which was taken unanimously, was due to purely economic reasons, some accused the kingdom of standing with Russia.

"Iran is also a member of OPEC, does this mean that the kingdom is standing with Iran as well?" he asked, referring to Saudi Arabia's regional rival.

In a speech broadcast on Sunday night, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud insisted his country was "working hard, within its energy strategy, to support the stability and balance of global oil markets".

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which like Saudi Arabia are US allies as well as OPEC partners, also defended the cartel's decision as a "technical" move.

White House spokesman John Kirby said last week that Riyadh knew the cut "would increase Russian revenues and blunt the effectiveness of sanctions" on Moscow.

AFP



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MUSCAT DAILY

Wärtsilä wins contract extension from Musandam Power Company



Our CorrespondentMuscat

Finland-based technology group Wärtsilä has extended the operations and maintenance (O&M) agreement signed five years ago with Musandam Power Company (MPC), the owner of the independent power plant (IPP) in Musandam.

The three-year contract extension will enable the Musandam IPP to continue meeting all its obligations under the power purchase agreement (PPA) it has with the Musandam isolated grid authorities, Wärtsilä said in a statement.

'It will also ensure a reliable electricity supply for local businesses. The extension was signed and booked in Wärtsilä's order intake in the second quarter of this year. There is an option to further extend the agreement by two one-year extensions,' the company added.

The Musandam isolated grid is entirely dependent on the Musandam IPP. The local region is rapidly developing economically and is a popular tourist area with a high demand for electricity.

The extended O&M agreement is part of the two active Wärtsilä service agreements with MPC. A 15-year long term service agreement was signed simultaneously with the engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contract in 2014, which has been complemented with Wärtsilä taking responsibility for operating and maintaining the facility from 2017.

During its five years of operation and maintenance by Wärtsilä, the plant's exceptional reliability has enabled MPC to achieve 100 per cent of the contracted performance guarantees under its PPA based on the service agreements with Wärtsilä, the company said.

The 146MW facility was delivered under a full EPC contract by Wärtsilä in 2017. It operates with 15 Wärtsilä 34DF engines operating on natural gas as the primary fuel.

"Electricity demand is expected to grow during the period of the PPA, and a secure supply is essential for meeting Oman's stringent grid code.

The Wärtsilä plant provides this reliability and availability, thanks both to the efficiency of the engines and their professional operation and maintenance support.

We value Wärtsilä as a partner we can rely on and trust,"

Murshid al Yarubi, CEO of Musandam Power Company, said.

"The initial five-year agreement was successfully completed with good cooperation between Musandam Power Company and Wärtsilä. We have achieved 100 per cent of the contracted performance guarantees towards MPC. We are very proud to know that our good cooperation has enabled Musandam IPP to meet all performance guarantees under the PPA," said Alexandre Eykerman, director - Middle East, Wärtsilä Energy.

Wärtsilä also provides additional services for MPC, including plant security. Remote monitoring of the equipment is carried out from Wärtsilä's Expertise Centre in Dubai and full operational data is analysed to ensure optimal performance and the prevention of outages.

UK reverses budget tax cuts to calm market turmoil

London, UK – Britain's new finance chief Jeremy Hunt on Monday axed debt-fuelled tax cuts to further calm market turmoil, in another major government U-turn that appears to leave Liz Truss's position as prime minister in a precarious state.

Hunt estimated that the tax changes would raise about £32bn (US\$36bn) per year, after economists estimated the government faced a £60bn black hole in the public finances. He also warned of spending cuts.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Hunt, parachuted into the job on Friday to replace sacked Kwasi Kwarteng, said no government could control markets – but stressed his action could give certainty over the health of public finances.

"We will reverse almost all the tax measures announced... three weeks ago," Hunt said in a televised statement, conceding last month's budget from his predecessor had harmed the public purse.

"The most important objective for our country right now is stability," he added in a contrite statement.

Tax U-turns

Hunt scrapped plans to axe the lowest rate of income tax, and curbed the government's flagship energy price freeze –



Britain's new Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt arrives in Downing Street in central London (AFP)

pulling the plug in April instead of late 2024.

After April, the government will "review" its energy support package, he said.

A proposed reduction in shareholder dividend tax was also binned, along with planned tax-free shopping for tourists and a freeze on alcohol duty.

The announcement comes as Truss' governing Conservative party tanks in the opinion polls amid Britain's worsening cost-of-living crisis. Truss fired her close friend Kwarteng on Friday after their recent tax-slashing

budget sparked markets chaos – fuelling intense speculation over her political future one month after taking office.

"No government can control the markets but every government can give certainty about the sustainability of public finances," Hunt added Monday.

Hunt's action sent the British pound briefly jumping to US\$1.1331, while bond yields dipped. Last month's notorious budget sent bond yields spiking and the pound collapsing to a record dollar-low on fears of rocketing UK debt.

'Difficult decisions ahead'

Tax reductions were the centrepiece of the ill-starred budget, but they were financed via huge borrowing. Truss had already staged two humiliating budget U-turns, scrapping tax cuts for the richest earners and on company profits.

Following his appointment, Hunt hit the ground running Saturday with a warning of tax hikes as he dramatically reversed course on Truss's radical programme of economic reform.

"There will be more difficult decisions I am afraid, on both tax and spending, as we deliver our commitment to get debt falling as a share of the economy over the medium term," he said Monday.

"All departments will need to redouble their efforts to find savings, and some areas of spending will need to be cut."

Hunt already warned that he was not taking anything off the table" amid speculation of painful cutbacks on critical areas like defence, hospitals and schools. Hunt met over the weekend with the governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, and the head of the Debt Management Office to discuss his plans.

In the wake of the earlier turmoil, the BoE launched emergency buying of UK government bonds – a policy that ended Friday. The furore over the budget has reportedly sparked a plot to oust the prime minister.

UK media reported that senior Conservative members of parliament were plotting to unseat Truss, aghast at the party's performance since she replaced scandal-hit Boris Johnson on September 6.

Party grandee and former leader William Hague said Truss' premiership was "hanging by a thread" after Kwarteng was unceremoniously fired.

AFP

BP to buy US renewable gas firm for \$4.1bn

London, UK – BP has agreed to buy US renewable gas producer Archaea for US\$4.1bn to help the British oil giant reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, the pair said Monday.

The London-listed energy major is flush with cash after recent surges in oil prices that have triggered calls for the cash-strapped UK government to massively enlarge a windfall tax on British energy giants.

Chief executive Bernard Looney said in a statement Monday that the acquisition of Archaea would create "a real leader in the biogas sector, and support our net zero ambition".

Houston-based Archaea produces renewable natural gas equivalent in amount to about 6,000 barrels of oil per day.

BP will pay US\$3.3bn in cash plus around US\$800mn in debt, while the purchase remains subject to regulatory and Archaea shareholder approvals.

The UK energy titan is attempting to pivot towards cleaner fuels to help tackle climate change. In June, BP said it was taking a 40.5 per cent stake in an Australian energy project being billed as one of the world's largest renewable power stations. But energy majors are often faced with charges of corporate greenwashing, especially by environmentalists.

Greenpeace UK policy director Doug Parr said Monday that



with Britain's new finance minister Jeremy Hunt U-turning on tax cuts to limit state debt, "why not consider a full and proper windfall tax on oil and gas?".

He added, "This government has already made more U-turns than a battalion on parade – one more won't hurt and it's the right one."

Even the outgoing head of BP's rival Shell recently indicated that governments should "probably" tax energy firms more to help protect the poorest from rocketing energy bills.

"One way or another, there needs to be government intervention... that somehow results in protecting the poorest," Ben van Beurden told an energy conference earlier this month.

"And that probably means governments need to tax people in this room to pay for it -- I think we just have to accept as a societal reality."

AFP



This photo taken on Sunday shows people waving national flags as they watch the opening session of the 20th Chinese Communist Party Congress in Huabei, China (AFP)

China delays release of economic data during key political meeting

Beijing, China – China said Monday it will delay the release of economic growth figures, as the country's leadership gathers for a major meeting set to hand President Xi Jinping a historic third term in office.

The announcement comes a day before analysts had expected Beijing to publish some of its weakest quarterly growth figures since 2020 with the economy hobbled by Covid-19 restrictions and a real estate crisis. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said the release of growth figures for the third quarter along with a host of other economic data would be "postponed", without specifying a reason or giving a new timeline.

The delay comes as officials from China's ruling Communist Party meet in Beijing for their 20th Congress, which is set to rubber stamp Xi's bid to rule for another term.

Zhao Chenxin, senior official at the National Development and Reform Commission, told reporters on Monday that "the economy rebounded significantly in the third quarter".

"From a global perspective, China's economic performance is still outstanding," he said.

But many analysts expect the world's second-largest economy

to struggle to reach its growth target this year of around 5.5 per cent, with the International Monetary Fund lowering its forecast for GDP expansion to 3.2 per cent.

A panel of experts polled by AFP last week predicted an average of three per cent growth in 2022 – a long way off the 8.1 per cent seen last year.

That would be China's weakest growth rate in four decades, excluding 2020 when the global economy was hammered by the emergence of the coronavirus.

The NBS said it would also postpone the release of monthly data on indicators including real estate and retail sales.

Last week customs authorities delayed the release of September trade figures without providing an explanation.

Nick Marro, lead for global trade at the Economist Intelligence Unit, told AFP that signs point to "a really ugly Q3 data print, at a time when the party is focused on highlighting its policy achievements, while minimising any missteps".

Alicia Garcia Herrero, chief economist at Natixis, said "nothing, not even GDP data release, can disturb the coronation of Xi Jinping".

The delay "puts China in a

bind", Marro added.

"If it comes out with a rosier-than-expected data print, the national statistics bureau will inevitably face questions around data veracity," he said.

China's economy has been hit hard by the government's strict zero-Covid policy. The country is the last of the world's major economies to continue to follow the strategy, which imposes tight travel restrictions, mass PCR testing and obligatory quarantines.

It also involves sudden and strict lockdowns – including of businesses and factories – that have disrupted production and weighed heavily on household consumption.

China is also battling an unprecedented crisis in its real estate sector – historically a major driver of growth that accounts for more than a quarter of GDP when combined with construction.

Following years of explosive growth fuelled by easy access to loans, Beijing launched a crackdown on excessive debt in 2020.

Property sales are now falling across the country, leaving many developers struggling and some owners refusing to pay their mortgages for unfinished homes.

AFP

EU to discuss energy crisis measures

Brussels, Belgium – EU leaders this week will attempt to overcome divisions on how to face Europe's energy crisis and end weeks of feuding over a gas price cap, a draft of the summit conclusions said on Monday.

The bloc's 27 member states are deeply split on how to address skyrocketing energy prices caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine that have seen heating bills explode in Europe just ahead of winter.

Several meetings of EU energy ministers have failed to break the deadlock and the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, will propose a fresh set of options on Tuesday in a renewed effort to bridge differences.

These will be taken up by leaders during a two-day meeting in Brussels on Thursday in hopes of achieving a better result than a summit earlier this month in Prague that ended in stalemate.

A large group of EU countries, led by Italy, have pushed hard for some form of price cap on gas imports and vented frustration against Germany, Europe's biggest economy, for a 200bn-euro plan to help Germans meet the high prices.



"The prices are insane: we agree on the diagnosis, but are still discussing the therapy to be administered," Italian Minister of Ecological Transition Roberto Cingolani said last week.

According to the draft of summit conclusions seen by AFP, the commission's plans will include a vaguely worded proposal to "explore a temporary EU framework" to cap the price of gas used in electricity generation.

This, however, must be done "without leading to overall increased gas consumption" nor

replacing gas as the benchmark for setting the price of electricity in Europe.

In another bid for compromise, the commission is expected to propose something called a maximum "dynamic price", an emergency control on the benchmark that sets gas prices across the bloc.

The benchmark, known as the Dutch Title Transfer Facility, also helps set the price for electricity, a situation that the commission said it would speed up efforts to change.

An ambition to encourage joint purchases among EU countries will also get a fresh push.

The EU-27 agreed in March to a the purchasing platform, but many countries have continued going-it-alone without consultation with their EU peers.

The commission now wants to negotiate joint deals with "reliable" producers such as Norway and the United States by bringing together EU energy giants in a consortium or cartel of buyers.

AFP

Wages should rise with inflation: UN expert

Geneva, Switzerland - Countries must ensure that social benefits and wages rise with inflation, otherwise people could starve or freeze in their homes, the United Nations' poverty expert insisted on Monday.

"It is not hyperbole to say that unless governments increase benefits and wages in line with inflation, lives will be lost," said Olivier De Schutter, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

"As with the Covid-19 pandemic, it is once again the most

vulnerable that are paying the price of world events. Combined crises are expected to throw an additional 75mn to 95mn people into extreme poverty this year alone," De Schutter said.

"Whether in Europe, where inflation has hit a record high of 10 per cent, or sub-Saharan Africa, where food prices have surged by nearly 24 per cent, household budgets across the world are being stretched beyond breaking point," he said.

