

NEWS BRIEF

EGYPT ANNOUNCES PRESIDENTIAL VOTE ON DEC 10-12

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt will hold a presidential vote on December 10-12, its election authority stated on Monday, with the winner to be announced by December 18.

President Abdel Fattah al Sisi, a former army chief, has ruled for nearly a decade in the Arab world's most populous country, which is now mired in a deep economic crisis.

Experts had predicted Sisi would move forward the 2024 election, ahead of a possible switch to a flexible exchange rate that could exacerbate social tensions.

Presidential hopefuls can apply from October, and the list of candidates is to be finalised by November 9, said Walid Hassan Hamza, chairman of Egypt's National Election Authority.

ECONOMY BOUNCES BACK

2.1% INCREASE IN GDP TO RO17.05BN

2.1% INCREASE IN NON-OIL GDP TO RO11.82BN

1.4% INCREASE IN OIL GDP TO RO5.75BN

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Omani economy has recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic with notable improvement in non-oil sectors.

H E Dr Said Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, announced a 2.1% growth in Oman's economy in the first half of 2023, predominantly driven by transport, storage, and agricultural and fisheries activities, highlighting the successful efforts under the 10th Five-Year Plan for economic diversification.

The announcement was made at the Ministry of Economy's media briefing on Monday, which reviewed the prospects and trends of the global economy and the performance of the Omani economy.

H E Saqri noted that the integration of policies and accelerated programmes to achieve Oman Vision 2040 and the 10th Five-Year Plan have been beneficial. Non-oil sectors contributed to approximately 69.4% of the GDP in the first half of 2023.

The minister highlighted ongoing projects, including the support for economic projects enhanced by artificial intelligence,



Integration of policies and accelerated programmes to achieve Oman Vision 2040 and the 10th Five-Year Plan have been beneficial

H E DR SAID MOHAMMED AL SAQRI



Fitch upgrades Oman rating

Muscat - Global credit rating agency Fitch upgraded Oman's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating (IDR) to 'BB+' from 'BB' on Monday. The rating agency's outlook on Oman is stable.

'The upgrade reflects the use of high oil revenues to pay down debt and spread its maturity, spending restraint reducing external risks, and an increase in Fitch's oil price forecast,' the ratings agency said in a statement.

Fitch projects Oman's general government debt to fall to 36% of GDP in 2023 and stabilise at around 35% in 2024 and 2025. Earlier, Fitch had forecast it to fall to 45% of GDP in 2023 when it last upgraded Oman's rating in August 2022.

'The upgrade also incorporates our view that the government will not backtrack on recent fiscal consolidation measures,' Fitch said.

Oman continues to prepay some of its debt, using the budget surplus from high oil prices.

The ratings agency projects Oman's GDP growth of 2.1% in 2023, slowing from 4.3% in 2022.



Startup aims to transform procurement process



Libya orders arrest of eight officials after flood disaster

gence, with a RO10mn allocation for implementing AI in ministries and government agencies for the first time.

In alignment with Oman Vision 2040, the government prioritises offering gainful employment opportunities to citizens. As a result, employment opportunities surged by 16.2% in 2022, demonstrating the continued recovery and openness of the Omani economy.

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The government has also initiated various measures to mitigate inflation effects, including fixing fuel prices and expanding the list of goods exempt from VAT to 513.

The Ministry of Economy is focusing on governorate development with a RO20mn allocation each for implementing 606 projects. Since the start of the 10th Five-Year-Plan, 1,915 development projects have been approved at a cost of RO8bn with the infrastructure sector accounting for the highest percentage - 53%.

The economy is expected to grow at a rate of 2.3%, outpacing International Monetary Fund's expectation of 1.7%. This discrepancy is attributed to the IMF's reliance on old statistics and not considering the growth in non-oil activities, the minister clarified.

Further, reflecting economic recovery, the GDP at constant prices showed growth of 2.1% during the first half of 2023, reaching RO17.05bn, compared to RO16.7bn during the first half of 2022.

Public debt decreased to around 37% of GDP, enhancing the nation's credit ratings. Initiatives like expanding the time frame for redirecting electricity subsidies to ten years and supporting farmers have been introduced to counter inflation effects. H E Saqri added.

The positive economic indicators, decrease in public debt and substantial allocations for development projects and AI implementation mark a significant upturn in Oman's economic landscape, reinforcing a promising outlook for further growth and stability.

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MAFWR to use drones for cloud seeding to induce rain, improve water resources

Our Correspondent Muscat

In an effort to bolster Oman's water resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is turning to drones to improve cloud seeding

ing across the sultanate. This initiative aligns with the government's broader strategy to ensure a sustainable freshwater supply by 2030.

An official from MAFWR told Muscat Daily, "Being an arid nation, Oman needs techniques like

artificial rain to augment our underground water reserves. With technology evolving, the ministry seeks to use drones to cover areas where it is difficult to develop ionisation stations."

He further detailed Oman's foray into rain enhancement,

which began in 2013 with emitter stations. These stations release negatively charged ions that, when carried by dust and ascending air, interact with clouds to induce rainfall. "The success of these stations hinges on specific climatic conditions, like high humidity and rising air flows."

Of the 12 stations, ten are strategically placed on mountains in the Eastern and Western Hajar ranges and two in Dhofar.

Reflecting on the success of the programme, the official said, "In the past few years, we've observed a 15 to 18% increase in rainfall. Following a feasibility study, we're also in the process of establishing a new station in Musandam."

MAFWR is currently trialling the use of solar energy in cloud seeding projects in North Sharqiyah.

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Dhofar set to welcome 400 charter flights this winter

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a major boost for tourism, Dhofar is poised to welcome 400 charter flights from several countries this winter.

H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, announced the plan while highlighting Oman's successful summer tourism season, in particular this khareef in Dhofar.

Marking a healthy tourism season for Dhofar, 924,792 tourists visited between June 21 and August 31.

The plan for 400 charters from European countries and Russia in the winter underscores an all-year-round robust tourism strategy in the governorate.

H E Mahrouqi described these charters as a testament to the ministry's efforts to globalise Oman's appeal.

Sunday marked the beginning of the winter charter flight season in Dhofar with Salalah Airport welcoming the first charter from the Czech Republic, carry-



These charters are a testament to the ministry's efforts to globalise Oman's appeal

H E SALIM MOHAMMED AL MAHROUQI

ing 200 tourists, in keeping with the ministry's efforts to position the governorate as a year-round global tourist destination.

Highlighting ongoing initiatives to attract more charter flights and cruise ships from Europe, Marwan Abdul Hakim al Ghassani, Director of Tourism Promotion Department in Dhofar, said, "These successful efforts promise to increase arrivals at Salalah Airport this



(Supplied photo)

season, boosting the local economy."

Ghassani emphasised the ministry's multipronged approach to tourism promotion in Dhofar with an array of diverse tourism events and attractive programmes, both local and international, in the pipeline.

"The ministry has approved annual specialised events such as the frankincense season festival during the National Day

holiday in November and the Empty Quarter Festival in January at the peak of the winter tourism season.

Ghassani described adventure activities, diverse marine sports and desert tourism - the latter, particularly in the Empty Quarter - as vital contributors to Oman's tourism portfolio.

"Dhofar's rich heritage and archaeological sites like Al Baleed, Sumhuram and Al Shasr,

registered on the World Heritage List, alongside traditional markets, nature reserves, water springs, valleys and caves, further enhance its global appeal."

The increased charter flights are expected to generate substantial returns for the tourism and allied sectors in Dhofar, stimulating commercial activity and contributing added economic value to the region, he added.



(Supplied photo)

Health insurance meet focuses on mitigating fraud

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 14th Middle East Health Insurance Conference kicked off in Muscat on Monday with a focus on managing health insurance risks and mitigating fraud and misuse of health benefits.

The two-day event marks the fourth consecutive year of a crucial collaboration between Capital Market Authority (CMA) and the Middle East Insurance Group. H E Sultan bin Salem al Habsi, Minister of Finance was the chief guest of the event.

The conference brings together regional and international experts to delve into pressing topics, chiefly managing health insurance risks and reducing cases of fraud and misuse of health benefits. These issues critically affect the quality and cost of insurance and health services, warranting in-depth discussion and cooperative solutions.

Highlighting the persistent growth of health insurance in Oman, Ahmed bin Ali al Mamari, Vice-President of Insurance Sector at CMA, informed that the sector had a dominant 36% share of the total insurance premiums in the first half of 2023, underscoring its paramount position in the insurance landscape.

He added that this growth sig-

nifies a fortifying link between healthcare providers, predominantly in the private sector, and health insurance companies. "The CMA's unwavering dedication to offer accessible, high-calibre healthcare services is evident. Further supporting this, the prices for unified health insurance policies for expatriate workers have been reduced by half this year, enhancing affordability and accessibility."

On Monday, the conference featured a comprehensive agenda including an evaluation of the Damani project, a collective endeavour involving various stakeholders including Oman Medical Association and the Ministry of Health. Discussions also covered the latest health insurance statistics of the Middle East and explored compulsory health insurance experiences in the region. A pivotal session concentrated on modern methods of fraud, how to identify these, and the advancement of systems to counteract them.

On Tuesday, topics will include utilising advanced pricing methodologies for underwriting health insurance and exploring innovation in health insurance. Attendees will examine harnessing technology, artificial intelligence and innovation to handle fraud, abuse and waste effectively.

S Batinah announces development projects for 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

South Batinah governorate is set to launch multiple development projects in 2024.

Highlighting upcoming enhancements in the wilayat of Nakhal, an official of the governorate informed that key projects include renovation of entrance to the governorate, paving internal

roads and creation of two parks in residential neighbourhoods.

According to the official, a number of projects are currently underway throughout the governorate, such as the Ain al Thuwara development and internal road works, including the design and paving of additional internal road links, parking lots for schools and health institutions, upgrading a walkway and in-



stalling 12 kiosks.

The official also informed about completion of several projects in Nakhal. These are development of Nakhal Market, addition of public facilities and parks in Wadi Mistal and Khubat al Qa'dan, and construction of the first phase of a walkway.

More development projects - initial phase of Rimal Park and enhancement of Nakhal Public Park

- are in the analysis or tender stages.

These expansive projects align with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's substantial increase in the Governorate Development Programme allocation. The funding was increased from RO10mn to RO20mn for every governorate for the current Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), effective from 2022.

ROHM announces 2023-2024 season with affordable tickets, global performances

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) announced its new season for 2023 to 2024 - September to May - on Monday promising a wide variety of shows from all over the world.

The new season will feature a rich blend of culture, music and entertainment. Umberto Fanni, Director General of ROHM, announced a significant reduction in ticket prices to enable more people to enjoy world-class performances.

Fanni articulated ROHM's belief in the performing arts as a universal language, uniting diverse people and expressed the institution's commitment to showcasing human creativity and making music and culture accessible to everyone.

"Our 2023-2024 season is a testament to this commitment. We have been presenting opera for a decade and now have 14 ROHM productions alongside in-



(Supplied photo)

ternational operas and shows," Fanni informed.

He emphasised the revised pricing policy's aim is to ensure affordability for families, students and art enthusiasts, allowing them to experience the magic of live performances.

The season will begin with the globally popular Italian opera, *The Barber of Seville*, on Friday and Saturday. This opera by Gioachino Rossini promises a delightful mix of love, comedy and intrigue. The stellar cast includes

Antonino Siragusa as Conte d'Almaviva and Maria Kataeva as Rosina, with a special feature of the Oman Opera Choir in the production.

This season promises a diverse variety of shows, from classical music to ballet to jazz. Highlights include performances of Arabic folk music and world music, allowing audiences to explore their roots through captivating performances.

The season's educational events designed for children and

adults aim to cultivate a love for the arts in the younger generation.

"This season will be a melting pot of cultures and talents," Fanni added, noting that it will feature artists from countries as diverse as Italy, France and Holland, among others. "With affordable pricing and a line-up that spans the globe, ROHM continues to be a beacon of culture and a testament to the unifying power of the performing arts," he concluded.

Oman takes part in Global Sustainable Transport Forum 2023

Muscat - The sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, is taking part in the Global Sustainable Transport Forum 2023 being held in the Chinese capital Beijing.

H E Said bin Hamood bin Said al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, is leading Oman's delegation in the two-day forum - themed 'Sustainable Transport: Working Together to Promote Global Development' - that stated on Monday.

The forum discussed aspects of cooperation between Oman and Saudi Arabia and means of promoting these in the fields of transport and logistics.

More than 50 countries and organisations, with leaders of transportation and logistics sectors, and representatives of regional and international organisations are taking part in the forum.

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CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Oman recycles 31% of its waste

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a significant progress towards sustainable waste management, Oman now boasts 67 waste recycling facilities, recycling 31% of the total waste collected in the country's engineered landfills.

This announcement was made by Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority (EA), at the inauguration of the Public Hygiene Symposium on Monday.

Amri also informed about activation of EA's National Waste Management Register, an integrated and transparent electronic system. It will efficiently monitor and record waste collection and transportation from various sources to treatment sites and ensure safe disposal in specialised facilities. "The emphasis on a circular economy is clear,



The National Waste Management Register will efficiently monitor and record waste collection and transportation from various sites

ABDULLAH BIN ALI AL AMRI

engaging the private sector to bolster a diverse economy adept at maintaining environmental preservation and sustainability of natural resources."



The Public Hygiene Symposium focused on enhancing environmental awareness and transforming attitudes towards the environment.

"This symposium reflects Oman's commitment to ensuring environmental safety and combating pollution within the framework of sustainable development

goals. The EA is dedicated to achieving integrated waste management by formulating a general policy and a national strategy for waste management and updating

environmental legislation and regulations."

Amri described the symposium as a culmination of efforts of various sectors under the 'Be

Careful' public hygiene campaign. The event featured sessions on building a community movement, developing sound environmental behaviours, and showcasing experiences of different countries and organisations that have succeeded in environmental conservation and promoted public hygiene behaviours.

The symposium presented various working papers and included a special presentation on Japan's public hygiene awareness experience by Yamada Miki, Secretary-General of Japanese Omani Parliamentary Committee.

Through the 'Be Careful' campaign, EA aims to enhance social responsibility towards public cleanliness and amplify messages related to maintaining cleanliness, further reinforcing Oman's commitment to a sustainable and environmentally respectful future.

Tobacco use kills 8mn annually; workshop highlights control measures in Oman



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Committee of Tobacco Control (NCTC), in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, conducted a workshop titled 'Tobacco Control and Plain Packaging in the Sultanate of Oman' on Monday.

The workshop was attended by Dr Badriah Mohsen al Rashdi, Director General of Primary Health Care, WHO experts and Saudi representatives.

Yasser al Busaidi, a public health specialist at WHO, emphasised the severe global threat posed by tobacco, responsible for over 8mn deaths annually. "Oman stands out as the second country (after Saudi Arabia) in the region adopting plain packaging for tobacco products, a significant step towards curbing tobacco use."

The workshop focused on a thorough evaluation of Oman's current status in tobacco control, reviewing recent advancements. It provided a crucial platform for interaction with key decision-makers, ensuring precise and comprehensive briefing on the national situation regarding tobacco use. This interaction facilitated the exchange of valuable

Oman stands out as the second country in the region adopting plain packaging for tobacco products, a significant step towards curbing tobacco use

YASSER AL BUSAIDI

insights and successful strategies of various countries.

A dedicated session within the workshop deliberated on the topic of plain packaging. The assembled technical team and NCTC collaborated to chart a clear and effective policy path forward, developing a proactive response plan to anticipated future tactics adopted by the tobacco industry.

Last week, Oman was recognised for its tobacco control efforts when the Ministry of Health received the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of NCDs Award.

The award acknowledges Oman's continuous efforts and commitment to multispectral action for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases by implementing plain packaging for tobacco products on a national level.

'Oman's culture a cornerstone for building modern state'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is participating in the 12th Conference of Ministers of Culture in the Islamic World being held in Doha from September 25 to 26, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The theme of the conference is 'Towards Renewing Cultural Action in the Islamic World'.

Addressing the meet, H E Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Culture in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and head of the Omani delegation, emphasised Oman's focus on culture as a cornerstone for building a modern state and shaping identity and awareness. He noted the essential role of culture in enhancing both social and



human development.

"The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is working to strengthen cultural communication with various countries," H E Busaidi said in his speech.

This effort aligns with the ministry's comprehensive vision of showcasing diverse programmes that highlight and share Oman's

culture of peace and tolerance worldwide – a message Oman has spread since ancient times.

H E Busaidi also recalled Oman's role as host of the 9th Conference of Ministers of Culture in the Islamic World in 2015, which celebrated Nizwa as the Capital of Islamic Culture. The event underlined Oman's com-

mitment to enhancing dialogue among cultures, renewing cultural policies in the Islamic world, and integrating these with global changes.

He highlighted the sultanate's continuous efforts to link individuals to their past and legacy, which is crucial for societal progress and maintaining national identity. The ministry, H E Busaidi confirmed, is dedicated to highlighting these facts for future generations.

Organised by Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), the conference tackles contemporary cultural issues and promotes united action in various cultural arenas, including development indicators, cultural planning and battling unlawful trafficking of cultural property.

Wheat Production Programme registration extended to Oct 15

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has announced an extension for registration in the Wheat Production Programme.

Intended for the sale of the 2023-2024 season wheat produce to Oman Flour Mills Company, the new deadline is October 15, 2023. The fixed selling price is RO400 per tonne.

Interested sellers, including non-Omanis, are advised to submit their requests by filling out a form available in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in all wilayats.

According to the ministry, eligibility to sell requires the wheat to be a registered Omani variety, produced this year and not mixed with any other seeds or



impurities. Farmers themselves are required to deliver the wheat to the company's mill in Muttrah.

Applications can also be submitted online - omanibur.com - before the new deadline.

Additionally, to support wheat

farmers, MAFWR offers seeds of high-quality and high-yield wheat varieties including Wadi Quriyat 226, 227, 308, and 110.

Regular campaigns are being conducted to protect crops from pests, diseases and birds, besides intensified awareness campaigns to emphasise the importance of timely agricultural activities.

On May 31, the Council of Ministers approved a RO5mn fund to assist wheat production in the country until 2027. Further efforts to enhance food security include the allocation of land via usufruct contracts in various governorates, specifically for wheat cultivation.

MAFWR stated it is continuing its work to further expand the cultivation area of wheat with the expectation of a better harvest next season.



Mega cultural event on Oct 6

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Layam, a Kerala cultural event, will be held at Al Falaj Hotel in Muscat on October 6. Organised by the Harippad Kootayma organisation, the event will feature director K Madhu.

Briefing the media, the event's organisers informed that a three-hour music concert led by playback singer Vidhu Prathap and his group will be the main attraction. Additionally, the programme will be a platform for local talent to perform.

Layam is open to all; there will be no entry fee.

The Harippad Kootayma organisation was formed in 2013 and has been active in the field of philanthropy and social work. It is a community hailing from Harippad in Alappuzha district, Kerala.

'As the organisation approaches its tenth anniversary, the Harippad community takes pride in its substantial growth and continuous contribution to society. Its notable works include significant aid provided during the 2018 floods in Oman and unwavering support for those facing hardships during the pandemic in the sultanate,' organisers stated.

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BRIEFS

Morocco sets aside \$12bn for quake recovery

Quake-hit Morocco's government announced a budget of nearly \$12bn for reconstruction, rehousing and socio-economic development of areas hit by the deadly disaster. The 6.8-magnitude earthquake hit Al-Haouz province south of Marrakesh on September 8, killing nearly 3,000 people and injuring thousands more.

The government said in a statement it was setting aside 120bn dirhams (\$11.7bn) to help 4.2mn inhabitants affected by the quake over a period of five years.

The funds would be used to "rehouse affected people, reconstruct homes and restore infrastructure", said the statement published at the end of a meeting chaired by King Mohammed VI.

The earthquake razed thousands of homes in central Morocco, including the High Atlas mountain range, forcing families to sleep out in the open with winter around the corner.

Omani tech startup aims to transform procurement with live bidding platform

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Traditional procurement methods are known for their lengthy processes, lack of transparency, higher costs, and limited supplier options. An Omani technology startup aims to transform how companies and organisations purchase goods and services from their suppliers, creating more value, efficiency, and transparency in procurement activities while reducing risks, biases, and expenses.

BidBid Technology, a new startup based in Muscat, has developed a 'game-changing' solution for businesses seeking to streamline their procurement and purchasing processes.

Hani Macki, the founder and CEO of BidBid Technology, believes that the firm's innovative live bidding platform has the potential to revolutionise the procurement landscape by providing transparency, efficiency, and substantial cost savings.

The BidBid Digital Platform introduces a dynamic approach to e-tendering and e-auction processes, significantly simplifying the complexities associated with traditional procurement, Macki told *Muscat Daily* in an interview.

"With its secure, encrypted, and transparent system, BidBid



Digital Platform ensures that companies can maximise their returns while minimising risks," Macki noted. He emphasised that the digital platform includes a complete audit trail and a customisable Management Information System (MIS) to enhance governance and transparency.

"Small and medium-sized companies receive quotations from suppliers by email, fax, or in sealed envelopes, while large companies use expensive sophisticated systems to obtain electronic quotations. These companies still need to negotiate prices with each supplier, which is

a less transparent and lengthy process," Macki pointed out.

"BidBid Digital Platform solves this lengthy process through live bidding. All a company needs to do is onboard their approved list of suppliers and ask them to quote their prices. All competing suppliers can view the prices offered by other suppliers but cannot view who is bidding, thereby ensuring the company gets the best price possible from its suppliers in a cost-efficient way," he explained.

One standout feature of the BidBid Digital Platform is its ability to empower suppliers. During live

bidding, suppliers can view the bidding prices while keeping the identities of other bidders confidential. This unique feature, according to Macki, fosters competition and immediate price improvements, ensuring companies receive the best possible deals in a fair and secure manner.

BidBid Technology offers a comprehensive range of live bidding services across various categories such as insurance, uniforms, deposit rate maximisation, currency exchange rate improvement, stationery, safety equipment, pantry items, facility management services, and more. As Macki explained, companies only need to invite their approved list of suppliers to participate in live e-tendering or e-auctions through the BidBid Digital Platform to start bidding instantly.