This means "even more people in poverty will starve or

freeze this winter unless immediate action is taken to increase their income".

UN experts are independent. They do not speak for the global body but are mandated to report their findings to the Human Rights Council.

De Schutter urged governments in the northern hemisphere to act quickly to insulate homes before the winter comes.

"Failure to act in this area is simply down to a lack of political will," he said.

"Not only will doing so re-

duce the energy bills of low-income households, it will also considerably reduce carbon emissions."

The Belgian expert also urged countries to involve people living in poverty in designing policies aimed at tackling the soaring cost of living.

"For far too long, misguided poverty-reduction policies have completely failed to reach those in need, meaning poverty simply passes from one generation to the next," he said.

AFP

Ministry of Education honours prominent women



The Ministry of Education, under the auspices of H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniya, Minister of Education celebrated the Omani Women's Day on Sunday, under the slogan 'Women are partners in development'.

In appreciation of their role in the era of renewed renaissance, H E Dr Madiha honoured a few prominent women achievers from different fields. The celebration of the day included recitation of a poem by Zakiya al Hashmi, an Arabic language teacher from South Sharqiyah governorate, who was honoured among the distinguished teachers on e-learning platforms. The minister then honoured Sumaiya al Siyabi, who won the 'Stars of Science' recognition as the first Arab woman for her scientific innovation in the field of environment. She also honoured Khadeeja al Mafreji, who won the first place in the Rahid bin Homaid Award for Culture and Science for her literary creativity.



Chedi celebrates with breast cancer awareness workshop

Together with the country, the Chedi Muscat on Sunday celebrated Omani Women's Day in its hotel in Muscat. The celebration started with a breakfast with general manager Karim Bizid, who emphasised the importance of celebrating Omani women during his speech marking the event.

Several other women employees expressed their appreciation of the event as well. The celebration was followed by a cake cutting ceremony, distribution of gifts and a group photo. The hotel also organised a breast cancer awareness programme for the attendees, said a press statement.

OFA announces 'Inspirational Women of Oman' ceremony



On the occasion of the Omani Women Day, the Omani French Friendship Association announced the fourth edition of the 'Inspirational Women of Oman' OFA Award ceremony to be held at Hormuz Grand hotel from 7pm on October 19. Under the auspices of French Ambassador H E Veronique Aulagnon and Sulaiman al Harthi, chairman of the association and CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, OFA will give recognition to inspiring Omani women highlighting their successful achievements in different fields. Alizz Islamic Bank is the sponsor of the event, said a press statement.

A panel discussion will be introducing the award ceremony, focusing on women's role and contribution to the community. The panel is composed of Yuthar Mohammed Msellem al Rawahy, founder and honorary life president of Omani Cancer Association (OCA); Sabah bint Mohammed al Bahlani, CEO at Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disability and a member of the State Council; Lamyia Adnan al Haj, associate professor at the Sultan Qaboos University; and Sayyida Dr Shariffa Khalid Qais al Said, PhD, Educational Expert at Ministry of Education, and moderated by the famous TV presenter Rachel George.

OMANI WOMEN'S DAY

Bank Muscat empowers Omani women, lauds their role



Ahlam Ahmed al Ghaithi



Haifa Ahmed al Zadjali



Nazik Lal Bakhsh Hassan al Balushi

In celebration of the Omani Women's Day, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has expressed its sincere appreciation for the efforts made by all Omani women to realise the goals and objectives of Oman Vision 2040 across various fields and sectors including the banking sector.

In particular, the bank commended its women employees for their continuous efforts and achievements in furthering 'Oman's Renaissance', Bank Muscat said in a statement.

Throughout its four-decade long history, Bank Muscat has keenly worked to empower Omani women through jobs as well as training and learning opportunities. Thanks to an exemplary work environment based on fair and equal opportunities to all, state-of-the-art technology and global best practices in the financial services sector, women have been able to contribute more and more to the bank's progress and successes in the past decades, the bank said.

'Today, women employees work across different departments and at all levels including the bank's senior management. It is indeed a matter of great pride for Bank Muscat that more than 50 per cent of its over 3,800 employees are women', it added.

On the occasion of the Omani Women's Day, several women employees expressed their happiness regarding the fact that a day has been dedicated to Omani women and to celebrate their successes and achievements across various sectors, the statement added.

Special place in society

Omani women enjoy a special position due to their great efforts, sheer determination and effective participation in making Oman's development plans a reality. Their important role in 'Omani Ren-

naissance' is well appreciated by all and it is very well known that the wholehearted participation and role of women has been a strong factor in the stability, progress and long-term development of the sultanate.

The Omani Women's Day celebrates this important role that Omani women play in nation-building, and at the same time also represents a platform for them to discuss their needs and put forward new ideas and opinions, which can further boost their societal status and participatory role.

Speaking on the occasion, Nazik Lal Bakhsh Hassan al Balushi, head of Small Sector - Al Wathbah, Bank Muscat said, "Omani women form half of our society and have a major role to play in the building of our great nation. Omani women play an important social role as mothers who bring up the next generation in the best traditions and heritage of Omani society apart. On top of this they have an important role at the workplace in ensuring that they support the progress of the country along with their male brethren.

"Since the launch of the Blessed Renaissance under the leadership of the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said (May his soul rest in peace), the role of Omani women has been recognised and cherished as a pillar of society's progress in various fields. This role has been further strengthened under the able leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik to continue on the path of Renewed Renaissance of the Sultanate. Today, we have unlimited support for the continued success of Omani women, to maintain their leadership roles in various sectors and enhancing their position in the march of progress."

Continuing about the role of women at Bank Muscat, Nazik added, "The bank is keen to continue supporting Omani

women and give them more opportunities to grow and rise to the top-most levels. Since joining the bank I have received many opportunities to participate in different programmes and roles, which have played a key role in enhancing my leadership abilities.

"I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Bank Muscat, especially the Executive Management of the bank, for the support and attention accorded to Omani women. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation, thanks and greetings to each and every Omani woman as we work together for the further advancement of our beloved country."

Continuous support

Speaking on the occasion, Haifa Ahmed al Zadjali, Bank Muscat manager of the Sultan Qaboos University branch, said, "It is really wonderful to be honoured on this day. This motivates Omani women to exert more efforts in nation-building and contribute more to the success of the Sultanate across different sectors. The strong participation of Omani women will be an engine of strong growth that helps achieve the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040 and progress further on the path of Renaissance.

"I must say here that the sky is the limit for Omani women under such inspiring leadership. With regards to the excellent opportunities that have been provided to me in my career, there is no doubt that Bank Muscat is helping me grow and build my skills."

She added, "I have been continuously offered several opportunities for training and upskilling myself so as to take on more responsibilities and bigger roles. At Bank Muscat, women work across all the departments and branches and are offered plenty of opportunities to upskill

themselves and grow to the next stage in their career. It is indeed a matter of great encouragement that the bank provides scholarships and opportunities to its employees including women to grow further in their careers. I would like to take this opportunity to call upon all my sister to together build on the achievements so far and strengthen the pillars of our great nation along with our brothers as we progress to the next stage of our development."

Concrete efforts to support the community

Ahlam Ahmed al Ghaithi, the manager of the Bait Al Reem branch, said, "The Omani Women's Day is a very important day for all of us. Today, we see many Omani women occupying high administrative, political and military positions. Also, many Omani women entrepreneurs have achieved top-notch success both at the local and global levels. Our wise government is continuously working on the principle of equality of both men and women as our beloved nation marches forwards on the path of progress and development. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, who is continuously working hard to enhance the status of Omani women in society and is a great inspiration for all of us.

Speaking about her experience at Bank Muscat, Ahlam explained that the bank is like a second family that has been supporting her since the first day of joining. She wished all Omani women the very best as they work towards achieving personal and career goals. Ahlam hoped that everyone would find their own path to success by building on the foundations of hard work, passion and perseverance.

ICAI Muscat honours women in celebration

The Muscat Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India held its first ever Omani Women's Day Awards ceremony on Sunday at the College of Banking and Finance in Muscat.

The event was attended by chief guest Divya Narang, wife of the Indian Ambassador H E Amit Narang; and guest of honour Madiha Nasser al Sibani, Audit Director of the State Audit Institution.

The event, organised by the sub-committee for the empowerment of women members, honoured 14 Omani women drawn from various industries.

One of the awardees Wasan al Malki expressed her appreciation for the ceremony.

"It is great to feel valued and appreciated. Each and every woman here achieved amazing things. It is great to be here and hear them sharing their success stories," she said.

A mother of two, Wasan - an



entrepreneur and the managing partner of Thy Yard Oman - said, "The Omani Women's Day means a huge deal to me...it gives [me] that feeling that we can achieve anything."

Giving a little background of the selection process, sub-committee chairperson Shilpa Pawani said, "We had requested our members to nominate one Omani woman who is a part of their organisation, whom they believe need to be recognised with an award."

"We were overwhelmed by the amount of responses we received. It goes to prove that

Omani women are successful and are doing well across all industries," Sajeev Surendran, chairperson of ICAI, Muscat added.

The event also included a 'leadership talk' discussion facilitated by Dr Leigh De Brun, a leadership coach and executive consultant with over 14 years of experience in the field. "Women empowerment to me is about helping women break free from their dragons," she said.

Dragons, according to De Brun, are "unconscious fear patterns and defensive mechanism that women may develop in re-

sponse to any challenging situation."

By helping people recognise those patterns, she believes that people can unlock their unlimited potential.

ICAI Muscat was established in 2008 with the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Finance under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) having the goal of developing the accounting profession in the country.

The Muscat chapter hosts development events that are available to professionals of all nationalities in Oman.

(Contributed by Hibba al Kindi)



Bank Nizwa takes pride in women staff

From leadership lessons to success stories, Bank Nizwa marked Omani Women's Day with a day-long eclectic and interactive workshop for its women employees led by Dr Lamyia al Haj, a member of the board of directors of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington and an associate professor at Sultan Qaboos University and founder of Coach4Change.

The workshop involved attendees in immersive learning activities and demonstrated life skills to redefine success and cultivate leadership qualities that enhance both personal and

professional life. Organised to celebrate Omani women and their achievements, the get-together provided a platform for the bank's employees to engage with the management team, partake in team building activities and assimilate life skills through an inspiring workshop that was aimed at empowering women and enhancing their roles in the society.

The day-long session began with a formal introduction of the facilitator to the gathering of the bank's women employees, followed by a warm welcome from Khaled al Kayed, Bank Nizwa

CEO, who applauded the role of every member of the audience in shaping the fortunes of the bank. He also congratulated Omani women on the glorious day designated to recognise their combined efforts in the progress of the society and the nation at large.

Haifa Abdul Ali al Lawati, assistant general manager of Human Resources at the bank, said, "This day embodies the importance that our government is giving to the role of the Omani women in contributing towards the national development."

Al Bustan Palace chosen as one of the best in ME region

Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, has been recognised as one of the best hotels in the Middle East by Readers' Choice Awards - Condé Nast Traveler - 2022. Al Bustan Palace has set the benchmark for luxury hospitality since opening its doors in 1985 and today continues to be heralded as a symbol of excellence for the past 37 years, it said.



Nabil Abdul Wahab Zadjali, general manager of Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, said, "The award caps a very successful year for the hotel, especially with the opening of the Omani borders almost a year ago, after a long period of restrictions and lockdowns. We have been delighted with the return of guests from across Oman, the region and around the world, to experience their most preferred hotel in Muscat and a destination that has always held a special place in their heart. Our dedicated Ladies and Gentlemen always go above and beyond to ensure visitors have an exceptional stay with us while making memories that last a lifetime. To see this, acknowledged by an influential international publication is a sure sign that we are on the right track as travelers, fully embracing travel once more." With exquisite gardens, the resort features an alluring blend of old and new, local and global, seamlessly blended, carefully designed and naturally untamed.

Sohar International celebrates Tomohi graduates



In line with its social agenda to continuously educate, enhance, and empower national talent, Sohar International has been at the forefront of investing in youth programs that are sustainable, relevant, and inclusive. In line with the same, the bank honoured the second batch of its Tomohi graduates - a one year internship programme that seeks to enhance Omani youth skills. Held under the patronage of H E Said Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the ceremony was held at the W Hotel recently.

The event was presided over by Mohamed Mahfoodh al Ardh, chairman of Sohar International, a number of Board of Directors and executive members, staff of the bank, special invitees, as well as the parents of the interns.

The event's proceedings began with a welcome-note by Mohamed Mahfoodh al Ardh addressing the audience on this significant milestone in the lives of Tomohi candidates; which was followed by a video highlighting Tomohi Programme journey and a keynote speech from Mutheer al Kalbani, the head of Sohar Academy.

Ooredoo's charity number auction begins tomorrow

As the weather cools down, the excitement and fun times kick in! Ooredoo's much-awaited vanity number charity auction is back again. With over 100 'Diamond' and 'Gold' numbers up for grabs, the highest bidder will take home the eight-digit prize. Registration opened on Sunday and bidding set to kick off on Wednesday, said a press statement.