Highlighting compliance and reliability, BidBid Technology's digital platform has already successfully passed technical evaluations conducted by the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technology and was given a 'no objection' to proceed by the Central Bank of Oman.

Among the prestigious clients that have already adopted BidBid Technology's innovative solution are major entities like Omantel, Muscat Stock Exchange, Enhance Group, and OHL, among others, Macki noted.



CBO sees positive outlook for Oman economy in 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The macroeconomic outlook of the Omani economy has significantly improved this year, successfully overcoming the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing global geopolitical tensions, according to a new report released by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

"The steadfast implementation of the reforms agenda under the strategic direction of Oman Vision 2040, along with favourable oil prices, paints an optimistic macroeconomic picture for the Omani economy in 2023," the sultanate's central bank noted in its Annual Report 2022, released on Sunday.

According to the report, the Omani economy's recovery is now firmly established, as evidenced by its continued progress in overcoming the economic repercussions of health conditions and global geopolitical tensions. The CBO pointed out that economic activities in the sultanate are already witnessing a revival, with real output growing, and inflation being contained at low levels. The apex bank expects oil prices to remain at higher levels, providing support to hydrocarbon activities.

"The fiscal outlook for 2023 is projected to improve due to oil windfalls and fiscal consolidation measures, which have had a positive impact on both fiscal and external positions," the report stated.

"The non-hydrocarbon activities are also expected to show moderate growth in real terms in 2023, thanks to the anticipated increase in demand for Omani exports," the CBO added in its report.

"This aligns with the government's commitment to fiscal consolidation and creates opportunities for productive expenditures and support for economic activities. Additionally, the external sector is expected to benefit from robust demand for Omani non-hydrocarbon exports," the CBO said.

Oil prices to reach \$100 in 12 months: Goldman Sachs

Muscat – Brent crude oil is expected to reach \$100 per barrel in the next 12 months, up from an earlier forecast of \$93 per barrel, Goldman Sachs said in a report.

According to the Goldman Sachs research, as reported by Anadolu Agency, the rise is due to reduced oil supply from OPEC and to rising demand which is expected to more than offset an increase in oil supply coming from the US.

The report explained that 'the lower for longer' supply from Saudi Arabia and its OPEC+ partners is the main reason for the forecast change.

'Saudi Arabia's recent production announcement signals its strong determination to drive down inventories and push up prices,' the report underlined.

At the same time, there's scope for Saudi Arabia to boost profits in 2024 depending on which supply cuts are expended, as the increase in oil prices can compensate for the decline in Saudi production.

According to the report, OPEC is likely to reduce its oil production for longer because of more supply coming from outside the organization – most notably from the US. Supply constraints for parts, rigs, and workers have eased in the US, and producers are drilling and completing wells more quickly with more powerful rigs with less downtime.

"There will likely be more global demand for oil in 2024 led by Asia, as the slowdown in China's economy shows signs of 'bottoming out,' the report said and added that India and the Middle East are also expected to have large increases in demand.

Commenting on the predictions for the next year, Goldman



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Sachs' head of oil research Daan Struyven explained in the report that OPEC will probably be able to keep Brent prices in a range of \$80-\$105 next year.

Brent crude rises to \$92.3

Oil prices rose on Monday as markets focused on a tighter supply outlook after Russia limited the export of gasoline and diesel.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$92.31 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 0.38% gain from the closing price of \$91.96 a barrel in the previous trading session on Friday.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at \$90.40 per barrel, up 0.41% from Friday's close of \$90.03 per barrel.

The Russian government temporarily limited the export of diesel and gasoline on Thursday.

The government explained in a statement that the decision, which aims to stabilise fuel prices on the domestic market, "will help saturate the fuel market, which in turn will reduce prices for consumers."

Russia, one of the largest global oil producers, exports nearly 900,000 barrels per day (bpd) of diesel fuel and 100,000 bpd of gasoline.

Although Russia ships less diesel and gasoline than it does crude oil, the export embargo before the winter and ongoing supply concerns have heightened market jitters.

This comes amid tight oil supply, with Saudi Arabia and Russia extending their production curbs until the end of this year.

Further pressuring prices, the number of oil rigs in the US fell to the lowest level since February last year, according to the latest data released by Baker Hughes on Friday.

Agencies

OQGN IPO subscription opens today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The subscription period for the initial public offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) will open on Tuesday, September 26, 2023.

OQGN, the sole operator of Oman's gas transportation system, is offering 49% of its total issued share capital through the IPO. The offer is expected to raise up to RO297mn (equivalent to \$771mn) at the top of the price range, valuing OQGN at up to RO606mn (equivalent to \$1.574bn).

Three Anchor Investors – Saudi Omani Investment Company, a wholly owned entity of the Public Investment Fund, Falcon Investments LLC, a subsidiary of Qatar Investment Authority, and Fluxys International – have irrevocably committed to subscribe to the offering at 140bz per share, subject to the terms contained in their respective anchor investment agreements.

The shares will be offered in parallel, across two categories. The Category I subscription pe-



riod, for non-individual investors, will run from September 26 to October 9, 2023. Category I is open to institutional investors, representing 40% of the total offer size. The subscription price range will be 131bz to 140bz per share.

The Category II subscription period, for individual investors, will run from September 26 to October 5, 2023. Category II is exclusively open and reserved for individual investors and represents 30% of the total offer size.

Category II shares will be offered at a discounted maximum price of 126bz per offer share, providing a 10% discount on the maximum price of 140bz per share.

Exclusively reserving 30% of the total offer size for individual investors and offering shares at a discounted price aim to provide greater access to potential individual investors in the IPO.

The IPO will allow OQGN, the exclusive operator of the natural gas transportation network in Oman, to move the company into the next chapter of growth. It is part of a broader divestment programme envisioned by the government and being implemented by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – the sovereign wealth fund of Oman.

OQGN shares are expected to commence trading on the MSX on or about 24 October 2023.

US Fed official calls for more interest rate hikes

Washington, US – The US Federal Reserve has more work to do to tackle high inflation despite making "considerable" progress in the last 18 months, a senior bank official said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Fed officials unanimously voted to hold interest rates at a 22-year high while indicating they expect another hike will be needed to bring inflation down to the US central bank's long-term target of two percent.

The decision postponed additional

pain for millions of Americans already struggling with the impact of the Fed's existing hikes on mortgages and other loans.

Although the Fed has made "considerable progress on lowering inflation," it remains "too high," warranting further action, Fed Governor Michelle Bowman told a conference in Colorado, according to prepared remarks.

"I continue to expect that further rate hikes will likely be

needed to return inflation to two percent in a timely way," she added.

Bowman said it would be appropriate for the Fed's rate-setting committee to hold interest rates "at a restrictive level for some time," in order to bring inflation down to target, mirroring the Fed's forecast of just two interest rate cuts next year.

After 11 interest rate increases since March last year, inflation has fallen sharply but remains stuck stubbornly

above the Fed's long-term target.

Inflation has crept up again in recent months due to a spike in energy costs, underscoring the need for policymakers to keep up the fight through tight monetary policy.

"I see a continued risk that energy prices could rise further and reverse some of the progress we have seen on inflation in recent months," Bowman said Friday.

AFF

Time ticking on US deadline to avert government shutdown

Washington, US – Four months after barely avoiding a catastrophic default, the world's largest economy is once again on the verge of a major fiscal crisis.

President Joe Biden's Democrats are engaged in a bitter feud with Republican rivals in Congress over spending bills, which, if not passed into law soon, may trigger a government shutdown.

US lawmakers have until midnight on September 30 to reach an agreement, before funding for government services is due to dry up.

A shutdown would put at risk the finances of hundreds of thousands of workers at national parks, museums and other sites operating on federal funding, but it could also carry significant political risk for Biden as he runs for re-election in 2024.

House Republicans failed to support the government spending levels agreed to between Biden and Speaker Kevin McCarthy, the top Republican in Congress, that would keep government gears turning, the White House has said.

"A small group of extreme Republicans don't want to live up to the deal, so now everyone in America could be forced to pay the price," Biden said Saturday.

"It's time for Republicans to start doing the job America



President Joe Biden announces the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, in the White House in Washington, DC on September 22 (AFP)

US lawmakers have until midnight on Sept 30 to reach an agreement, before funding for government services is due to dry up

elected them to do."

Tensions are mounting around additional aid for Kyiv,

after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Congress Thursday pleading for

more weapons to battle Russian forces 18 months into the war.

Both parties in the Senate support the \$24bn aid bill. But a handful of hardline Republicans in the House of Representatives are threatening to block it.

"I am not voting for one single penny to go to a war in Ukraine," congresswoman Marjorie Taylor

Greene, a close ally of former president Donald Trump, said in a video posted on X, the former Twitter.

"I am America First, I work for the United States of America. I work for the American people." The budget vote in Congress regularly turns into a standoff, with each party using the

prospect of a shutdown to obtain concessions from the other – until a solution is found at the last minute.

But this year the showdown is exacerbated by new levels of polarisation on Capitol Hill. In the Senate, debate is led by two political heavyweights, Democratic majority leader Chuck Schumer and Mitch McConnell, the Republican minority leader.

"Leader McConnell and I are both strongly for aid for Ukraine," Schumer told CNN Friday. "And I believe the majority of the members of both parties in the Senate agree with that."

If no firm agreement is reached, lawmakers could turn to a short-term funding measure, called a continuing resolution, which would offer temporary respite to lawmakers to find common ground.

The shutdown prospect comes just four months after the debt ceiling crisis, during which the United States came dangerously close to defaulting on its debt, which could have had disastrous consequences for the American economy and beyond.

As part of the deal averting default, Democrats agreed to limit certain spending in hopes the budget would be approved smoothly.

AFP

US, China announce economic working groups

Washington, US – The United States and China announced two new working groups on economic and financial policy, in the latest effort to stabilize fraught relations between the world's biggest economies.

The formation of the groups was agreed during talks in July between US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng in Beijing, the Treasury Department said.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV also announced the launch of an "Economic Working Group" and "Financial Working Group," saying both will hold "regular and irregular meetings to strengthen communication and exchange on relevant issues."

"My trip to China aimed to establish a durable channel of communication between the world's two largest economies, consistent with President (Joe) Biden's guidance following his meeting with President Xi (Jinping) in Bali," said Yellen in a social media post announcing the new groups.

AFP

Microsoft nears takeover of Activision Blizzard

London, US – British regulators have dropped their objections to Microsoft's attempt to buy video game firm Activision Blizzard, the maker of "Call of Duty", paving the way for the US tech titan to close one of the biggest technology acquisitions ever.

Microsoft launched its blockbuster \$69bn takeover in January last year, an acquisition that would make it the world's third-largest gaming company by revenue, but it faced stiff scrutiny from US regulators and the UK's Competition and Markets Authority.

The CMA blocked the deal in April over fears it would damage competition in the fast-growing cloud gaming sector, where games are bought virtually and players can use a variety of devices rather than just consoles.

Microsoft eventually submitted a new bid that the CMA said in a statement on Friday had made important changes and "opens the door to the deal being cleared", adding that it would consult on the "remedies" before making a final decision.