It's not only an exciting chance to get a memorable number, but with all proceeds being donated to charity, to do a good deed too. Don't miss out on the fun! Those interested can browse the online list, which includes different starting prices for different numbers. A registration fee of RO20 is applicable to take part in the auction and first-time bidders are required to fill out a registration form. Meanwhile, those who have participated in previous auctions can simply activate their account.



Oman Sustainability Week Awards to be held in March

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company 'be'ah' has announced the launch of 2023 Oman Sustainability Week Awards inviting expressions of interest from local organisations.

The Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) Awards, to be held on March 12 next year, will be jointly organised by be'ah (co-organiser) and CONNECT (organiser), in partnership with the globally renowned Centre for Sustainability and Excellence (CSE), said a press release.

Under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the event will be held as an integral part of the Oman Sustainability Week from March 12 to 16, with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) as the host organisation, be'ah and Oman Shell as strategy partners, and BP Oman as the platinum sponsor of the sustainability week.

Established as a prestigious annual event, the Awards will assess organisations operating in Oman in the areas of sustainability and corporate responsibility. In accordance with sustainability initiatives identified under Oman Vision 2040, the focus of the Awards will be on clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, industry innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities and responsible consumption and production.

The primary goal of the OSW Awards is to raise awareness regarding sustainability issues and to assist businesses and organisations in incorporating responsible and sustainable practices into their corporate strategy, thereby demonstrating that economic, social, and environmental responsibility is a long-term commitment. Aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the OSW Awards continue to recognise vital contributions to sustainability that have helped businesses surge ahead of their competitors.

Themed under the environment segment will cover environmental strategy, environmental management system, energy consumption, water consumption, emissions, waste management and environmental impacts; the social segment will include strategy, measure social impact, local communities support, supply chain, customer health and safety, customer privacy; the governance segment will focus on corporate vision and values, strategic goals on sustainability, anti-corruption policy and stakeholder engagement; whereas the employment segments will cover health, safety, wellness and wellbeing, and training and education.

Organisations wishing to participate, may submit an 'expression of interest' until November 17.

The focus of the Awards will be on clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, industry innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities and responsible consumption and production

As per the set structure, submissions for the OSW Awards will be scored against internationally recognised environmental, social and governance (ESG) framework. Submissions will be limited to 25 in total, across all categories (enterprise, government, SME and academic) with high performers announced at the awards ceremony on March 12. Participating firms will be assessed according to an overall index score and benefit from a bespoke report, mapping out their current sustainability status against industry peers and identifying the medium- and long-term risks and opportunities. Business entities that have set themselves apart with their contributions to sustainability will be honoured.

Dr Mohab Ali al Hinai, vice president - Sustainability and Circular Economy, be'ah, said, "With sustainability at the heart of the Oman 2040 vision, organisations in the Sultanate are increasingly becoming conscious of adopting ESG principles in their business operations. Such practices have proven to have long-term positive impact, ensuring sustainable economic development.

"The Oman Sustainability Week awards serve as a platform to honour those organizations that are transforming their business practices into ones that are more socially and environmentally responsible."

It is significant to note that the previous OSW Awards honoured OQ with the Platinum Award, and PDO and ASYAD with the Gold Award. The Silver Award was given to Nama Holding and Bank Muscat, while Bank Nizwa and Shell Oman received the Bronze Award. Nama Holding received special recognition for governance, Oman Broadband for Education, OQ for Society and Environment, and ASYAD for Employees.

These Awards, given by be'ah's Centre for Sustainability and Excellence (CSE), form a part of the week-long Oman Sustainability Week, comprising an exhibition, ISRTC, a leadership summit and site visits.

The Lion King reveals international cast

The promoter of the Lion King's Middle East debut has announced that, following unprecedented demand for tickets, five extra shows have been added to the award-winning musical's historic run in Abu Dhabi.

Set to be held at Etihad Arena on Yas Island, the curtain will rise for the first time on November 16 and close for the last time on December 10, with five evening shows now scheduled to take place at 8pm on November 22, 23 and 30, as well as on December 6 and 7.

Nicolas Renna, managing director of Proactiv Entertainment, the promoter responsible for bringing the musical to the Middle East, said demand in the region has exceeded expectations and urged those keen to buy tickets to do so at the earliest opportunity to avoid disappointment.

"With the Lion King coming to the region for the first time, we expected a positive reaction when tickets went on sale, but



the overall response has far exceeded our initial expectations," Renna said.

"We're delighted to be able to add these additional five performances and provide audiences further opportunities to experience the magic of Disney's landmark musical event. We encourage everyone to secure their tickets before they sell out."

Michael Cassel, CEO of Michael Cassel Group, the theatrical producer leading the Lion King's four-week run at Etihad

Arena, added: "It has been wonderful to see UAE audiences embrace the Lion King with such enthusiasm, allowing us to extend the season further. To be bringing Julie Taymor's extraordinary vision, exactly as audiences have enjoyed it on Broadway and around the world, to Abu Dhabi for the first time is truly an honour."

The Lion King has also unveiled the talented cast that will be heading to the UAE to captivate audiences with their spec-

tacular performances. Futhi Mhlongo has played the role of 'Rafiki' for 15 years across the globe, with no sign of slowing down. Mhlongo's experience includes the North American Tour, as well as performances in New Zealand and Germany.

Dashaun Young, having played the role of Simba on Broadway, as well as Las Vegas, and the North American tour, reprises his role. The lioness 'Nala' will be played by Amanda Kunene, who has performed on stage since childhood and has been with the International Tour since it's commencement in 2018.

The legendary role of 'Mufasa', King of the Pride Lands, will be led by Mthokozisi Emkay Khanyile who performed on the West End before joining the International Tour. The show's iconic villain 'Scar', will be played by Antony Lawrence, while Australian-born actor André Jewson is set to return as 'Zazu'.

Bank Muscat adjudged best company in large cap category

In recognition of its role as the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman and outstanding excellence across all operations, Bank Muscat recently won the award for Best Performing Company - Large Cap at the 12th edition of Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards.

The award was handed over by the chief guest, H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, to Ahmed Fagir al Balushi, Bank Muscat's chief banking officer, at the gala event.

Overall, 15 top ranking MSX-listed companies were felicitated at the awards function across three categories - large cap, mid cap and small cap - based on their performance on select financial parameters. The event witnessed the congregation of a large number of important dignitaries and business leaders from Oman.



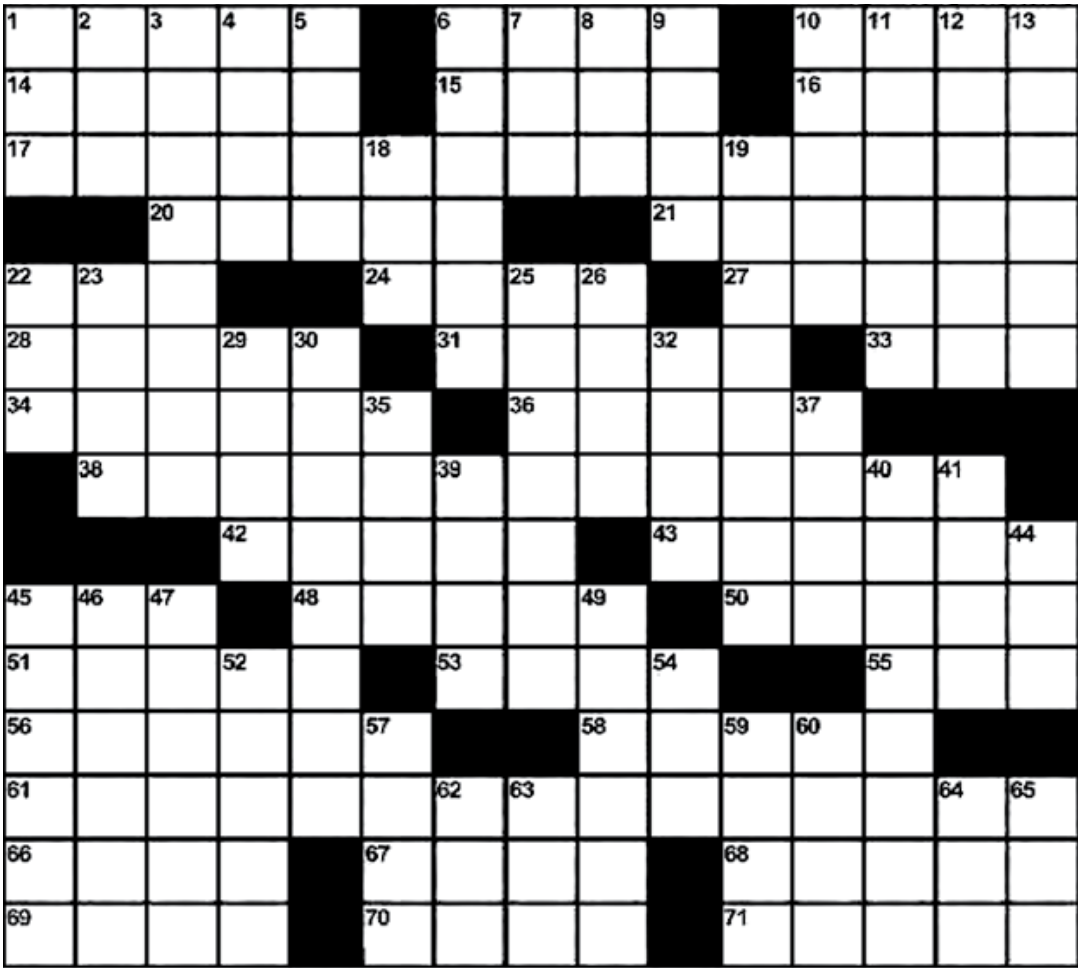
"The bank is delighted to win this Award, which is a recognition of both recent accomplishments and also its enduring leadership over the past four decades," said Balushi. "We would like to thank Alam Al-Iktisaad for recognising the Bank's successful leadership and other achievements across various spheres. Going ahead, the Bank will aim to continue its market-leading position in the Sultanate's financial services sector while also expanding its social

impact through a large number of sustainability and social responsibility initiatives."

He paid his sincere thanks and appreciation to customers for their strong confidence in Bank Muscat's services and products.

It is a matter of great pride that as the first choice for over 2mn customers, Bank Muscat leads the financial services sector in Oman with about RO13bn in assets, 174 branches and more than 800 touchpoints across the country, the bank said.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Botch
6) Mountain passes
10) Drizzly day phenome-
non
14) "He's_ nowhere man ..."
(Beatles lyric)
15) "Once_ a time"
16) _ Spumante (sparkling wine)
17) Source of a fonnal writ-
ten request
20) Depth charge target
21) Person who holds prop-
erty in trust
22) That lady
24) Gesture of greeting
27) Air traffic control de-
vice
28) Kind of pasta
31) Harder to find
33) Letters on an ambu-
lance
34) Knowledge of the
mysterious
36) Like Brutus or Caesar
38) Pry or snoop
42) Adult nit
43) Copier fluids
45) Fraternity characters

48) Moisten, as a roast
50) Target practice place
51) Built-out window
53) All-time knockout king
Nolan
55) Boston clock setting
56) It may keep you on
your toes
58) Come up with, as
money
61) Friendly with each
other
66) Weight-loss plan
67) Ireland, to locals
68) Soft, crinkled fabric
69) Maneuverable, as a
yacht
70) Breed, as animals
71) Green fence?

DOWN

1) Damage
2) Fury
3) Succession
4) Smear, as paint
5) Mingle-mangle
6) Musical "ax"
7) Suitable
8) Baked Hawaiian dish
9) Self-styled superior
10) Puzo subject

11) King Mark's bride
12) Small waterway
13) Stopwatches, e.g.
18) Carpenter's cutter
19) One who does ac-
counts?
22) Mineral baths
23) Rosemary or basil
25) The spice of life
26) Winged god of love
29) Catch, as a criminal
30) Dignifies
32) Give off
35) Blue-green shade
37) Ship of Columbus
39) Russia, once
40) Like most modern fur-
niture
41) Dynes at work
44) Matching collection
45) Not a single person
46) Astronomy Muse
4 7) Lone Ranger's horse
49) One making money
52) Glitterati, e.g.
54) Pester
57) Stadium level
59) Thing to scratch
60) Desperately dry, as
land

62) Make a bow
63) Savings vehicle

64) Hybrid's selling pt.
65) Take in visually

NOTE PAD

AS KTO EBON HERB
THEES GALE UVEA
MORNINGSICKNESS
SENORA IOTANEE
RITES ABATED
ETC SHU CRUD
ROOM ARIA KIOSK
AFTERNOONSIESTA
SUEDE PUCE ULAN
ELBA AID ORE
HAWAII ANNIE
ALI SCAN ENLAGE
NIGHTAFTERNIGHT
ECHO RASE ETHIC
SETS BRYN REACH

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Like confetti falling all around you, there are many trivial dramas fluttering about, and they're equally celebratory. Good news is everywhere today, but most of it will affect the people around you more than it will affect you, so be wary of the green-eyed monster showing up when you least expect it. The good fortune of others may become downright annoying as the day continues, but try to remember that good things come to those who wait.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

The issues of today aren't really as threatening as they look at first glance. Early in the morning, keep your chin up. Maintaining a positive attitude will quickly deactivate any potential bombs. You'd be surprised by how far a smile and a wave can take you. Once the petty stuff of the day is finished, turn your attention to future plans. A trip or big purchase has been in the back of your mind for a while, so why not push it to the front? Get some ideas on paper.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Despite what some people you work with may think, there's nothing wrong with taking the easy way out every once in a while. As long as you can deal with the consequences of moving back a deadline or postponing some event, then it's fine to put things off for a little while longer. Just make sure that you're not leaving anyone else in a lurch. You might even find ways to juggle a few things without any fallout. Dare you have your cake and eat it too?

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It's way too soon to tell whether or not your latest scheme is going to work the way you want it to, so try not to be too confident about it. On the other hand, don't worry too much about it either. All the elements are working nicely together, and things are moving on their own accord. You can't affect the situation much today (if at all). But you should see this lack of control as a good thing. The weight is no longer on your shoulders!

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Stick to the facts today. Logic and emotionless criticism are the only way to go. Some smart folks have been telling you that you must put a piece of yourself into everything you do, but today you need to remove your emotions from the equation. Your perspective is important and valid, but it isn't relevant to what's going on right now. It may also cause you to focus on stuff that isn't important to anyone else but you. Put yourself in other people's shoes today.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Do everything you can to try new things today. Exploration is something that will provide you with the stimulation and fulfillment you've been waiting for. You don't have to take on a major international expedition or anything. Simply do things in a different way and express yourself in a unique manner. If you treat the world the same way all the time, you'll miss all those new paths that are waiting for you. So keep your eyes and ears open.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The tiny problems you encounter today add little if any stress to your life. In fact, they may be welcome, since solving puzzles and making logical choices are fun activities for you. These quandaries provide an excellent workout for that gray matter between your ears. Gossip and intrigue about the seemingly exciting lives of the beautiful people are revealed to be not too terribly interesting after all. You end this day satisfied and very happy in your own skin.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You need to know your limits in love, in business, in sports, and especially in fiscal matters. Your eyes may be bigger than your wallet right now. This dissonance is probably caused by your jealousy over someone else's recent purchase. Stick to your own life. Don't try to live by someone else's shopping list. Just because another person lives beyond their means doesn't mean you should. Maintain a balanced lifestyle and you'll be better off in the end.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's time for you to stop waiting for other people to create opportunities for you. Waiting for someone to set you up on a date, pave the way for you in a new job, or provide you with a big discount? Stop waiting. Your time is very valuable, and wasting it on the unpredictability of others isn't good for you. You'll get further both financially and emotionally if you take things into your own hands and do what it takes to get what you want. Plus, your ego will get a big boost.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You may look at old buildings, vintage cars, and retro furniture with new admiration today. They represent things that last and offer a classic sense of beauty. The idea of permanence is becoming more important than ever to you, so ponder this today. It could be a part of the aging process, but more likely it's a part of your slow movement toward understanding the true meaning of value. Trends and whims hold little appeal to you right now.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Keep in mind that it takes two to tango, so try not to take on too much in a burgeoning relationship. You're feeling confident and in control of how things are going, but did you ever think that you may have too much power? It's time to let the other person drive this partnership. Giving up some control won't be that hard. Leaving things up to them will add some unpredictability and excitement to things and give you some key insight into how they think.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Wherever you go today, you'll cast a long shadow. Your impact on every situation will be felt by everyone, no matter how well you know them. It's a great day to establish connections with people you admire. Your personality has a vibrancy to it that only comes once in a while. Take advantage of your potency to get stuff done. Your wit will be sharper than ever, and every story you spin will enthrall the people you're trying to impress.

01. The warrant for the first Astronomer Royal appointed in England, 4 March 1675, stated what as the purpose of the of- fice?

A. To prepare a catalogue of at least 10,000 stars
B. To maintain the Royal Navy's marine chronometers
C. To find "the longitude of places" in order to perfect navigation
D. To co-ordinate the work of English astronomers, and liaise with others of the world's as-
tronomers

02. In rugby union, which po- sition wears the number 2 jer- sey?

A. Hooker
B. Full back
C. Right wing
D. Half back

03. What function do egg yolks serve in making hollandaise sauce?

A. Give a rich flavour
B. Emulsifier
C. Thickener
D. Balance the flavours of the other ingredients

Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. B

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

N	C	L	S
P	S	U	S
K	E	P	A
O	G	H	A

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

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

Iran: At least eight killed in ‘terrible’ prison fire

Authorities, on Monday, doubled the official toll saying four inmates injured had died later in hospital

Paris, France - Eight Iranian inmates were killed in a fire that raged through Tehran’s Evin prison, the judiciary said on Monday, doubling the official toll from the blaze that further stoked tensions one month into protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini.

Authorities in the Islamic republic have blamed the fire late on Saturday on ‘riots and clashes’ among prisoners, but human rights groups said they doubted the official version of events and also feared the real toll could be even higher.

The judiciary authority’s website Mizan Online said on Monday that four Evin prison inmates injured in the fire had died in hospital, after reporting the previous day an initial toll of four dead from smoke inhalation.

Gunshots and explosions were heard during the dramatic blaze from inside the complex, according to social media footage, while state media broadcast images of the aftermath with areas gutted by the flames. Iranian authorities have accused ‘thugs’ of torching a prison clothing depot and reported clashes between prisoners, and then between inmates and guards who intervened to put an end to the violence.



A picture obtained from the Iranian Mizan News Agency on Sunday shows damage caused by a fire in the notorious Evin prison, in Tehran (AFP)

Hundreds of the protesters arrested in recent weeks have been sent to Evin, infamous for the ill-treatment of political prisoners, which also holds foreign detainees and thousands jailed on criminal charges.

The official IRNA news

agency, citing a Tehran prosecutor, said the clashes had ‘nothing to do with the recent unrest’, while Mizan said that all those who died had been convicted of robbery.

But Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights (IHR) said it ‘re-

jects’ the official account, given the ‘long history of concealing facts’ in the Islamic republic.

It said it had ‘received reports that special forces were deployed to incite prisoners and set the grounds for a crackdown’ and called for a UN-backed inter-

national investigation to establish the facts.

‘Big distress’

The fire came after four weeks of protests over the death of 22-year-old Amini, following her arrest for allegedly violating Iran’s

Authorities in the Islamic republic have blamed the fire on riots and clashes among prisoners, but human rights groups said they doubted the official version of events and also feared the real toll could be even higher

strict dress code for women.

The wave of demonstrations has turned into a major anti-government movement, confronting Iran’s clerical leadership with one of its biggest challenges since the ousting of the shah in 1979.

At least 122 people have been killed in the crackdown on the Amini protests, and at least 93 more died in separate clashes in Zahedan, Sistan-Baluchestan province, according to an updated toll published by IHR.

More protests were held on Sunday, including at the Tehran and Shariati universities where women chanted ‘we are all

Mahsa!’ There were more overnight rallies including in Ekbatan district where residents shouted ‘death to the dictator!’, social media footage showed.

Iranian rights activist Atena Daemi, herself a long-time inmate of Evin, wrote on Twitter that in the early hours of Sunday several buses and ambulances were seen leaving the facility.

She said some prisoners in Ward 8, which houses political detainees, had been transferred to another jail. Activists noted further confusion when state television announced on Sunday that 40 people had been killed in the prison, only to correct this back to the initial toll of four just minutes later.

Evin prison holds foreigners such as French-Iranian academic Fariba Adolkhah and US citizen Siamak Namazi, whose family said he was taken back into custody days ago after a temporary release. Namazi’s US attorney Jared Genser said he had spoken to his family, and that he was unharmed.

Supporters of Austrian prisoner Massud Mossaheb said he was suffering after inhaling smoke and tear gas, writing on Twitter that ‘he can barely speak... He is in big distress’.

AFP

Japan PM orders probe into Unification Church

Tokyo, Japan - Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida ordered a government probe into the Unification Church on Monday, after the assassination of former premier Shinzo Abe renewed scrutiny of the sect.

The church has been in the spotlight because the man accused of killing Abe was reportedly motivated by resentment against the group, which has been accused of pressuring adherents to make hefty donations and blamed for child neglect among members.

Officially known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, the organisation was founded in Korea by Sun Myung Moon and its members are sometimes called ‘Moonies’.

The church has denied wrongdoing, but a parade of former members have gone public



Japan’s PM Fumio Kishida (AFP)

with criticism of its practices, and revelations about its links with top politicians have helped tank Kishida’s approval ratings.

Kishida told parliament on Monday that there were ‘many victims’ of the church and its related groups who had found themselves in poverty or facing family breakdown.

“Efforts to help them are still insufficient,” he said, so ‘the gov-

ernment will exercise its right to probe the church, based on the Religious Corporations Act’.

The government also wants to implement other measures, such as strengthening ‘initiatives to prevent child abuse and help the offspring of religious followers with their education and employment’, Kishida said.

Local media said the probe would examine whether the church had harmed public welfare or committed acts at odds with its status as a religious group. The investigation could lead to a dissolution order, which would see the church lose its status as a tax-exempt religious organisation, though it could still continue to operate.

Only two religious groups in Japan have ever received such an order, reports said.

AFP

Brazil’s Bolsonaro, Lula trade jabs, insults

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro and leftist challenger Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva traded jabs and insults as they squared off on Sunday in their first-ever head-to-head debate, two weeks from Brazil’s presidential runoff election.

Lula attacked Bolsonaro as a ‘little dictator’ and the ‘king of fake news’, drawing accusations of lying, corruption and a ‘disgraceful’ record in return, as the rivals sparred in the first debate for their polarising second-round showdown on October 30.

Front-runner Lula, the charismatic but tarnished ex-president (2003-2010) who is seeking a comeback at 76, was particularly fiery criticising Bolsonaro over his handling of COVID-19, which has killed 687,000 people in Brazil, second only to the United States. Attacking Bolsonaro over his resistance to buying vaccines and embrace of unproven med-



Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (left) and Jair Bolsonaro gesture during a televised presidential debate in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Sunday (AFP)

ications such as hydroxychloroquine, Lula said the president ‘carries the weight of those deaths on his shoulders’.

“Your negligence led to 680,000 people dying, when more than half could have been saved,” the ex-metalworker said in his trademark gravelly voice.

Bolsonaro, 67, sought to shift the focus to the issue of corrup-

tion - a weak spot for Lula, who was jailed in 2018 on controversial, since-overturned charges stemming from the investigation of a massive graft scheme centered on state-run oil company Petrobras. “Your past is disgraceful... You did nothing for Brazil but stuff public money in your pockets and those of your friends,” Bolsonaro said, calling

Lula a ‘national shame’.

“Lula, stop lying, it’s bad for you at your age,” said the ex-army captain at another point, simultaneously defending his own record and taking a shot at his rival’s age. Already bitter, divisive and full of mud-slinging, the campaign has if anything veered further into negative territory since the first-round vote.

Bolsonaro, the vitriolic hard-line conservative who took office in 2019, finished second in the first-round election on October 2 with 43 per cent of the vote, to 48 per cent for Lula. But many opinion polls had put Lula’s lead in the double digits.

Bolsonaro’s stronger-than-expected performance has given him an aura of momentum heading into the runoff, and increased speculation over the possibility of another surprise in two weeks’ time.

AFP

92 migrants found on Greek-Turkish border

Athens, Greece - Ninety-two migrants were found almost naked and bruised after allegedly being forced across the Evros river from Turkey into Greece, Athens said on Sunday, a charge fiercely denied by Ankara.

EU border agency Frontex confirmed to AFP the arrival of the group in circumstances which the Greek ministry for civil protection said sent out an ‘inhuman image.’

“The Frontex officers reported that the migrants were found almost naked and some of them with visible injuries,” said Paulina Bakula, spokeswoman for the organisation.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said in a tweet that it was ‘deeply distressed by the shocking reports and images of 92 people, who were reported to have been found at the Greek-Turkish land border, stripped of their clothes’.

Bakula, speaking from Frontex’s Warsaw HQ, said

Frontex officers worked with Greek authorities to provide the migrants - mainly Afghans and Syrians - with immediate assistance.

She added the organisation had informed the agency’s fundamental rights officer of a potential rights violation.

Greek minister for civil protection Takis Theodorikakos accused Turkey of ‘instrumentalising illegal immigration’ in the latest of a series of recriminations on migration between the neighbours.

Speaking on Skai television, Theodorikakos said many of the migrants told Frontex that ‘three Turkish army vehicles had transferred them’ to the river which acts as a natural border.

In a series of scathing comments on Twitter, the Turkish presidency denied any responsibility for the migrants and blamed Greece for the ‘inhuman’ situation.

AFP

Murder trial of Indonesian police official begins

Jakarta, Indonesia - The murder trial of one of Indonesia’s most senior police officers started on Monday, in what is seen as a test of the accountability of the force after it was accused of initially trying to cover up the crime.