Microsoft launched its blockbuster \$69bn takeover in January last year, an acquisition that would make it the world's third-largest gaming company

Both the companies involved in the deal praised the CMA's change of heart.

Microsoft vice chairman and president Brad Smith, who had labelled the initial rejection in April as "probably the darkest day" of the firm's time in the UK, called Friday's statement a "positive development".

He said Microsoft would aim to get approval to close the deal

by October 18. Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick, whose company also makes the popular games "Diablo" and "Candy Crush", said the UK regulator's announcement was "a significant milestone for the merger".

Analysts said the takeover now looked like a shoo-in and all sides were able to claim victory – the regulator showed its teeth and forced a concession and the firms got their deal over the line.

If the deal goes through, Microsoft will muscle in to form a "big three" in the sector – just behind China's Tencent and Japan's Sony.

The original deal would have seen hugely popular Activision games including "Call of Duty", "Overwatch" and "World of Warcraft" added to its cloud roster, which was too much for the UK regulator to stomach.

Under the new deal, Microsoft has agreed it would not take control of the cloud portion of Activision's business, which will be transferred to French studio Ubisoft for 15 years.

AFP

European Union trade chief warns businesses questioning future in China

Beijing, China – The EU's trade chief told Beijing on Monday that tough security laws and a more "politicised" business environment have left European companies struggling to understand their obligations and questioning their future in China.

China's refusal to condemn ally Russia for its war in Ukraine also poses a "reputational risk" for the world's second-largest economy, Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said in a speech at Beijing's Tsinghua University.

He said transparency and openness were "a winning strategy in the long run", at a time when trade tensions between the European bloc and China are mounting.

"China is navigating a challenging transition from an investment-led economy to a broad-based economy," he said. "For this it needs to remain open."

Dombrovskis's four-day trip, which kicked off Saturday, follows a report by the EU Chamber of Commerce that showed busi-



EU Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis

ness confidence was at one of its lowest levels in years.

It also follows Brussels' decision to launch a probe into Beijing's electric car subsidies.

The investigation could see the EU try to protect European carmakers by imposing punitive tariffs on vehicles it believes are unfairly sold at a lower price.

China's commerce ministry has condemned the EU's "naked protectionism", and said the measures "will have a negative

impact on China-EU economic and trade relations".

On Monday, Dombrovskis insisted China remained an attractive investment opportunity for European businesses.

"The EU and China both benefited immensely from being open to the world," he said, adding that "European companies still want to invest here – but only if the conditions are right."

Growing challenges for European business in China mean

that "what many saw as a 'win-win' relationship in past decades could become a 'lose-lose' dynamic in the coming years", the commissioner said.

A new foreign relations law aimed, in part, at combating foreign sanctions and a recent update to China's tough anti-espionage regulations are of "great concern to our business community", Dombrovskis said.

"Their ambiguity allows too much room for interpretation," he warned.

Asked about Dombrovskis's remarks, China's foreign ministry insisted the country would "protect the legitimate rights and interests of individuals".

"We will continue to provide a market-oriented, legal and international business environment for companies from all over the world to legally operate in China," foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told a regular briefing. "China is not the source of risks, but rather a firm force for preventing and defusing risks," he added.

AFP

Amazon steps up AI race with \$4bn Anthropic investment

Paris, France – Amazon said on Monday it would invest up to \$4bn in AI firm Anthropic, as the online retail giant steps into an AI race dominated by Microsoft, Google and OpenAI.

The success of OpenAI's ChatGPT, a chatbot released last year that is able to generate poems, essays and other works with just a short prompt, has led to billions being invested in the field.

Amazon had already announced it aimed to soup up its Alexa voice assistant with generative AI, which the firm said would allow users to have smoother conversations.

San Francisco-based An-

thropic is seen as a leader in the field and has its own chatbot, Claude, a competitor to ChatGPT.

"We have tremendous respect for Anthropic's team and foundation models, and believe we can help improve many customer experiences, short and long-term, through our deeper collaboration," said Amazon CEO Andy Jassy.

The giant firms and wealthy investors of Silicon Valley have poured money into artificial intelligence as they seek to find a killer application to justify the interest.

ChatGPT's instant success threw much of the focus onto chatbots and sparked imitators



and rivals, not least from Google with its Bard chatbot.

Chinese titans Tencent and Baidu have also launched bots they claim can rival ChatGPT.

'Transformation' promise

But Monday's deal between Anthropic and Amazon is potentially less significant in the chatbot world and more important in the race to develop chips to power AI.

Anthropic agreed to use Amazon's chips to develop its next models and the two firms said they would collaborate on developing the next set of chips.

All firms in the space are look-

ing to wean themselves off the chips made by market leader NVIDIA, said Nick Patience, lead AI research analyst at S&P Global Market. "It'll be difficult for anyone to make a dent in the next 12 to 18 months," he told AFP, but tie-ups like Monday's Amazon deal could help change the picture over five years.

Anthropic also agreed to use Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud infrastructure – the data centres that store and process data on a vast scale – for "mission critical workloads".

Amazon said it would take a "minority ownership position" in the AI firm, which has already raised more than \$1bn since it

was set up in 2021.

The statement promises that "Claude", which is the name of Anthropic's chatbot and its model, will help AWS customers "of all sizes to develop new generative AI-powered applications to transform their organisations".

The deal intensifies competition between Amazon and Google, which had earlier opened its cloud services to Anthropic and invested \$300mn to acquire 10% of the company.

AI models require huge computing power so AI firms rely on data centres provided by the likes of AWS, Google Cloud and Microsoft Azure.

AFP

Omantel, Outward Bound Oman renew partnership

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has reiterated its commitment to enhancing the skills of Omani youth through training programmes by renewing its partnership with Outward Bound Oman as part of Omantel's social responsibility programs, which began in 2013.

Outward Bound Oman is a non-profit organisation established by a ministerial decision and is part of the Outward Bound Global Foundation that was launched in 1941, a press release said.

The renewal agreement was signed between the two parties at Outward Bound Oman Training Centre in Muscat, in the presence of Talal bin Saeed al Maamari, CEO of Omantel, and Sulaiman bin Masoud al Harthy, chairman of Outward Bound Oman. The Omantel representatives toured the training centre and reviewed the efforts made by the centre in providing training courses to different groups.

Maamari said, "Omantel targets the youth to enhance their



capabilities in the field of communications, technology and programming by investing in their training across relevant sectors through partners like Outward Bound Oman. This

institution trains young people in innovative ways as reflected in the training camps for job seekers, people with disabilities and school students, benefiting more than 679 Omani youth through

46 courses."

Harthy added, "In addition to youth, we provide training and professional development programmes to many leading companies in the sultanate, as well as

conduct specialised training courses in leadership and team development. Outward Bound Oman's strategy is aligned to Oman Vision2040 through a serious commitment to training."

MoE hosts virtual forum on Genetic Technology

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision - Applied Sciences Supervision Department - implemented a virtual forum for genetic technology, which targeted teachers, senior teachers, supervisors, and senior supervisors to discuss the latest developments in genetic technology.

The virtual forum discussed analysis, cloning of genes, and the design of genetically modified organisms, a press release said.

Dr Khadija al Balushi, director of the Applied Sciences Supervision Department, said, "The world is moving at an accelerated technical pace that affects all areas of life, especially those related to the educational system. Perhaps scientific development, especially in the genetic field, has become one of the most important aspects affected by these steps.

"It was necessary for education to keep pace with this development, and to provide its beneficiaries - science students - with the most important developments in this field.

"Accordingly, the Biology Unit Enrichment Forum for Genetic Technology comes to raise the attendance of teachers and supervisory groups' awareness of the developments in genetic technology.

The aim of the forum was to acquire skills, extract genetic information about the gene to be studied, how to identify the sequences of its nitrogenous bases, and design the principles used to amplify it through thermal passing.

The forum also sought to acquire the skills of designing the appropriate plasmid for the process of cloning the insulin gene and how to produce it by the fermentation process (Bioreactor).

Omani CFO Programme focuses on professional growth and development

Forty enthusiastic Omani professional, primarily from finance and accounts, came together at OCCI to listen to experienced and qualified mentors on leadership roles.

An equal number of male and female participants - aspiring CFOs and CXOs - devoted their Saturday morning in exchange for a session on professional growth and development, a

press release said.

The Omani CFO Programme is a joint initiative of ICAI Muscat Chapter, Ministry of Commerce Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP), Ministry

of labour, Chamber of Commerce and Industry and General Federation of Oman Workers to bring together an educative, finance knowledge enhancing and interactive programme for

aspiring Omani CFOs.

The objective of the Omani CFO Programme was to share knowledge and experience with real life practical examples with the participants and provide the

required mentorship. The participants were encouraged to ask questions and think originally.

Both, the participants and mentors of the programme,

were selected after a detailed review process so that most deserving participants get the right mentorship from the most suited mentors having rich experience and qualifications.

BankDhofar opens 100th branch

BankDhofar inaugurated its 100th branch in the heart of the city, carving a spectacular chapter in its illustrious history and reinforcing its pivotal role in Oman's economic development.

The launch of the 100th branch reaffirms BankDhofar's commitment to extend financial services and enhance customer accessibility across the sultanate. It underscores its 'Closer to You' concept and its firm intent to narrate a hundred stories of success through the length and breadth of the country, a press release said.

Abdul Hakeem Omar al Ojaili, CEO of BankDhofar, said, "We are delighted to celebrate this important milestone of reaching 100 branches. This achievement is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team, as well as the support of our customers. We are committed to



providing our customers with the best possible banking experience and our expanding branch network is a key part of that strategy. We are proud of our journey and our commitment to serving Oman's various regions and communities, empowering our customers to achieve their financial goals."

He further said, "We are not

just a bank, we are our customers' financial companion, committed to helping each one of them achieve their financial aspirations. We have equipped our branches with the latest banking technologies to enable customers experience the best banking experience. Our teams of experts are ready to serve and provide expert guidance.

TELANGANA WARRIORS CLINCH HFCT SESSION-5 TITLE



Telangana warriors beat Titans to win the HFCT Session-5 2023 trophy at the Nama ground on September 22. Twelve teams from Hyderabad in Oman took part in this tournament



Mazda's style, comfort performance affordable

Mazda Oman proudly unveils its latest campaign - Unmatched Style, Performance & Comfort - Now More Affordable - and invites people to be a part of this automotive renaissance where the allure of Mazda becomes even more attainable.

Mazda 6, a sedan that stands as a testament to meticulous craftsmanship and innovation, is powered by a 2.5ltr engine delivering a robust 190PS, every drive promises to be an exhilarating experience, a press release said.

Mazda CX-5 has a dynamic 2.5ltr engine, offering 190PS, while the Mazda CX-60 is a luxury segment SUV with a powerful 2.5ltr engine delivering 191PS, paired with the Mazda Radar Cruise Control (MRCC) to offer a driving experience that's both powerful and seamless.

The Mazda CX-9, with its 2.5ltr Turbo Engine boasting 231PS, redefines what a 7-seater SUV should be. From the Mazda Radar Cruise Control (MRCC) ensuring safety to the striking 20" Alloys and Real Wood Panel accents emphasising luxury, the CX-9 is a masterpiece on wheels.