Ferdy Sambo, a two-star general and head of internal affairs for Indonesia’s national police, was named as a suspect after his bodyguard was found dead at Sambo’s home in July.

He stands accused of ordering a subordinate to shoot Brigadier Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat, or Brigadier J, then shooting the wounded victim again himself to finish him off.

“Defendant Ferdy Sambo approached the victim Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat, who was lying face down and still moving in pain near the stairs next to the bathroom,” prosecutor Sugeng Hariadi read from an indictment letter in South Jakarta District Court on Monday.

“Then, to make sure that he was really dead, defendant Ferdy Sambo, who was already wearing black gloves, grabbed a firearm and shot once into the



Indonesian police general Ferdy Sambo is escorted to his trial at the South Jakarta court in Jakarta on Monday (AFP)

left side of the back of Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat’s head,” he added.

Police were initially accused of covering up the murder before Sambo’s August arrest and September discharge from the force. Intense public scrutiny is now focusing on the outcome of a trial

that experts say is one of the biggest scandals to ever hit the police.

“This is a test not only for the police but also for the attorney general office and the court. It’s a test for our criminal justice system,” Ardi Manto Adiputra, deputy director of rights group

Imparsial, told AFP.

Accountability in spotlight

The issue of police accountability has taken on fresh urgency in Indonesia after officers’ response to a pitch invasion at a football game earlier this month was blamed for triggering a stampede that left 132 people dead.

The incident sparked an out-

This is a test not only for the police but also for the attorney general office and the court

ARDI MANTO ADIPUTRA

pouring of public anger, with the government announcing an investigation and authorities later charging at least six people - three of them police officers - for their roles in the disaster.

When Brigadier J was found dead at Sambo’s home on July 8, police initially said another mem-

ber of the security detail had killed him after catching him sexually assaulting Sambo’s wife.

But on August 9, Sambo was arrested on suspicion of premeditated murder, with his wife arrested on the same charge two weeks later. They could face the death penalty if found guilty.

That followed weeks of speculation about what had taken place inside the top officer’s home, where Brigadier J had been shot multiple times and whose body showed signs of torture. Sambo claimed to have been taking a COVID-19 test at the time of the murder.

Police did not reveal the killing for three days and said CCTV footage was not available because it was not functioning when Brigadier J died.

“There were some irregularities in the case at the beginning, for almost two weeks the narration of the story was only based on the manipulation perpetrated by Sambo. Over time, the police’s alibis and explanation no longer made sense,” Adiputra said.

AFP

Hundreds of Ukraine towns without power as deadly drones strike Kyiv

Kyiv, Ukraine - Hundreds of Ukrainian towns were cut off from electricity on Monday by Russian attacks against critical infrastructure and deadly kamikaze drone strikes in Kyiv, Ukraine said.

Moscow is thought to be trying to counter weeks of battle-field losses by waging a punitive policy of damaging energy facilities before winter in a move that President Vladimir Putin hopes will weaken Ukrainian resistance in the eight-month war.

Ukraine branded the swarm of attacks, which the presidency said killed three people in Kyiv, as an act of desperation with a senior official demanding that Russia be excluded from the G20, which is to hold a summit in a month.

Russia launched five strikes in Kyiv and against critical infrastructure in the central Dnipropetrovsk and northeast Sumy regions, knocking out electricity to hundreds of towns and villages, said Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal.

"Hundreds of settlements were cut off as a result of the attack," he said.

Temperatures across Ukraine were forecast at between 11 and 17 degrees Celsius on Monday.

Ukrainian regional officials said the strikes in Sumy killed at least three people.



Ukrainian firefighters works on a destroyed building after a drone attack in Kyiv on Monday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine (AFP)

The Russian army said it hit 'all' its targets, having aimed 'high-precision and long-range... weapons at military command and control facilities and the energy systems of Ukraine'.

An AFP journalist saw drones swooping low over a central district of Kyiv as police tried to shoot them down with automatic

weapons and smoke rose from explosions across the city.

'Hitting us every Monday'

"They seem to be hitting us every Monday now," said taxi driver Sergiy Prikhodko, who was waiting for a fare near the central train station in Kyiv.

"It's a new way of starting the week," he told AFP.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, a senior official at the Ukrainian presidency, said emergency workers rescued 19 people from the rubble, including an elderly woman. The presidency put the death toll at three in Kyiv.

Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko

said a residential building in the central Shevchenkivsky district of the capital was hit, sparking a fire and damaging several buildings. The dead included one woman, he said, posting also a picture of what he called the charred wreckage of one kamikaze drone - loitering munitions that can hover while wait-

ing for a target to attack.

The attack comes exactly a week after Russia missiles rained down on Kyiv and other cities on October 10 in the biggest wave of strikes in months.

Those attacks killed at least 19 people, wounded 105 others and sparked an international outcry.

Air raid sirens sounded in Kyiv shortly before the first explosion at around 6:35am (0335 GMT), followed by sirens across most of the country.

"Kamikaze drones and missiles are attacking all of Ukraine. The enemy can attack our cities, but it won't be able to break us," President Volodymyr Zelensky said. "Those who give orders to attack critical infrastructure, to freeze civilians and organise total mobilisation to cover the front-line with corpses, cannot sit at the same table with leaders of (the) G20," senior presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak said.

In a statement on social media, he called for Russia to be 'expelled from all platforms'.

The head of the national railways, Alexander Kamyshin, confirmed attacks 'near' the capital's central rail hub. "We need more air defence systems and as soon as possible. More weapons," Zelensky's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, said on social media.

AFP

Temporary ban on Egypt's 'mahraganat'

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt's state-affiliated musicians' union on Sunday announced a temporary ban on electro-beat 'mahraganat' singers, the cultural establishment's latest move to crack down on the hugely popular genre.

Mahraganat, often known as 'electro-shaabi', or popular electro, relies heavily on computer-generated and synthesised beats, and has a wide reach.

Some purists in socially conservative Egypt - a cultural powerhouse in the Arab world - view its blunt lyrics tackling topics including love, power and money as overstepping moral boundaries.

The union has 'decided to temporarily suspend permits issued to mahraganat singers, in order to fully study their case (and) in order to preserve Egypt's artistic value', it said in a statement on Sunday.

The suspension came as Egyptian singer Mustafa Kamel became the union's chief.

His predecessor, Hani Shaker, had led a campaign against what he called an 'unacceptable' genre, issuing a decision in February 2020 to ban mahraganat performers from clubs, cafes, hotels and concert venues.

"This kind of music which is loaded with sexual innuendo and offensive language is completely unacceptable. That's why we have pulled the plug on it once and for all," Shaker said at the time.

The measure was unevenly enforced.

Union spokesman Tarek Mortada said on Sunday that a committee would be formed in coming days to study the issue and determine a course of action, which could include a permanent ban.

The move, he said, is to 'preserve public taste in the country'.

Mahraganat music has gone mainstream in Egypt, with its outlandishly named stars monetising social media success after the country's 2011 uprising.

With its roots in impoverished urban neighbourhoods, it has often sparked the ire of critics as 'low-brow'.

AFP

EU launches training mission for Ukraine soldiers

Luxembourg, Luxembourg - The EU on Monday stepped up its military support for Kyiv by launching a mission to train 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers and providing €500mn more for weapons.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba addressed a meeting of his EU counterparts via video link from a shelter in Kyiv and urged them to provide more air defences and sanction Iran over drone supplies to Russia after strikes pummelled the city.

"While Dmytro Kuleba addresses (us) from a bomb shel-

ter, we raise EU military assistance to €3.1bn (US\$3bn) and launch the EU military training mission for Ukraine," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted from the meeting in Luxembourg.

"Russia's latest indiscriminate attacks will not shake our determination to support Ukraine, it will only reinforce it."

After almost eight months of war, Ukraine's forces are making progress on the battlefield and Kyiv's western backers are keen to make sure its troops have the capacity to keep fighting.

Several EU nations - including Germany and France - are already training Ukrainians to use the modern artillery systems, missile launchers and air defences they are delivering to Kyiv. But the EU has lagged behind in providing large-scale training to help the country's military face off against Russia's invading forces.

The United States, Canada and Britain have already been training thousands of troops.

The European training mission should become operational next month and will have a budget of around €105mn for

an initial two-year period.

An official said the plan is to provide basic training to 12,000 soldiers and specialised instruction to 2,800 more.

Iranian drones

Ukraine's neighbour Poland is due to serve as the main hub for the mission and Germany is also set to be a key staging post for training.

Programmes currently run by individual member states are set to continue and could be incorporated in the EU mission later.

The new tranche of €500mn

takes the overall contribution for weapons from the EU's central coffers to three billion euros. Member states have also spent more from their own pockets.

Kuleba tweeted that he was 'probably the first foreign minister' to address such an EU meeting from a bomb shelter because of air raid sirens in Kyiv.

"Requested more air defense and supply of ammo. Called on EU to impose sanctions on Iran for providing Russia with drones," he wrote.

He also called for a 'strong' new package of sanctions to be imposed on Moscow.

EU ministers discussed the alleged use of Iranian-made drones by Moscow to hit targets in Ukraine, but no punishment was expected yet.

Tehran has rejected accusations it has supplied Russia with weapons 'to be used in the war in Ukraine'.

Brussels says it is conducting a probe into possible violations of a United Nations resolution and could impose sanctions.

"We will look for concrete evidence about the participation that Iran in the strongest possible terms denies," Borrell said.

AFP

Ukraine war surge 'deeply troubling': New UN rights chief

Geneva, Switzerland - The new United Nations rights chief voiced alarm at the escalating conflict in Ukraine as he began his posting on Monday, insisting that civilians must be protected.

"Any escalation in warfare is deeply troubling to us, and it's happening in Ukraine," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk told reporters in Geneva on his first day in the job.

Earlier on Monday, Russia launched a fresh attack on Kyiv using what the Ukrainian president's office said were 'kamikaze drones'. "We have received reports from our colleagues on the ground about these drone attacks," said Turk, who is succeeding former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet at the helm of the UN rights office.

"It is absolutely important that civilian objects, civilians are not targeted," he said, warning that 'this is very difficult in densely populated urban areas'. Monday's attacks came exactly a week after Moscow unleashed a massive two-day wave of missile strikes on the Ukrainian capital and across the country.

The deadly October 10-11 attacks marked the biggest wave of



UN rights chief Volker Turk (AFP)

strikes in months in the conflict that began with Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, and sparked an international outcry. Turk, a 57-year-old Austrian national and UN veteran, stressed that respect for international law was 'absolutely critical'.

'De-escalate'

"The big call is to de-escalate and to find ways and means to respect international law," he said.

"Ultimately, it is about human beings who are not involved in warfare, and they need to be protected." Turk, who most recently served as UN chief Antonio Guterres's assistant secretary general for policy, said he was taking on his new job at 'a very critical point in time'.

Pointing to the brutal war in

Ukraine, but also to violence and conflicts raging in many other parts of the world, he said it was vital 'to have a very strong focus on human rights'.

"We have seen so many divisions around the world, but also incredible pushback on gender issues, on civic space issues, on the utter contempt for human life in warfare," he said.

Turk will certainly have his work cut out on a range of issues, including the Ukraine conflict, the war in Ethiopia's Tigray region, and the situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban's takeover last year. The situation in China's Xinjiang region also looms heavy on the agenda.

Minutes before she left office at the end of August, Bachelet published a long-awaited report, which cited possible crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities there, but left the tricky follow-up job to her successor.

In his brief press conference Turk did not discuss specific cases, but insisted that 'we need to come back to a deep understanding about why it is important to respect international law.'

AFP

Hungry elephants, Cameroon farmers struggle to coexist

Campo, Cameroon - Banana growers on the edge of a giant national park on Cameroon's Atlantic coast say they can take no more crop destruction from hungry elephants as the conflict between man and animal escalates.

Near the southern border with Equatorial Guinea, eight villages have registered complaints with the Campo Ma'an national park, a vast area of virgin forest from where the animals emerge.

An estimated 500 gorillas and more than 200 elephants - both endangered species - roam the reserve's 264,000 hectares (652,000 acres).

A week after elephants flattened his banana plantation close by the park, Simplice Yomen, 47, is struggling to cope. "We are at the end of our tether," he sighs.

The elephants eat the new growth inside the banana tree trunks after splitting them open.

Manioc, maize, sweet potato and peanuts are also favourite snacks, says park administrator Michel Nko'o.

In Cameroon, co-existence between humans and animals on



The silverback gorilla and dominant male of the gorilla group Akiba, looks on at the dense forest of the Campo Ma'an National Park in Cameroon (AFP)

the edge of dense forests is proving increasingly challenging.

Most of the crop destruction is recorded near protected wildlife reserves.

For Nko'o, the elephant raids have become noticeably more frequent since agro-industrialists began setting up by the park.

More 2,000 hectares of forest has been chopped down to grow palm oil trees for Cameroun Vert, an industrial plantation project for which the government first approved a clearing of

60,000 hectares before reducing it to 39,000 hectares after protests.

"The elephants who lived here no longer have any place to go and end up in people's fields," regrets park conservationist Charles Memvi.