The package on offer guarantees that Mazda vehicles sustain their peak performance for 5 years or 100,000km, whichever comes first. Similarly, a complimentary AAA Roadside Assistance for unexpected challenges on the road, and the support remains readily available, just a call away.

Refugees stream into Armenia from Azerbaijani rebel enclave

Goris, Armenia - Thousands of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh streamed into Armenia on Monday, as the presidents of Azerbaijan and ally Turkey held a summit marking Baku's victory over the rebel enclave last week.

While Azerbaijan showcased its regional support, Russia hit back at embattled Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan after he blamed Moscow for the swift defeat of the breakaway territory.

Several days after the fighting, the first refugees arrived in Armenia on Sunday and 4,850 people have so far entered, Yerevan said on Monday.

AFP reporters saw the refugees crowding into a humanitarian hub set up in a local theatre in the city of Goris to register for transport and housing.

"We lived through terrible days," said Anabel Ghulasyan, 41, from the village of Rev, known as Shalva in Azeri.

She arrived in Goris with her family by minibus, carrying her belongings in bags.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have fought two wars marked by forced displacement on both sides in the last three decades over Nagorno-Karabakh, a majority ethnic Armenian enclave within the internationally recognised border of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan launched a lightning operation on September 19 to seize control of the territory, forcing the separatists to lay down their arms under the terms of a ceasefire agreed the following day.



Refugees board a bus as they leave the Red Cross registration centre, in Goris, on Monday (AFP)

While Azerbaijan showcased its regional support, Russia hit back at embattled Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan after he blamed Moscow for the swift defeat of the breakaway territory

It followed a nine-month blockade of the region by Baku that caused shortages of key supplies.

The separatists have said 200 people were killed in last week's fighting.

Baku announced two of its

soliders also died when a mine hit their vehicle on Sunday.

Azerbaijan's state media said officials were holding a second round of peace talks with Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian community aimed at 'reintegrating' them.

But on the road heading to Armenia, more and more residents from the region appeared to be trying to get out as the witnesses said cars were snarling up in traffic.

At the refugee centre in Goris, Valentina Asryan, a 54-year-old from the village of Vank who fled with her grandchildren, said her brother-in-law was killed and several other people were injured by Azerbaijani fire.

"Who would have thought that the 'Turks' would come to this historic Armenian village? It's incredible," she said, referring to the Azerbaijani forces.

She was being housed temporarily in a hotel in Goris and had 'nowhere to go'.

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev cemented his victory by holding talks in his country's western enclave of Nakhichevan with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, his most important regional ally.

A smiling Aliyev kissed Erdogan on both cheeks as he descended from his plane.

Armenia's premier on Sunday sought to deflect blame for the outcome on long-standing ally Russia, signalling a breakdown in the countries' security pact.

In nationally televised comments, the Armenian leader said the security agreements between the two countries had proved 'insufficient', suggesting he would seek new alliances.

Moscow on Monday said it 'categorically' disagreed with the criticism of its peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh.

"We will never accept such accusations," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) - a Russian-dominated group comprising six post-Soviet states that had pledged to protect each other if attacked.

Russia, bogged down in its own war in Ukraine, refused to come to Armenia's aid, arguing that Yerevan had recognised the disputed region as part of Azerbaijan.

AFP



An aerial view shows Libya's eastern city of Soussa on September 21, days following deadly flash floods (AFP)

Libya orders eight officials arrested after flood disaster

Tripoli, Libya - Libya's prosecutor general has ordered the arrest of eight officials as part of his inquiry into the recent flood disaster that killed thousands, his office said on Monday.

The flash flood, which witnesses likened to a tsunami, broke through two ageing dams on September 10 after a hurricane-strength storm lashed the area around Derna, a port city in Libya's east.

The officials are suspected of 'bad management' and negligence, among other offences, a statement from the prosecutor general's office said, adding that seven of them served currently or previously in offices responsible for water resources and dam management. 'The mistakes that they made' and their 'negligence in the matter of disaster prevention' contributed to the catastrophe, the statement charged.

Derna's mayor Abdulmonem al-Ghaithi, sacked after the flood, is among the detainees.

Almost 3,900 people died in the disaster, according to the latest official toll, and international aid groups have said 10,000 or

more people may be missing.

After opening a probe, Libya's prosecutor general Al-Seddik al-Sur said more than a week ago that the two dams upstream from Derna had been cracked since 1998.

Years of conflict

But repairs begun by a Turkish company in 2010 were suspended after a few months when Libya's 2011 revolution flared, and the work never resumed, the prosecutor said, vowing to deal firmly with those responsible.

According to his office, the investigation is focused on a dam maintenance contract reached between the Turkish firm and Libya's water department.

The 2011 NATO-backed revolt toppled longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi, leading to more than a decade of start-stop conflict in the oil-rich country.

Libya is now divided between an internationally-recognised Tripoli-based administration in the west and another in the flood-struck east backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

AFP

HARVEST AMID CONFLICT



Palestinian farmers harvest dates at their farm in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday (AFP)

Kosovo marks day of mourning after deadly clashes near Serbian border

Pristina, Kosovo - Kosovo was in mourning on Monday after a deadly clash between authorities and gunmen near the Serbian border that has prompted a large police operation and raised many unanswered questions.

The killing of a police officer during the ambush and ensuing firefight on Sunday marks one of the gravest escalations in Kosovo for years, following months of mounting tensions and stalling talks between the government in Pristina and Serbia.

Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti said a police operation was still underway while the site of the ambush was sealed off, as investigators sifted through evidence following a late-night gun battle that saw the standoff end.

"Many things will be resolved during the investigations," Kurti told Manuel Sarrazin - the German envoy for the Western Balkans - during their meeting on



Kosovo police officers stand guard around the entrance to the village of Banjska, northern Kosovo on Monday (AFP)

Monday.

The chaotic confrontation began when a police patrol was ambushed near the village of Banjska early on Sunday leaving one Kosovo law enforcement officer dead and another wounded.

The gunmen fled to a nearby monastery where they barricaded themselves and traded

gunfire with Kosovo police for hours, with at least three assailants shot dead in the melee.

Kosovo's Interior Minister Xhelal Svecla said authorities had recovered an exceptionally large number of heavy weapons.

AFP

France withdrawing ambassador, troops from Niger after coup: Macron

Paris, France - President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday announced that France would withdraw its ambassador from Niger, followed by the French military contingent in the coming months, a move welcomed by Niger's military leaders as a 'step towards sovereignty'.

Macron's announcement comes two months after a coup in the west African country that ousted the pro-Paris president.

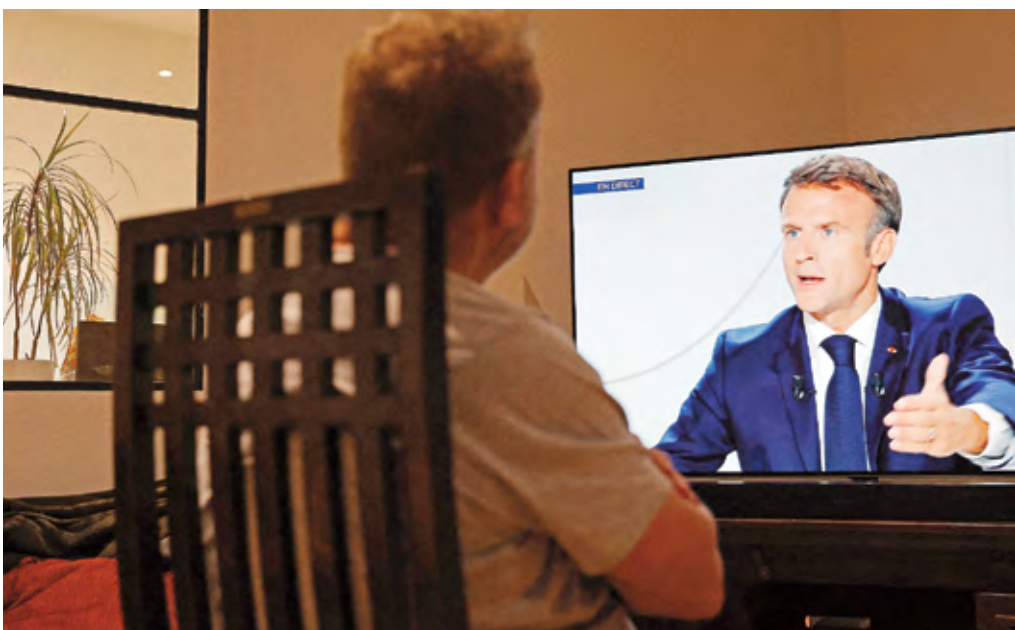
"France has decided to withdraw its ambassador. In the next hours our ambassador and several diplomats will return to France," Macron told French television in an interview, without giving details over how this would be organised.

Macron added that military cooperation was 'over' and French troops would withdraw in 'the months and weeks to come' with a full pullout 'by the end of the year'.

Niger's military rulers responded swiftly in a statement read out on national television.

"This Sunday, we celebrate a new step towards the sovereignty of Niger," said the statement from the military rulers, who seized power by overthrowing President Mohamed Bazoum on July 26.

"This is a historic moment, which speaks to the determination and will of the Nigerien people," the Niger statement added. Earlier on Sunday the Agency



A man watches Emmanuel Macron on a television screen in Paris during a live interview on Sunday (AFP)

This is a historic moment, which speaks to the determination and will of the Nigerien people

NIGER MILITARY RULERS

for the Safety of Air Navigation in Africa and Madagascar (ASECNA) said on its website that the military rulers had banned 'French aircraft' from flying over the country's airspace.

It was not clear if this would affect the ambassador being flown out.

In his comments, Macron said

that 'in the weeks and months to come, we will consult with the putschists, because we want this to be done peacefully'.

France keeps about 1,500 soldiers in Niger as part of an anti-militant deployment in the Sahel region. Macron said the post-coup authorities 'no longer wanted to fight against terrorism'. Niger's military leaders had told French ambassador Sylvain Ilte to leave the country after they overthrew Bazoum.

But a 48-hour ultimatum for him to leave, issued in August, passed with him still in place as the French government refused to comply, or to recognise the military regime as legitimate.

AFP

Odesa port hit in major Russian attack

The aerial attack by Russia on southern Ukraine overnight hit Odesa port and destroyed grain stores

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia launched a major aerial attack on southern Ukraine overnight, the Ukrainian military said on Monday, hitting Odesa port and destroying grain stores.

Russia ‘attacked the south of the country again’, the Defence Forces of the South of Ukraine said on the messaging platform Telegram.

Since July when Moscow pulled out of a UN-brokered deal allowing safe grain shipments via the Black Sea, Russia has ramped up attacks on Ukraine’s grain-exporting infrastructure in the southern Odesa and Mykolaiv regions.

Nataliya Gumenyuk, spokeswoman for the Ukrainian southern military command, said Russia was apparently ‘trying to test out the density of the air defence’. “They understand that port infrastructure is a priority for our region, and that it is reliably protected. However, that is why the attack that occurred tonight was both massive and by combined means,” she said on Telegram.

The Defence Forces of the South of Ukraine said Russia directed 19 drones and 2 Onyx su-



Firefighters pushing out a fire in sea port and the hotel ‘Odesa’ after Russian attack against the Odesa region in southern Ukraine on Monday (AFP)

personic missiles at Odesa, and fired 12 Kalibr cruise missiles.