'Discouraging'

Affected villages near the town of Campo have seen 'three to four hectares of plantations destroyed, which is a major financial loss for the local people', says

Nko'o. Elephants are blamed for 80-90 per cent of the attacks.

The rest is accounted for by gorillas, chimpanzees, hedgehogs, pangolins and porcupines.

Nearly all these species are endangered due to habitat loss and poaching.

Daniel Mengata's two hectares of banana trees were 'devastated' in 2020.

"The animals really are discouraging us," the 37-year-old admitted. "I started crying after seeing the damage because in one night a year's work was wiped out. That really hurts."

"I can no longer feed my family," adds 57-year-old Emini Ngono. Hungry elephants have ruined her smallholding, which once produced gourds, manioc and potato. Ngono says she could make more than €1,000 (US\$970) from selling seeds for gourds, a traditional stable food across the region.

The ministry for forests and wildlife says Cameroon has no legal framework to compensate people after attacks by animals from national parks.

AFP

Former PM Imran Khan wins big in Pakistan by-election

Khan won six of eight national assembly seats he stood for in a weekend by-election

Islamabad, Pakistan - Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan won six of eight national assembly seats he stood for in a weekend by-election, unofficial results showed on Monday, a vote he has called a referendum on his popularity.

The by-election is the latest twist in months of political wrangling that began before Khan's April ouster via a no-confidence vote, and comes as the nation grapples with the aftermath of devastating monsoon floods that left a third of the country under water.

The polls were called 'in constituencies where the government thought PTI was weakest', Khan, a former Pakistan cricket captain, said at a press conference at his home on the outskirts of Islamabad, referring to his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party.

"Despite such attempts, our voters defeated combined candidates of the ruling coalition."

It was, however, an effective net loss for PTI, which had previously held all eight seats.

Individuals can stand in multiple constituencies in Pakistan elections and choose which to forfeit if they win more than one, but it is rare for a candidate to contest as many as Khan.

The 70-year-old has attempted to disrupt Pakistan's po-



A voter casts her ballot at a polling station during the by-election for national assembly seats, in Karachi on Sunday (AFP)

litical process since his April ouster when he ordered all his lawmakers to give up their seats, leaving no PTI members in the National Assembly.

The Electoral Commission has so far called by-elections in only eight of the dozens of constituencies and PTI chiefs have said Khan will not take up any of the winning seats, triggering further elections.

"This was a referendum because voters knew we would not go to the assembly, and even then they voted in favour of our

candidates," Khan added.

He has also vowed to soon announce the date of a 'long march' of his supporters on the capital to pressure the government to announce an earlier national election than that scheduled for October next year.

Khan regularly holds rallies drawing tens of thousands across the country, giving fiery speeches criticising state institutions - including the powerful military - for allegedly conspiring to topple his government.

"Winning six out of eight seats

in the face of a combined opposition is not something small," said Imtiaz Gul, an analyst from the Center for Research and Security Studies in Islamabad.

"It underlines a reality which may be bitter for the entire ruling alliance... Imran Khan's narrative is still galvanising many people across the country."

Khan rode to power in 2018 on a populist platform promising social reforms, religious conservatism and a fight against corruption, overturning decades of rule by two feuding political

dynasties interspersed with military takeovers. But, under his tenure, the economy stagnated and he lost the support of the army, which was accused of helping to get him elected.

He has, so far, emerged largely unscathed from a series of court cases against him and his party.

Pakistan's courts are often used to tie up lawmakers in tedious and long-winding proceedings that rights monitors have criticised for stifling political opposition.

AFP

Ethiopia vows to seize airports, facilities in Tigray

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Ethiopia's government on Monday vowed to seize control of airports and other federal facilities in war-torn Tigray, a day after the African Union appealed for a ceasefire to the conflict.

AU Commission chair Moussa Faki Mahamat called for an immediate and unconditional truce as combat intensified in northern Ethiopia, where pro-government forces and rebels from the Tigray region have been fighting for nearly two years.

Faki also urged the rivals to 'recommit to dialogue' after both sides accepted an AU invitation to peace talks that failed to materialise as violence spiralled.

The authorities in Tigray said on Sunday they were 'ready to abide by an immediate cessation of hostilities' and called on the international community to press the government to come to the table.

Addis Ababa said in a statement on Monday it was 'committed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict through the AU-led peace talks'. But it said it would pursue this along with 'defensive measures' to protect Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity from internal and external threats.

"It is thus imperative that the Government of Ethiopia assumes immediate control of all airports, other federal facilities, and installations in the region," the statement from the Government Communication Service said.

UN chief Antonio Guterres, the United States and other Western powers have voiced alarm over the worsening violence in Tigray and called for a

peaceful settlement to 'this catastrophic conflict'.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government and the Tigrayan authorities were to attend AU-led negotiations in South Africa earlier this month but they did not go ahead, with logistical problems cited as one obstacle.

Ethiopian forces along with troops from neighbouring Eritrea have meanwhile stepped up an offensive near Shire, a city of 100,000 people in

AU Commission chair Faki Mahamat called for an immediate and unconditional truce as combat intensified in northern Ethiopia

northwestern Tigray, where civilian casualties have been reported in heavy shelling.

US aid chief Samantha Power on Sunday warned 'the risk of additional atrocities and loss of life is intensifying' around Shire, and accused Ethiopian and Eritrean forces of indiscriminate attacks.

On Friday, an aid worker from the International Rescue Committee was among three civilians killed in an attack in Shire left others injured.

The IRC staffer was distributing food to 'vulnerable' civilians including women and children, said the World Food Programme (WFP), which condemned the targeting of aid personnel.

AFP

Iraq's new president calls for speedy government formation

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq's newly-elected President Abdul Latif Rashid pledged on Monday on taking office to throw his weight behind efforts to rapidly form a strong new government.

"The Iraqi people expect a new government to be formed rapidly, and that it be efficient and united," Rashid said on his inauguration at the presidential palace in Baghdad.

Rashid, 78, elected last Thursday to the largely ceremonial post reserved for Iraq's Kurdish minority, swiftly named Mohammed Shia al-Sudani as prime minister-designate.

Sudani's task now is to form a new government that would end a year of political gridlock in the war-scarred nation since general elections were held in October 2021.

But the movement of fire-brand cleric Moqtada Sadr, Sudani's rival in Iraq's majority Shiite camp, on Saturday announced its refusal to join a Sudani-led government, igniting fears of renewed delays that are common in Iraq's multi-confessional politics.

Under the Iraqi constitution, the prime minister-designate has 30 days to form a government, a deadline that has often been missed.

"I will do everything I can to bring political forces closer and sponsor a dialogue," Rashid said, also vowing to work toward 'solid and balanced relations with neighbouring countries and the international community'.



Iraq's newly-elected President Abdul Latif Rashid attends his inauguration at Al-Salam Palace in the capital Baghdad on Monday (AFP)

The Iraqi people expect a new government to be formed rapidly, and that it be efficient and united

ABDUL LATIF RASHID

The stakes are high for the next cabinet, with a colossal US\$87bn in revenues from oil exports locked up in the central bank's coffers.

The money can help rebuild infrastructure but it can only be spent after lawmakers approve a state budget presented by the new government.

AFP

Roadside bomb kills two peacekeepers in Mali: UN

Bamako, Mali - Two United Nations troops were killed and four others were badly injured by a roadside bomb in northern Mali on Monday, the UN peacekeeping mission said.

They had been taking part in a search for mines in the Kidal region, the mission wrote on Twitter. "Two MINUSMA

#peacekeepers were killed today, 17 October, when their vehicle hit an Improvised Explosive Device during a #mine search and detection patrol in #Tessalit, Kidal region," MINUSMA said.

Four others were seriously injured, it said.

The peacekeepers were part of MINUSMA's Chadian contin-

gent, an official at the mission's camp in Kidal said on condition of anonymity.

MINUSMA - the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali - was launched in 2013 to help one of the world's poorest countries cope with a bloody militant campaign.

It is one of the UN's biggest peacekeeping operations, with 17,612 troops, police, civilians and volunteers deployed as of May, according to the mission's website.

It has suffered 276 fatalities, one of the highest tolls in the history of 'blue helmet' operations.

AFP

Sweden elects right-wing prime minister

Stockholm, Sweden - Sweden's parliament on Monday narrowly elected conservative leader Ulf Kristersson as prime minister, leading the country's first government to be shored up by the far-right Sweden Democrats.

Kristersson, 58, was elected by a wafer-thin majority of three votes, after announcing a deal on Friday to form a governing coalition comprising his Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals.

The government will be supported in parliament by its far-right ally, the anti-immigration, nationalist Sweden Democrats.

"I am thankful and glad for the trust I have received from parliament and also considerably humble before the tasks ahead of us," Kristersson told a press conference following Monday's vote.

He is expected to present his new government on Tuesday.

The Sweden Democrats were the big winners in the closely fought September 11 general election.

They emerged as the second-largest party with a record 20.5

per cent of votes, trailing only the Social Democrats, who have dominated Swedish politics since the 1930s.

The right-wing bloc now has 176 seats in parliament, to their left-wing rivals' 173.

On Friday Kristersson's four-party alliance unveiled a 62-page roadmap heavily influenced by the far-right agenda. It promises major crackdowns on crime and immigration and the construction of new nuclear reactors.

"Sweden is a country that is facing several parallel crises at the same time," said Kristersson.

Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Akesson told parliament that while his party would have preferred to be in government and holding cabinet posts, the policies the coalition pursued were most important.

"It is what the government does that is important, not what the government looks like," he said.

Akesson accused past governments, on both left and right, of mismanaging the country.

"We are ready to support a



Sweden's newly elected Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (AFP)

new government... because we have made sure, through negotiations, that it will do enough of what is necessary to reverse this trend," he said.

In its roadmap, the incoming government said it aimed to cut the number of refugees resettled in Sweden through the UNHCR from 6,400 last year to just 900

per year during its four-year mandate, introduce incentives to encourage asylum seekers to return home, and explore the feasibility of deporting foreigners based on 'misconduct'.

Gang violence

It will also probe the possibility of keeping asylum seekers in transit centres during their application process, ditch Sweden's target of spending one per cent of gross domestic income on development aid, and introduce a national ban on begging.

While the quartet has presented a united front, its constituent parties have traditionally differed on a number of key policy areas.

Major concessions were made in their joint agreement, primarily to meet the far-right's demands.

A major theme of the election campaign was Sweden's struggle to combat soaring gang shootings. "We will do everything possible to stop this," Kristersson said on Friday.

AFP

WINDIES SCOT UNAWARES!

George Munsey stars as Scotland stun West Indies at Twenty20 World Cup

Hobart, Australia - George Munsey's unbeaten half-century and some inspired bowling helped Scotland thrash two-time Twenty20 World Cup champions West Indies by 42 runs in another big upset on Monday.

The shock result comes a day after Namibia hammered Sri Lanka in the tournament opener in Australia.

In the second match of the day in Hobart, Zimbabwe beat Ireland by 31 runs in their round-one opening match.

Munsey's 53-ball 66 laced with nine boundaries steered Scotland to 160-5 after being put in to bat first in the opening-round match in Hobart.

Left-arm spinner Mark Watt led the bowling charge to bundle out West Indies, winners of the title in 2012 and 2016, for 118 in 18.3 overs.

Minnnows Scotland are on course for a second straight Super 12 place after achieving the feat last year.

"Obviously it is a special win for us. Took a lot of work and has given us belief," said Scotland skipper Richie Berrington.



Scotland's George Munsey celebrates after completing his fifty against West Indies in their opening match at the Twenty20 World Cup at Bellerive Oval in Hobart on Monday (AFP)

We haven't had as many T20 cricket as we would have liked but have played a lot of 50-overs cricket. It was about transferring those skills to the short form

RICHIE BERRINGTON



"We haven't had as many T20 cricket as we would have liked but have played a lot of 50-overs cricket. It was about transferring those skills to the short form."

Munsey, a left-handed batsman, and Michael Jones got Scotland off to a flier as they

raced to 52 in 5.3 overs when rain interrupted play.

Munsey hit a string of boundaries including three straight fours off Alzarri Joseph, whose first over at a T20 World Cup cost 15 runs.

The 45-minute rain break seemed to hit the batting mo-

mentum as Jason Holder bowled Jones for 20 soon after play resumed and then sent back Matthew Cross for three in his next over.

Munsey, named man of the match, stood firm and attempted to rebuild with Berrington, who got a good start but fell on 16 off

Joseph.

Munsey, playing his 54th T20 for Scotland, reached his first T20 World Cup fifty after a cameo by Calum MacLeod, who smashed 23 off 14.

Munsey finished with a flourish as he hit three fours in a 15-run 20th over from Odean Smith.

'Tough loss'

West Indies now have no margin for further error if they are to progress to the Super 12 stage.

"Tough loss for us, obviously disappointed," said skipper Nicholas Pooran.

"We have to work hard and win two games. We have to take accountability and responsibility."