The Ukrainian air force said the Kalibrs were launched from a ship and a submarine.

They claimed all 19 Shaheds and 11 Kalibrs were shot down.

However, Russia ‘hit the port infrastructure’ in Odesa, which ‘suffered significant damage’, the

southern defence forces said.

“Onyx missiles destroyed granaries. But people were not hurt,” they said. Warehouses and a private house in the Odesa

suburbs were damaged and caught fire, they added, ‘as a result of falling debris’.

Gumenyuk said one of the grain stores hit was empty.

Since July Russia has ramped up attacks on grain-exporting infrastructure in the southern Odesa and Mykolaiv regions

‘Nevertheless, hitting grain deal-related infrastructure’, she said, was a Russian ‘priority’.

Odesa regional governor Oleg Kiper said on Telegram that one woman in Odesa, a civilian, was injured by shrapnel ‘in a blast wave’ and was being treated in hospital.

Grain shipments

Ukraine is testing a new Black Sea route that avoids international waters and uses those controlled by NATO members Bulgaria and Romania, with the first two grain shipments reaching Turkey in recent days.

Russia and Ukraine are two major agricultural powers whose supplies are crucial for global food security.

Moscow’s invasion of its neighbour in February last year - and subsequent international sanctions - have destabilised global supplies and markets.

Elsewhere overnight in the south of Ukraine, Kherson regional governor Oleksandr Prokudin said that Russia shelled Kherson, damaging an educational institution, while strikes targeted nearby Olgivka and Loveve.

“Information about the victims and destruction is being clarified,” he said on Telegram.

Sergiy Lysak, governor of the east-central Dnipropetrovsk region, said falling debris from a downed drone caused a fire at an industrial enterprise in Kryvyi Rig, the hometown of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Pokrovska and Myrivska communities were hit with ‘heavy artillery’, he added, but without causing deaths or injuries.

Meanwhile Russia’s defence ministry said its air defences had ‘destroyed’ four unmanned aerial vehicles over the northwestern Black Sea, and the Crimean peninsula which Moscow annexed in 2014.

AFP

Thai police raid top cop’s home

Bangkok, Thailand - Thai police swooped on the home of one of the kingdom’s most high-profile officers on Monday as part of a series of raids targeting an illegal online gambling network dubbed ‘Betflix’.

Most forms of betting are illegal in Thailand, with authorities striving recently to shut down the illicit gambling sites, often foreign-owned, that have sprung up.

A sprawling investigation across six provinces saw SWAT teams raid some 30 locations - including Deputy National Police Chief Surachate Hakparn’s central Bangkok house.

Surachate, well known in Thailand for his regular appearances in the media giving updates on investigations, denied any involvement in the alleged gambling ring.

“I’m not worried at all, because I’m not involved in this and I can answer any question,” he told reporters outside his home while the raid was under way.

Police Major General Trairong Phiwan said the raids stemmed from a probe into a gambling website called ‘Betflix’ and 12



Thailand’s deputy national police chief Surachate Hakparn (AFP)

subsidiary sites.

Later on Monday he told local media that of 23 suspects, 17 had been arrested, including eight police officers.

Officers conducting the raid on Surachate’s house said they were unaware whose residence it was.

Known by the nickname ‘Big Joke’ - for his seniority, not his sense of humour - Surachate insisted the search warrant for his home was “irregular” and hinted at rivalries within the force.

“Today I see this as nothing more than internal politics within the police,” he said.

The raid comes only a few days before the selection of a new police chief, with Surachate touted as a possible candidate.

The long-serving officer - nicknamed ‘the cat with nine lives’ - has been linked to powerful figures in the previous government. He was appointed by ex-deputy prime minister Prawit Wongsuwan as chief of the Immigration Bureau in September 2018.

He disappeared in 2019 over unclear reasons, before then-prime minister Prayut Chan-ocha made him a special adviser on strategy to police in 2021.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin, who took office last month, told reporters he was monitoring the situation.

“There may be the need to set up an independent investigation committee - because this is a big problem,” he said.

“It affects the morale and public impression towards the police.”

Thai police have long been dogged by allegations of endemic corruption.

AFP

Petition filed against felling trees in historic Tokyo park area

Tokyo, Japan - Campaigners filed a fresh petition with almost 225,000 signatures on Monday against plans to fell large numbers of trees and tear down a historic baseball stadium in a rare green area of central Tokyo.

Lush with trees donated to honour Emperor Meiji a century ago, Meiji Jingu Gaien offers respite and shade - Japan saw its hottest recorded summer this year - in one of the world’s biggest urban areas.

The park area is also home to Jingu Stadium where US baseball star Babe Ruth wowed spectators in 1934 and where celebrated Japanese author Haruki Murakami says he was inspired to become a writer.

Also on the site is a stadium dubbed the spiritual home of Japanese rugby.

But the redevelopment project, due to start this month, will see the sports facilities razed and rebuilt alongside several new high-rises to add to Tokyo’s thicket of tall buildings.



This file photo shows people protesting against the Tokyo metropolitan government’s redevelopment project, in Tokyo on February 12 (AFP)

According to the petition submitted on Monday to the government, 1,000 trees will be cut down.

The new baseball stadium will also endanger a boulevard of ginkgo trees, just six metres (20 feet) away, whose stunning autumn leaves attract huge crowds, campaigners say.

“These are all huge beautiful trees,” said Rochelle Kopp, a management consultant who organised the petition - one of several - and who is also involved in a lawsuit against the project.

“The online petition numbers continue to grow because the more members of the public learn the details of the plan, the

more people are unhappy about this plan to cram as many skyscrapers as possible into a small space and forever change a beloved landscape,” Kopp told AFP.

‘Heritage alert’

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) this month put the number of trees in danger at around 3,000 in a ‘heritage alert’ issued by the advisory body to UNESCO.

The redevelopment ‘will lead to the complete destruction of the urban forest that has been formed and nurtured over the past 100 years’, ICOMOS said.

“Urban parks are places for people’s recreation and also contribute to maintaining rich biodiversity. They mitigate the heat island effect in cities and provide shelter in case of natural disasters such as major earthquakes,” it said in a September 7 statement.

AFP

Hollywood writers, studios reach tentative deal to end strike

Los Angeles, US - Striking writers whose industrial action has paralysed Hollywood said on Sunday they had reached an ‘exceptional’ deal with studios that could see them go back to work.

The apparent breakthrough will raise hopes that striking actors can also reach terms with studios to end a months-long impasse that has seen film and TV production largely halted, costing the California economy billions of dollars.

“We have reached a tentative agreement on a new 2023 (minimum basic agreement), which is to say an agreement in principle on all deal points, subject to drafting final contract language,” said a letter the Writers Guild of America sent to members.

“We can say, with great pride, that this deal is exceptional - with meaningful gains and protections for writers in every sector of the membership.”

The letter, which AFP has seen, gave no details. It said lan-



This file photo shows SAG-AFTRA members and supporters walking the picket line in New York on July 19 (AFP)

guage was being ironed out and that the final say on whether to accept what was on offer rested with the membership.

“To be clear, no one is to return to work until specifically authorised to by the Guild. We are

still on strike until then. But we are, as of today, suspending WGA picketing,” it said.

A terse joint statement from the WGA and the AMPTPT, the umbrella group representing studios and streamers confirmed an

agreement.

Actors strike

Thousands of film and television scribes downed their pens in early May over demands including better pay for writers, greater

rewards for creating hit shows, and protection from artificial intelligence.

They have manned picket lines for months outside offices including Netflix and Disney, and were joined by striking actors in mid-July, leaving normally busy Hollywood lots all but vacant, in

an ebullient and united show of force. Actors’ union SAG-AFTRA congratulated the WGA, praising the ‘incredible strength, resiliency and solidarity on the picket lines’.

“While we look forward to reviewing the WGA and AMPTP’s tentative agreement, we remain committed to achieving the necessary terms for our members,” it said.

Negotiations between studios and writers had been moribund for weeks until a new sense of urgency appeared to have been injected into the process in the last few days, with the heads of Netflix, Disney, Universal and Warner Bros Discovery personally attending the talks.

Among their demands, writers say their salaries have not kept up with inflation, and that the rise of streaming has diminished the ‘residuals’ they earn when a show they work on becomes a smash hit.

AFP

Nine killed in Taiwan golf ball factory fire

Taipei, Taiwan - At least nine people were killed in a fire at a golf ball factory in southern Taiwan over the weekend, including four firefighters who died in an explosion, officials said on Monday.

The fire, which began on Friday evening and raged all night, also injured more than 100 people, mostly workers in the factory in Pingtung county, according to the local government.

One person was still listed as missing as further testing was required to verify the identity of some body fragments found at the scene, an official said.

AFP

Chinese tourists get VIP welcome in Thailand as visa-free travel begins

Bangkok, Thailand - Chinese tourists received a personal welcome from the Thai prime minister on Monday as they arrived in Bangkok under a new visa-free scheme the government hopes will give the kingdom's vital tourism sector a boost.

Traditional dancers accompanied a smiling PM Srettha Thavisin as he greeted visitors arriving from Shanghai at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport, handing out welcome gifts. "I was shocked by the welcoming ceremony, and I'm very happy. It's a great start of my trip," visitor Zhuang Pan, 31, told AFP.

Jin Li, arriving for her honeymoon, told AFP the scheme was great, before she and her new husband grabbed a photograph with Srettha.

"I don't need to worry, can go on a trip at any time, just need to book a ticket," she said.

Visitors from China accounted for the largest percentage of Thailand's tourists pre-pandemic, with tourism overall making up around 20 per cent of the kingdom's GDP.

COVID-19 travel restrictions hammered the sector and recovery has been slow, stymied by a struggling global economy - and safety fears stoked by a Chinese block-



Chinese tourists are greeted by Thai dancers at the arrivals gate at the airport in Bangkok on Monday (AFP)

buster thriller about a man being kidnapped and forced to work in a Southeast Asian on-line scam centre.

Zheng Zhengzhou, 36, said he was aware of the dangers of visiting Thailand, referencing *No More Bets* - the film that has spooked many tourists.

"So it would be a lie to say I don't have any concerns (on safety issues)," he said.

Srettha has sought to reassure visitors about their safety before, emphasising that visitor security in the kingdom is a priority. "The safety of tourists from their first step in Thailand to their departure when they leave must be safe and spec-

tacular from all sides," he said.

Chinese visitors were greeted by tourism police officers and informed of the details of a 24-hour police hotline. The visa-free scheme was launched in time for China's 'Golden Week' holiday period in October, and runs until February 29.

Srettha said that under the scheme bookings had already increased 'tenfold', and that he was confident it would 'significantly stimulate the economy'.

"Today marks a good day for Thailand and we hope our other policies will continue to stimulate the economy," he added.

AFP

Resolve issue through dialogue, says Indian community in Canada

Brampton/Toronto, Canada - The Indian Community in Canada is concerned over the recent strain in relations between the two countries following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations regarding the India government's involvement in the fatal shooting of Khalistan Tiger Force chief Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada.

Senior Canadian journalist Harleem Sadia said that the Indian community has concerns which are very genuine.