Kyle Mayers started aggressively in the West Indies reply with three boundaries, but mistimed a hit to be caught out by Munsey off pace bowler Josh Davey. He made 20.

Evin Lewis and Brandon King hit back with a flurry of boundaries in their attempt to get quick runs in the first six overs of powerplay - when only two fielders are allowed outside the inner circle.

But their stay was shortlived as left-handed Lewis fell for 14 and King was bowled by Watt, who returned figures of 3-12 from his four overs, for 17.

The two-time champions slipped further at 62-4 when off-spinner Michael Leask bowled Pooran for five.

Scotland's bowlers kept chipping away as the rest of the West Indies batting caved in, despite a valiant 38 by Holder, who was last man out.

AFP



Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza plays a shot during his knock of 82 against Ireland in Hobart on Monday (AFP)

Raza leads Zimbabwe to win over Ireland at Twenty20 World Cup

Hobart, Australia - Sikandar Raza smashed 82 off 48 balls to set up a convincing 31-run victory for Zimbabwe in their opening match of the Twenty20 World Cup against Ireland on Monday.

Zimbabwe lost three early wickets after being invited to bat first in Hobart, but Raza put on key partnerships to guide the team to 174-7 in Hobart.

Returning paceman Blessing Muzarabani took three wickets as Zimbabwe restricted Ireland to 143-9.

"We are ecstatic. To put up a performance like that first game,

it shows that we do belong here," said skipper Craig Ervine, whose side missed the last edition in the UAE.

"It's a pity that it has been a long way since we have played a World Cup."

Zimbabwe are on track to make the Super 12 after winning the first of their three matches in round one.

Raza set the tone for the team's domination after he put on attacking stands with Sean Williams and then Milton Shumba.

Ireland pace spearhead Josh

Little got Regis Chakabva for nought with the second ball of the match and then dismissed Wesley Madhevere for 22.

Raza took nine balls to get going as he smashed Curtis Campher for two sixes in the ninth over and kept up the attack despite losing partners along the way.

He fell on the last ball of the innings off Mark Adair after hitting five fours and five sixes.

Ireland were never in the chase after losing their top four for just 22 runs inside four overs with pace bowler Richard Ngar-

ava and Muzarabani sharing the spoils.

Campher, who made 27, and George Dockrell attempted to revive the chase in their stand of 42. But Raza broke through with his off spin, dismissing Dockrell for 24.

Campher departed soon after and the Irish batting fizzled, despite cameos by Gareth Delany (24) and Barry McCarthy (22 not out).

Tendai Chatara finished with two wickets, missing out on a hat-trick.

AFP

Wanted to give him a little bit of a challenge, says Rohit after Shami stuns Australia in warm-up match

Brisbane, Australia - There was no sign of Mohammed Shami till the last over of the Indians' warm-up game against Australia at Gabba. "This was always the plan," Rohit Sharma said, explaining that the idea was to throw a challenge to Shami, who was returning after a long layoff. But when Shami came on, he made things happen. The Australians, favourites to win with 11 to get off six, lost four off the last four balls, with Shami getting three, to lose by six runs.

"Honestly, he is coming back after a long time. So we just wanted to give him an over. This was always the plan from the beginning," Rohit said on Star Sports. "He comes and bowls at the death. We know how lethal he can be with the new ball. We just wanted to give him a little bit of a challenge, coming and bowling that death over and we saw what it was."

In the Australians' chase of the



Mohammed Shami (2L) took three wickets in the final over as Australia's chase ended six runs short

Indians' 186 for 7, Aaron Finch led the way with a 54-ball 76. The first-wicket stand between Finch and Mitchell Marsh was worth 64 - inside the powerplay - and for the most part, it looked like the Australians would win. But Harshal Patel got Finch with a

lower yorker, Virat Kohli pulled off a stunning run-out - and then a one-handed catch backtracking at long-on in the final over - and Shami aced the final over to give India victory, a heartening one after the defeat to a Western Australia XI the other day.

"There is definitely room for improvement," Rohit said. "I am sure we are on it but I want to see more consistency in terms of where you want to pitch the ball. You know, when you play back home and when you play in Australian conditions, you have to

change your tactics, change your lengths a little bit. Sometimes, keeping it simple and hitting the ball hard on the deck will be a good option.

"It is something we've been working on, speaking to the guys about it. But overall, it was a good game for us. Like I said, it was a good pitch. They had a decent partnership in the middle, which put pressure on us a little bit. But our last three-four overs were really good."

The first half wasn't too shabby either, as KL Rahul first and then Suryakumar Yadav hit quick half-centuries to put a good score on the board.

"I thought we batted well. Just towards the end, we could have added 10-15 runs more," Rohit said. "That's something that we have been talking about. We want the set batter to bat as long as possible and till the end, which Surya did to some extent."

ESPNCricinfo

Sri Lanka to host Afghanistan for ODIs in November

New Delhi, India - Afghanistan will travel to Sri Lanka for three one-day internationals in November, soon after the T20 World Cup in Australia ends, the island nation's cricket board said on Monday.

The minnows of cricket in Asia, Afghanistan "will arrive in Sri Lanka on November 22", Sri Lanka Cricket said in a statement. The series was initially scheduled for February 2023 but "was shifted to the new schedule as the international cricket calendars of the two nations enabled the change", it added.

The teams will play three matches on November 25, 27 and 30 in the city of Kandy.

Sri Lanka were surprise Asia Cup winners in September

The teams will play three matches on November 25, 27 and 30 in the city of Kandy

after defeating fancied opponents Pakistan and India in the Twenty20 format.

Afghanistan too have put up spirited displays with some young and exciting cricketers in the game's shortest format in the last few months.

The ODI series is seen as preparation on the road to the World Cup in the longer white-ball format, which will be hosted by India in 2023.

I am going to fight for it

Mohamed Salah not giving up on Premier League title after scoring Liverpool’s winner against Man City

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Mohamed Salah said Liverpool are not giving up on the Premier League title after the Egyptian’s strike in a 1-0 win inflicted Manchester City’s first defeat of the season on Sunday.

The Reds are still 10 points behind City and 14 adrift of leaders Arsenal, but kickstarted their season with just a third league win of the campaign.

“Personally, I love to play always for a title,” said Salah. “In my head I am going to fight for it, but we need to focus more and take one game at a time.”

Jürgen Klopp was sent off in the closing stages as he lost the plot with the officials for refusing to award Salah a free-kick.

But City were also left fuming at referee Anthony Taylor after he disallowed Phil Foden’s strike early in the second half after a VAR review.

“This is Anfield,” said City boss Pep Guardiola, who was targeted by coins thrown from the crowd in the aftermath of the disallowed goal.

“The referee spoke with my assistant and Jürgen before the game and said ‘Today I won’t make soft fouls’ and all the game was play on, play on, play on, except the goal we scored.”

For all their achievements under Guardiola, City are still to master Anfield in front of a crowd as Liverpool’s proud unbeaten home league record with fans in attendance dating



Liverpool’s Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring against Manchester City in their Premier League match at Anfield on Sunday (AFP)

back to 2017 goes on.

Haaland draws a blank

Klopp claimed in his pre-match press conference that no one can compete with the wealth of resources at City’s disposal after adding Erling Haaland to a squad filled with seasoned Premier League winners.

But the Norwegian’s 10-game scoring streak at club level came to an end on an afternoon Liverpool will hope gives their season lift-off.

“On a normal day you should

period.

Salah should have opened the scoring when he latched onto Roberto Firmino’s through ball and Ederson made a brilliant save low to his right.

Seconds later the ball was in the Liverpool net as Foden swept home the loose ball after Alisson Becker bravely saved at Haaland’s feet.

However, the goal was ruled out after a VAR check for a foul by Haaland on Fabinho in the build-up.

Guardiola was still furiously remonstrating with the officials

On a normal day you should not even try against City, you have to play to your limits and further. That’s what we did in a well organised and very passionate way

JURGEN KLOPP

not even try against City, you have to play to your limits and further,” added Klopp.

“That’s what we did in a well organised and very passionate way.”

Liverpool have caused City more problems than anyone else in England over the past five years and belied the form of both sides heading into the game to inflict the champions’ first league defeat since February.

A lacklustre first half was followed by an explosive second

on the touchline when the home side missed another huge chance to break the deadlock.

Salah’s cross picked out Jota at the far post, who headed against the post when it seemed easier to score.

Haaland was next to be denied as the game raged from one end to the other as his low effort was palmed away by Alisson.

But it was Liverpool’s star marksman who finally found his range.

AFP

Mbappe insists he ‘never asked to leave’ as PSG beat Marseille

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe insisted Sunday he has “never asked to leave” Paris Saint-Germain despite widespread reports last week that he would seek a move away from the Qatar-owned club as soon as possible.

The 23-year-old France superstar was speaking in the wake of PSG’s 1-0 win over Marseille, in which he set up Neymar for the only goal as his side moved three points clear at the top of Ligue 1.

“I am very happy. I have never asked to leave in January,” he said while insisting that he was not “implicated directly or indirectly” in the rumours about his future.

The story emerged on Tuesday, hours before PSG’s 1-1 Champions League draw with Benfica in which he scored.

“I didn’t understand why the story came out on the day of a game. I was as shocked as everyone,” Mbappe claimed.

“People can think I was involved but I wasn’t at all.”

Several sources assure that



PSG’s Neymar celebrates with Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe after scoring against Marseille on Sunday (AFP)

the noise about Mbappe wanting to leave PSG -- despite only signing a new three-year contract in May after lengthy negotiations -- came from the entourage of the player himself.

Mbappe has openly admitted that he has not enjoyed his position in the Paris attack this sea-

son, saying he plays with “more freedom” when on international duty. But he insisted that there was no truth that he wanted to leave Paris, saying: “It is completely false. I am very happy.”

Neymar’s goal against Marseille came in first-half stoppage time as PSG beat their bitter ri-

vals at the Parc des Princes to maintain their unbeaten start to the season.

The game also featured a red card for Marseille defender Samuel Gigot, who was dismissed in the second half for scything down Neymar.

AFP

Osimhen keeps Napoli top of the pile, Milan squeeze past Verona

Milan, Italy - Victor Osimhen made sure that Napoli kept hold of their Serie A lead on Sunday with the winning goal in a 3-2 victory over Bologna which took their all-competitions winning streak to 10 matches.

Nigeria striker Osimhen struck in the 69th minute to secure the win for unbeaten Napoli, who maintained their two-point lead on Atalanta at the top of the pile.

It was his first league goal since August after helping his team to secure qualification to the Champions League last 16 with a midweek strike in Naples against Ajax.

“It’s always important for me to get a goal in this stadium because the atmosphere is really amazing,” said Osimhen to DAZN. “I’m happy to be able to help the team with this goal and the victory, and I believe we will continue to push with this momentum.”

However Sunday’s win was far from the swashbuckling display expected against Bologna, who sit 17th but come away from the Stadio Maradona with credit after



Napoli’s Victor Osimhen celebrates after scoring in their Italian Serie A match against Bologna in Naples on Sunday (AFP)

a fine performance without star man Marko Arnautovic.

The hosts looked to be heading for a routine win once Hirving Lozano put them ahead three minutes after half-time.

They had gone into the break level thanks to Juan Jesus bundling in his first goal of the season in final minute of the half, just four minutes after Joshua Zirkzee had give Bologna a shock lead.

However Alex Meret allowed

Musa Barrow to level for Bologna just two minutes after Lozano’s arrowed strike with a howler, letting the Gambian’s long-range shot slip through his fingers.

The home crowd squirmed but Osimhen, who replaced Giacomo Raspadori at half-time, forced his third league goal of the campaign under Lukasz Skorupski from the superb Khvicha Kvaratskhelia’s pass to send the fans home drained but happy.

AFP

Union stun Dortmund and stay top of Bundesliga as Bayern thrash Freiburg

Berlin, Germany - Union Berlin’s fairytale run at the top of the Bundesliga continued Sunday after a howler from Borussia Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel helped them to a stunning 2-0 win over Edin Terzic’s side.

Two first-half goals from Janik Haberer put Union into dreamland in front of a raucous home crowd as they extended their five-week run at the top of the table and pulled four points clear of Bayern Munich, who moved second with a thumping 5-0 win

at home over Freiburg.

“We are performing so consistently. Sometimes we get the rub of the green, but today it was no coincidence that we won,” said Haberer, as he was hugged by Union’s mascot in the bowels of the stadium after the game.

The visitors got off to a nightmare start after Kobel handed Union the opener on a silver platter.

As he stepped up to receive a routine backpass from Raphael Guerreiro, Kobel slipped on the

grass in his own penalty area, allowing Haberer to tap the ball into the empty net.

“It was lucky for us that he slipped, but when you’re at the top, that’s when you get the luck,” said Union defender Timo Baumgartl.

Haberer doubled the lead shortly afterwards, smashing the ball into the bottom corner after Union had danced through the lethargic Dortmund backline.

Terzic brought on three attacking players at half-time to try

and force a fightback, but it was Union who continued to have the better chances.

Baumgartl forced a sharp save from Kobel early in the second half and only a desperate challenge from former Union defender Nico Schlotterbeck denied Andras Schaefer a few minutes later.

Dortmund pushed hard in the final 15 minutes, forcing three brilliant saves from Union keeper Frederik Ronnow.

AFP



Union Berlin’s Janik Haberer scores the opening goal as Borussia Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel looks on (AFP)



Mason Greenwood

Man Utd’s Greenwood remanded in custody charged with attempted rape

Manchester, United Kingdom - Manchester United footballer Mason Greenwood was Monday remanded in custody after appearing at Manchester Magistrates’ Court charged with attempted rape, controlling and coercive behaviour and assault.

The 21-year-old forward was first held in January over allegations relating to a young woman after images and videos were posted online.

He had been on bail since but was arrested on Saturday for an alleged breach of conditions.

Within hours of the allegations surfacing at the beginning of the year Greenwood, who has made one appearance for England, was suspended from playing or training with United. He will spend more than a month on remand after a judge denied him bail. He will appear before Manchester Minshull Street Crown Court on November 21.

A product of the United academy, he has played 129 times for the club, scoring 35 goals and signed a new deal in February 2021.

Qatar to host 2023 Asian Cup

World Cup hosts Qatar gets the nod ahead of South Korea and Indonesia after China’s Covid pull-out

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - World Cup hosts Qatar will stage the 2023 Asian Cup, the Asian Football Confederation said on Monday, after China withdrew earlier this year because of Covid.

China pulled out in May because of its “zero-Covid” policy, leaving the AFC scrambling to find a new host for its flagship men’s 24-team football tournament.

The tournament had been due to be held in 10 Chinese cities from June 16 to July 16 next year.

The AFC did not say in its statement when the Asian Cup would now take place, but secretary-general Windsor John told AFP it will likely be in January 2024 because of the cooler weather in Qatar at that time of year.

South Korea and Indonesia were the other two countries in the running after China’s withdrawal, but Qatar got the nod - to the obvious displeasure of the Korea Football Association.

The AFC also said its executive committee had shortlisted India and Saudi Arabia for the 2027 Asian Cup.

“The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) executive committee has today confirmed the Qatar Football Association as the host association for the AFC Asian Cup 2023,” the Malaysia-based AFC said in a statement.

AFC president Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim al Khalifa said Qatar is ready to put on the event despite the short lead time to prepare.



AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al Khalifa (L) with Qatar Football Association chief Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Bin Ahmed al Thani (AFP)

Qatar’s capabilities and track record in hosting major international sporting events and their meticulous attention to detail are well admired throughout the globe

SHAIKH SALMAN BIN EBRAHIM AL KHALIFA

It will also host the World Cup starting next month.

The AFC chief hailed Qatar’s “existing world-class infrastruc-

ture and unrivalled hosting capabilities”.

“Qatar’s capabilities and track record in hosting major international sporting events and their meticulous attention to detail are well admired throughout the globe,” he said.

“I must also commend the AFC for showcasing utmost professionalism in conducting a fair

and transparent expedited bidding process and I thank all our commercial partners and sponsors for their patience during these unprecedented times.”

The Asian Cup is staged every four years. Qatar won the tournament’s last edition, in 2019, which was hosted by the United Arab Emirates.

Qatar hosted the 1988 and

2011 editions.

Korean disappointment

South Korea jointly held the men’s 2002 World Cup with Japan, but has not staged the Asian Cup since 1960.

The Korean FA made clear its disappointment at missing out and took a swipe at the selection process.

“It has not been held in Korea, an Asian football powerhouse for 63 years, and in terms of rotation and regional balance, it was a reasonable order to hold it in East Asia,” the KFA said.

“Unexpectedly, however, we had to face tough competition as Qatar jumped into the bid with its abundant financial, human and material base.”

It added: “It is judged that the unconventional offensive and support of Middle Eastern countries trying to take the lead in Asian football also influenced the situation.”

Indonesia held matches at the 2007 Asian Cup along with Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

But earlier this month Indonesia was struck by a deadly football tragedy that has become one of the world’s worst stadium disasters, with experts raising doubts about the country’s capability to host major international events.

The disaster in an overcrowded stadium in Malang in East Java left 132 people dead and hundreds injured.

AFP

Top-ranked Swiatek beats Vekic for WTA San Diego title

San Diego, United States - World number one Iga Swiatek captured her 11th career WTA title and her eighth of the year on Sunday by outlasting 77th-ranked Donna Vekic in the San Diego Open final.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek defeated the 26-year-old Croatian 6-3, 3-6, 6-0 for her WTA-best 64th match

victory of 2022.

“It was a really tight match and pretty long,” Swiatek said. “We felt the intensity for sure. At the end I wanted to be the one who played the last ball in.”

Swiatek took her prior titles this year at the US and French Opens as well as Qatar, Indian Wells, Miami, Stuttgart and Rome.

The 21-year-old Polish star bounced back in her ninth championship match of the year after losing last week’s final at Ostrava to Czech Barbora Krejickova.

In a rain-halted semi-final delayed to Sunday afternoon, Vekic rallied from 4-2 down in the third set when showers struck to defeat 19th-ranked American Danielle Collins, this year’s Aus-

tralian Open runner-up, by 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2).

That left her only a short rest break before facing Swiatek for the title, but she tested the top-ranked star through two sets.

“I wanted to give it all, and knowing how Donna can serve, I wanted to be more loosened up on my return games - not think, just relax and let my instincts

take over,” Swiatek said.

The victory helped Swiatek increase her overwhelming dominance of the WTA rankings and he lead now is a whopping 6280 points.

Paula Badosa fell four places from fourth to eighth after the Spanish player lost to Danielle Collins in the quarter-finals in San Diego.



Iga Swiatek celebrates after defeating Donna Vekic on Sunday (AFP)

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MANAGEMENT OF URINARY STONES

What are kidney stones?

Urine has many dissolved minerals and salts. Stones may form when urine has high levels of some of these minerals and salts. Kidney stones can grow larger in size, even filling the inner hollow structures of the kidney. They can travel down the ureter occasionally getting stuck and becoming painful. If the stone reaches your bladder, usually it passes out through your urine.

What are the symptoms of kidney stones?

Common symptoms of kidney stones include:

- A sharp, cramping pain in the back and side moving down to the lower abdomen or groin. The pain often starts suddenly and comes in waves.
- A feeling of intense need to pass urine.
- Passing urine more often or a burning feel when you pass urine.
- Urine that is dark or red due to blood.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- A feeling of pain at the tip of the penis in men

What are kidney stones made of?

Kidney stones come in many types and colours. These include:

- Calcium stones (80% of stones)
- Uric acid stones (5-10% of stones)
- Struvite/infection stones (10% of stones)
- Cystine stones (less than 1% of stones)

What causes Kidney stones?

Causes include dehydration, high salt intake, eating foods rich in calcium and oxalate, diet high in animal protein, certain bowel conditions that cause diarrhoea, surgeries on the intestines, obesity, abnormal growth of one or more parathyroid glands, some medications, and calcium/vitamin C supplements, and family history.

How are kidney stones diagnosed?

Blood tests can help find if a medical problem is causing your stones.

Your urine can be tested for urinary tract infection or crystals that are typical of different stone types. If you are getting recurrent stones, a 24-hour urine test is done which will reveal the levels of different stone-forming substances in your urine. 'Silent' kidney stones are often found with an ultrasound. When a person has blood in their urine or sudden abdominal or side pain, CT KUB study is done for a quick and exact diagnosis. If you pass a stone or a stone is re-

moved by surgery, a stone analysis is done.

How can one be treated?

Treatment of kidney stones depends on the type of stone, its location, its size and its associated complications. Often you can simply wait for the stone to pass. Smaller stones are more likely than larger stones to pass on their own. Surgery may be needed if the stone fails to pass, the pain is too great to wait or if stone is affecting kidney work.

Surgeries to remove stones in the kidneys or ureters include Shock Wave Lithotripsy and Uteroscopy (URS). Percutaneous Nephrolithotomy (PCNL) is the best treatment for large stones in the kidney.

How can I prevent kidney stones?

It is better to drink at least 3 litres of liquid each day. Reduce the amount of salt in your diet. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables - fruits and vegetables give you potassium, fiber, magnesium, antioxidants, phytate and citrate, all of which may help keep stones from forming. Eat foods with low oxalate levels like spinach, rhubarb and almonds. Eat less animal protein.



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Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress which most people experience as a form of nervousness to situations in their lives. However, it takes the form of psychological disorder when there is excessive fear or anxiousness that interferes with a person's ability to function normally.

There are an array of anxiety disorders, from panic attacks to manic phobias. However, some people tend to experience acute anxiety and concerns over climate change and the future of the planet - this is termed as 'eco-anxiety' and can be particularly seen in people who are either hygiene freaks or extremely meticulous about everything, including the need to see the environment, too, in perfect order.

According to an article in *CNN Health*, a 2021 global survey conducted among people ages 16 to 25 indicated that a majority expressed moderate worry about climate change. However, while 56% believed that 'humanity is doomed', more than 45% said their anxiety over climate change negatively affected their daily life and functioning.

Disruption in daily life

Experts at the Climate Psychiatry Alliance and the Climate Psychology Alliance point out that the genuine struggles that individuals, especially young people, are having with this kind of anxiety, can cause severe disruption in daily life, intrude upon people's thoughts, and interfere with healthy sleep.

Also, worries about climate change can lead to troubles for people with certain autoimmune diseases that flare up under particular environmental conditions.

Environ'mental' concerns

DO YOU FEEL WORRIED ABOUT THE EFFECT AND REPERCUSSIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE? YOU MIGHT BE SUFFERING FROM 'ECO-ANXIETY'



Lupus, for example, can be triggered by bright sunlight due to UV ray exposure, they said.

Some evidence also suggests relationships between pain and relative humidity, pressure and wind speed. Hence, for those suffering from arthritis, more frequent powerful storms may mean more potential for pain, though this is a debatable factor.

Impact of global warming on allergies

Experts suggest, more frost-free days mean more potentially

irritating pollens. There's also a debate among scientists about whether increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has made pollen more intense.

Moulds are other allergens affected by weather, exacerbated by more frequent storms, intense flooding and damp days. Many asthma attacks are first triggered by allergies, too. Asthma can be triggered by thunderstorms and wildfire smoke. It's all connected, they pointed out.

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Malabar Gold & Diamonds opens 3 showrooms in Oman Avenues Mall, Nizwa and Ibri

Bollywood Actor Anil Kapoor inaugurates restyled showroom in Oman Avenues Mall. Customers to get assured gold coins on gold & diamond jewellery purchase as part of festive offers

With an impressive network of over 285 outlets spread across 10 countries, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the sixth largest jewellery retailer globally, opened 3 showrooms in Oman Avenues

Mall, Nizwa and Ibri. The renovated and restyled showroom in Oman Avenues Mall was inaugurated by brand ambassador and Bollywood actor Anil Kapoor in the presence of Shamlal Ahamed, MD - International Operations, Malabar Gold

& Diamonds, Najeeb K, regional head - Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other Malabar Gold & Diamonds management team members, customers, and well-wishers. The imminent arrival of Anil Kapoor itself was a huge crowd

puller for the local population and the inaugural event at Oman Avenues Mall saw a huge number of spectators gathered to witness the performance of the renowned actor, who entertained and mesmerised the crowd with his enthralling energy.

The showrooms in Lulu Hypermarket at Nizwa and Ibri were inaugurated on October 10 by the Wali of Nizwa, Saeadat Alshaykh Rashid Alkalbani and the Wali of Ibri, Saeadat Alshaykh Almaskari, respectively, in the presence of Najeeb and other management team members, customers and well-wishers.

All the showrooms showcase a wide variety of jewellery collections across Malabar Gold & Diamonds' various sub brands, such as Mine, Era, Viraa, Divine, Ethnix, Precia & Starlet. Comprising of traditional jewellery, modern jewellery, daily wear jewellery, kids jewellery, and much more - the jewellery designs in Gold, Diamond and Precious gems have been curated from over 20 countries.

"The renovated showroom in Oman Avenues Mall and the new showrooms at Nizwa and Ibri aim to provide our customers with an unforgettable jewellery shopping experience. The immense collection of designs that we have on display coupled with the special line up of festive jewellery collections that we have arranged across our sub-brands ensure that Malabar Gold & Diamonds is the go-to place for jewellery lovers across the region.

With 18 showrooms in the sultanate, we are one of the largest jewellery retailers in the country," said Shamlal Ahamed.

With the festive offers that Malabar Gold & Diamonds have offered, customers can get assured gold coins on gold and dia-



mond jewellery purchase from all outlets, valid until October 23.

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 designs have been made available across a wide range of sub-brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraa, Ethnix and Divine, comprising 22k gold, diamonds, and precious gem jewellery. Elegant designs crafted in contemporary fashion have also been introduced in the 18k

gold category.

With the tastes and preferences of the local Omani population in mind, the brand has launched 'Brides of Oman' campaign, showcasing both traditional bridal jewellery in 21k gold as well as contemporary designs in diamond jewellery.



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