She said common people are now finding it difficult to travel to India and Canada. It is difficult for people who lead normal lives, have regular jobs. Canadian citizen of Indian origin Gurjant Singh said that being a Sikh, both India and Canada are extremely important to him and the recent tensions deeply concern him.

Gurjant Singh feels the issue should be resolved through dialogue. "I am very concerned about the matter and I think everything should be resolved through dialogue. Anything, any issue can be discussed, solved at the table. Both the Indian and Canadian governments should put up their point of views while remaining within their lines, boundaries," he said.

Last week, Justin Trudeau claimed that his country's national security officials had reasons to believe that 'agents of the Indian government were behind the fatal shooting of Hardeep Nijjar.' "Canadian security agencies have been actively pursuing credible allegations of a potential



A deserted view of Visa and Immigration service counters at the Canadian Embassy, at Shantipath in New Delhi (ANI)

I am very concerned about the matter and I think everything should be resolved through dialogue. Anything, any issue can be discussed, solved

GURJANT SINGH

link between agents of the Government of India and the killing of a Canadian citizen, Hardeep Singh Nijjar," Trudeau had said.

On Trudeau's claims, Gurjant said: "Being a Prime Minister,

you cannot claim anything that you cannot later prove. Whatever the Canadian PM said was wrong. Now that he has said it, he should be able to support his statement."

Gurjant further said that his parents were supposed to come to Canada in January. "But for now, for this reason, they won't be coming. But my problem is small when looked at from a larger scale," he said.

He further said that any demands should be made within the line, by keeping control on 'our language, emotions'.

Meanwhile, Canadian citizen Ajaib Singh has said relations between the two countries should get better for the sake of Indian

students studying in Canada.

"Students come to Canada for a better future. They study here, get good jobs and also become residents here. Parents also want their children to have a better future in Canada. Some also go back to India after their studies. They also go back for a better future," Ajaib said.

"For the sake of these students, I pray that relations between India, Canada get better," he said.

ANI

'Humans of New York' creator slams Indian version of blog for suing rival

Bengaluru, India - The creator of 'Humans of New York' has slammed an Indian version of the blog for suing a rival, accusing it of unreasonably monetising the stories of its subjects.

Brandon Stanton launched 'Humans of New York' in 2010, sharing interviews with city residents alongside their photos.

It was a runaway success and three years later, Karishma Mehta started 'Humans of Bombay' in her home city of Mumbai, which now has 2.7mn followers on Instagram.

This month, Mehta filed a copyright infringement suit against the 'People of India' Instagram account, claiming it had 'replicated a large number of images and videos' from her page.

The case has sparked a social media storm with many chiding Mehta, including Stanton.

"I've stayed quiet on the appropriation of my work because I think @HumansOfBombay shares important stories, even if they've monetised far past anything I'd feel comfortable doing on HONY," Stanton wrote Saturday on X, formerly Twitter.

"But you can't be suing people for what I've forgiven

you for."

And in an apparent swipe at Mehta - who receives a fee for subjects appearing on her page - Stanton said he admired the 'Humans of Amsterdam' project because its creator does not treat people's stories as 'the 'front end' of a business'.

In response, 'Humans of Bombay' said the lawsuit was over its rival stealing content.

'Humans of Bombay' filed a copyright infringement suit against the 'People of India' account, claiming it had replicated a large number of images and videos

"Perhaps, before jumping the gun on this matter, you ought to have equipped yourself with information about the case," it said in a statement posted on X.

"HOB is all for the power of story telling," it added. "But it should be done honestly and ethically."

AFP

'SAVE US FROM MOSQUITOES'



Members of the Indian National Congress party hold banners as they stand under mosquito nets during a protest along a roadside in Kolkata on Monday, to condemn municipal corporation's failure to control the recent rise in dengue and other vector borne diseases around the Indian city (AFP)

From K-pop to sales girls: AI goes mainstream in South Korea

Seoul, South Korea - Her face is a deepfake. Her body belongs to a team of similar-sized actors. But she sings, reads the news, and sells luxury clothes on TV as AI humans go mainstream in South Korea.

Meet Zaein, one of South Korea's most active virtual humans, who was created by Pulse9, an artificial intelligence company that is working to bring corporate dreams of the perfect employee to life. Pulse9 has created digital humans for some of South Korea's largest conglomerates, including Shinsegae, with research indicating the global market for such life-like creations could reach US\$527bn by 2030.

In South Korea, AI humans have enrolled as students at universities, interned at major companies, and appear regularly on live television driving sellouts of products from food to luxury handbags. But Pulse9 says this is only the beginning. They are 'working on developing the tech-



This file photo shows an engineer from Pulse9 conducting a demonstration as a live actor for virtual human Zaein in Seoul on April 24 (AFP)

nology to broaden AI human use', Park Ji-eun, the company's CEO, told AFP.

"Virtual humans are basically capable of carrying out much of what real people do," she said, adding that the current level of AI technology means humans are still needed - for now.

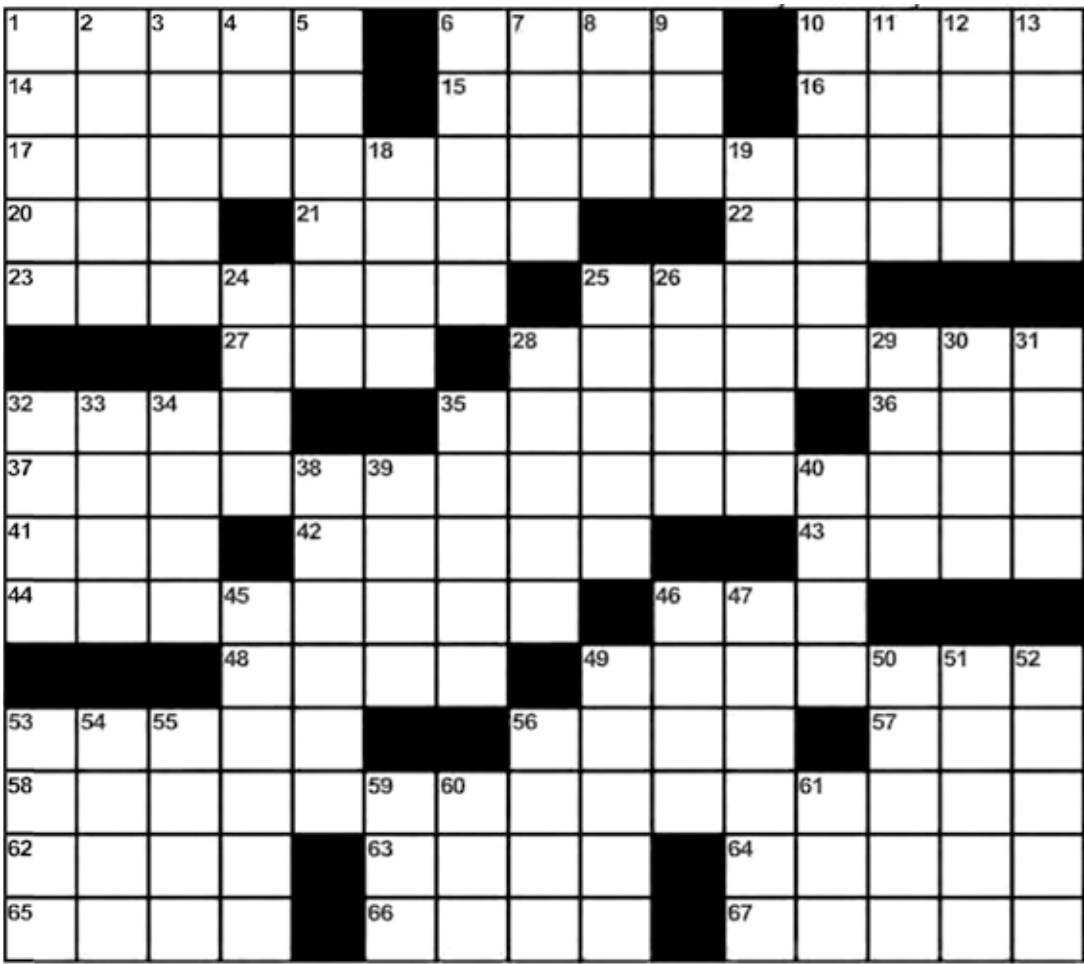
The demand for AI humans in South Korea was initially driven by the K-pop industry, with the

idea of a virtual idol - not prone to scandals and able to work 24/7 - proving popular with the country's notoriously hard-driving music agencies.

But now, Pulse9 is 'expanding their roles in society to show that these virtual humans aren't just fantasy idols but can coexist with humans as colleagues and friends', Park said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) One of the common people
5) Horse habitat
10) Goalie's wear
14) Freight car hopper of old
15) "Sesame Street" resident
16) Cain's victim
17) Clickable item
18) Church tenet
19) Emulate a drunkard
20) Times 3?
23) Short choral composition
24) The nine of some batteries
25) Back out on a promise
28) King of the jungle
30) Brilliant thought
31) Emotionless, as a stare
33) Mr. Potato Head part
36) Times 3?
40) Ambulance letters
41) Tadpoles, in time
42) Lofgren who rocks with Springsteen
43) Friendly ground-up bait?

44) Shape learned in pre-school
46) Video game giant, once
49) Where babies grow
51) Times 3?
57) Remove, as a knot
58) Rugged box
59) One named in a will
60) Angler's equipment
61) Extreme hardship
62) Cogito-sum link
63) " _ quam videri" (North Carolina motto)
64) Board for a manicurist
65) "General Hospital" e.g.

DOWN

1) Punxsutawney _
2) Mathematical sets of points
3) Black, in poetry
4) Source of some fertilizer
5) Put under
6) Figurative expression
7) Gut-wrenching feeling
8) Certain citrus fruit
9) "Able to... tall buildings ."
10) Paying customer
11) Bubbling on the stove
12) Bus station
13) Cold-weather coasters

21) "Put another _ on the fire"
22) Conjure up, as a memory
25) Customary observance or practice
26) Dutch cheese
27) Beaks
28) Scottish miss
29) Pen filler
31) " _ me up, Scotty"
32) "Acid" used in some trips
33) Film with many extras
34) What cheerleaders do
35) Emerald Isle language
37) Body of values
38) Costello of old comedy
39) Better or improves
43) Louisiana cuisine
44) Crunchy vegetable
45) Anger
46) Cloudless sky color
47) Firms up, as muscles
48) Chilean range
49) Electric bill listing
50) One-on-one teacher
52) 4,840 square yards
53) Straitlaced
54) "Bies" or "dynamics"

prefix
55) Baltic port

56) Let slip from one's hands

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

One of your more outgoing friends has been acting out of character lately, and today their emotions could get in your way. If this happens, you need to value the relationship with them more than whatever it was that they messed up for you. Keep things in proper perspective and support them. It could be time for a talk. Get them alone and find out what's going on. Once you get to the heart of the matter, you'll be able to help them.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You have a heightened sense of intuition right now, and you should rely on it to help a friend who's about to start a project or go on a journey. If you're worried about them, let them know how you feel and explain your fears. You owe it to them to elaborate as much as you can: The more details the better. Maybe you had a dream or maybe it's just a gut feeling. Regardless, you won't be able to relax until you say what's on your mind.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Reaching out to others doesn't always have to feel like a risk. Sure, wearing your heart on your sleeve can leave you feeling vulnerable, but it's also a great way to show how much you care. Don't be shy about your feelings for someone, especially if they're positive. There is great energy around sharing your thoughts and hopes today, so don't waste it. When you feel the urge to confess how you're feeling to someone, do it. It will make their day.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Today, try to surround yourself with people who look at the world from a perspective that differs from yours, such as older relatives, younger siblings, and friends from different cultures. They can help you solve a problem that's been nagging you for a while. Sometimes all you need is for someone else to add their two cents about a situation in order to understand the true value of it. Be proactive about asking for advice and you can gain some insight.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If your feet aren't planted firmly on the ground today, you run the risk of missing out on something special. It's important to be grounded right now, so try not to let your emotions get the better of you. Occasionally, it's your emotional nature that serves as your driving force in life, but now you need to follow your brain, not your heart. Think things through and don't act too hastily. Being practical might not sound sexy, but it's definitely smart!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

The Universe is sending you a lot more introspective energy, which might cause you to shy away from the world right now, but that's perfectly fine. In fact, you should follow your instincts to stay at home even if friends are anxious for you to join them for a fun night out. Your friends will totally understand if you feel like taking a pass. It's a good time to explore your own ideas and think about what goals you want to tackle next.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Intelligence isn't about what degree you've earned or what books you've read. People don't walk around with their resume tattooed on their forehead, so when you walk into a room, assume you're on equal footing with everyone else. In short, you're as intelligent as you believe yourself to be. Don't let other people intimidate you. What you have to say and contribute to a brainstorming session is valuable, and people will see that when you share your thoughts.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your grasp of complicated financial ideas is getting stronger, so take advantage of it! Visit a few reputable financial websites and start expanding your education about what to do with your money. Ask a friend who knows their stuff how you can learn even more. It might be intimidating at first, but when the concepts start to click you'll be hooked! It's a very educational time for you, and it could lead to a very financially profitable time. Just don't get frustrated if you get confused.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you're looking for more privacy in your life, you simply have to ask for it. People are so excited about the idea of spending more time with you that they aren't going to pick up on the subtle hints you've been sending. If someone asks to hang out with you today, don't hem and haw or tell them you're not sure. Go ahead and own your time. Tell them you're sorry, but no. You don't have to give them an excuse. Your time is yours to do with as you will.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

A friend or coworker has a few troubles on their mind, and they'll feel the need to tell you all about them today. It's nice of you to sit and listen to them go on and on about their drama, but you don't have to, especially when you find their troubles trivial. Tolerating their emotional intensity and upheaval could send them the message that you're always going to be willing to enable their attention seeking, which isn't helping them. You need to give them some tough love.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Creating a vision of what you want to accomplish is the first step to doing it. Pick your toughest goal, whether it's getting fit, landing a new job, asking someone out, whatever it may be, and create a clear picture of it happening in your mind. Give yourself a road map of steps to follow and you'll make it easier to succeed. Don't let doubts or fears creep into the periphery. Those just don't have a place in your positive story line.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You'll be in a great mood today, full of good humor and unlimited hope, so it's a great day to pick an obstacle and leap right over it. You're feeling confident and energized enough to go the distance no matter how far it is. Pick your battle early in the day and by tonight you should have a very satisfying solution worked out. This accomplishment, although it might not seem huge to some people, will make you feel warm and fuzzy all over and ready for your next success.

Answers: 1. A 2. B 3. B

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

F	T	A	E
F	Y	E	S
E	A	N	S
I	S	B	D

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

WORD BUILDER

W O T
R
A O B

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

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



Newcastle United's Sven Botman (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Sheffield United on Sunday (AFP)

Newcastle thrash Sheffield United 8-0

Sheffield, United Kingdom - Newcastle came close to matching the Premier League's record margin of victory as they thrashed Sheffield United 8-0 at Bramall Lane on Sunday.

Eddie Howe's side ran riot with goals from Sean Longstaff, Dan Burn, Sven Botman, Callum Wilson, Anthony Gordon, Miguel Almiron, Bruno Guimaraes and Alexander Isak.

The biggest winning margin in the Premier League era is 9-0, a score recorded by Manchester United against Ipswich and Southampton in 1995 and 2021 respectively.

Liverpool won 9-0 against Bournemouth last year, while Leicester managed it against Southampton in 2019.

Sheffield United's largest ever league defeat sent the Blades to the bottom of the Premier League table.

With just one point from their first six games back in the English

top flight, Paul Heckingbottom's future as manager is now in doubt.

"The first-half goals we conceded were really poor, but it's the second half I'm upset with," said Heckingbottom.

"The errors that led to goals, a lot of things I'd never seen before, and there's certain things that aren't acceptable."

Newcastle had lost three of their opening five league games of the season to dampen expectations that the Saudi-backed Magpies could challenge for the title. Howe's men had been in the Champions League for the first time in 20 years on Tuesday as they played out a 0-0 draw away to AC Milan.

But Newcastle showed no signs of fatigue and they exhibited their strength in depth as they became the first side in Premier League history to have eight different scorers in one match, not including own goals.

MORATA DOUBLE DOWNS MADRID

Striker helps Atletico end Real's winning streak

Barcelona, Spain - Alvaro Morata struck twice for Atletico Madrid as they inflicted rivals Real Madrid's first defeat of the season, with a 3-1 derby triumph on Sunday in La Liga.

Champions Barcelona sit top of the league as Los Blancos lost their 100 percent record, with Antoine Griezmann also on target for Atletico, fifth, at their raucous Metropolitano stadium.

Real Madrid are third, a point behind Barcelona and high-flying Girona in second place, after they failed to match Atletico's level of intensity in an enthralling clash.

Morata netted an early header and Griezmann doubled Atletico's lead, before Toni Kroos pulled Madrid into the game with a stinging drive before half-time.

However Morata headed home again at the start of the second half and Madrid could not find a way back against an Atletico side bouncing back from what coach Diego Simeone labelled their "weakest" performance of his long reign last weekend.

"It was a problem of defensive fragility, which we haven't had in the first few games," Real Madrid



Atletico Madrid's Alvaro Morata scores against Real Madrid in their Spanish league match on Sunday (AFP)

coach Carlo Ancelotti told reporters.

"In just over 45 minutes they put three past us, it was not a good night ... the team was not compact, above all in the first half, Atletico took advantage of that."

Morata led the line well for Atletico and was rewarded with two goals, which he celebrated

wildly.

"What I need is to feel important and this year, maybe I feel more important than in other years - I hope we keep winning because I really want to win a title with Atletico," Morata told DAZN. "I'm very happy for all the fans, I said it the other day ... that the fans are going to have the most important role, and that's

how it was.

"(We're) all together, us on the pitch and them in the stands."

Ancelotti has given veteran midfielders Luka Modric and Kroos limited minutes this season but chose to start them both in the team's biggest game of the campaign to date, dropping Aurelien Tchouameni and Joselu.

The Italian pushed new arrival

Jude Bellingham even further into attack, alongside Rodrygo, instead of in the number 10 role he has starred in since his move from Borussia Dortmund in the summer, scoring six goals in his first six games before the derby.

Real were without Vinicius Junior, who has recovered from his hamstring injury but suffered a stomach problem.

Mbappe comes off hurt as PSG demolish Marseille

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain demolished Marseille in Ligue 1 on Sunday with summer signing Goncalo Ramos scoring twice in a 4-0 victory for the reigning champions, but Kylian Mbappe came off injured in the first half.

Mbappe appeared to hurt his ankle in winning the free-kick which saw Achraf Hakimi put PSG ahead in the eighth minute at the Parc des Princes.

The France superstar was eventually replaced just after the half-hour mark, but the home side went on to double their lead before the break through Randal Kolo Muani.

Ramos then headed in the home side's third goal just after half-time and completed the rout late on as PSG followed up their 2-0 victory over Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League in midweek.

The win leaves Luis Enrique's team in fourth place after six games, two points behind surprise leaders Brest, who beat Lyon 1-0 on Saturday.

Luis Enrique suggested after



Paris Saint-Germain's Goncalo Ramos scores past Marseille goalkeeper Pau Lopez on Sunday (AFP)

the game the injury suffered by his top scorer Mbappe was nothing serious.

"I think it was a knock. He tried to change the strapping on it and continue but the pain wouldn't go away," the coach said.

"I don't think it is anything se-

rious and I suppose he will be back soon but it is better not to take risks when a player is not 100 percent."

The former Barcelona and Spain boss added: "I think this was without doubt the most complete performance in my

time here and luckily for us it came against our biggest rivals."

Marseille had started the day unbeaten and were above PSG in the table, but they were out-classed here at the end of a turbulent week.

Their coach Marcelino Garcia

Toral resigned on Wednesday after only seven games at the helm and following an angry meeting between club officials and fan representatives.

Marseille president Pablo Longoria and several senior colleagues opted not to travel to Amsterdam for Thursday's 3-3 draw with Ajax in the Europa League amid doubt as to whether they would carry on.

However, Longoria has since decided to stay and was in Paris for Sunday's game in which former player Jacques Abardonado took interim charge of the team.

"We showed a total lack of character and if you do that against some of the best players in Europe that is what happens," Abardonado admitted.

As well as Longoria, also in attendance in the French capital was Selenia Gomez, who may have been hoping to see Mbappe play a more prominent role than he ultimately did.

The forward appeared to turn his left ankle in an early tangle of legs with Leonardo Balerdi just outside the Marseille box.



Inter Milan's Federico Dimarco celebrates after the match

Dimarco keeps Inter perfect in Serie A

Rome, Italy - Federico Dimarco scored the only goal as Inter Milan continued their perfect start to the Serie A season with a 1-0 win at basement team Empoli on Sunday.

Simone Inzaghi's side shifted gear after a hard-fought first half to see off a club who fired their coach last week after a seven-goal thrashing by Roma.

Dimarco made the difference with a superb half-volley into the corner six minutes after the break.

France international Marcus Thuram was denied a second by the crossbar on 77 minutes before being replaced by Chilean Alexis Sanchez who made his Serie A return after spending last season at Marseille.

"It's an important victory, it wasn't easy, but it allows us to send a message to the other teams," said Dimarco.

"We had to wait until the sec-

ond period to gain the upper hand, but we managed this match well, with the right approach," added Inzaghi.

"It's only the fifth round, we know that everything can change quickly in football, but I am satisfied with my players, with their mental attitude."

Inter, the 2021 champions, are the only team not to drop a point so far, and have three more than second-placed rivals AC Milan who beat Verona 1-0 on Saturday.

Juventus are already five points adrift in fourth after a 4-2 defeat at 11th-placed Sassuolo.

Inter next play Sassuolo mid-week but without Austrian striker Marko Arnautovic who pulled up with a "serious injury" to his left thigh, the club announced.

Later champions Napoli were held to a goalless draw at Bologna.

Al Ahly's El Shahat put Ethiopian Saints to the sword

Johannesburg, South Africa - Hussein el Shahat scored twice as Al Ahly of Egypt began their CAF Champions League title defence with a predictable 3-0 qualifying win over Saint George of Ethiopia on Sunday.

El Shahat, popularly known as the Ninja, struck in each half in Cairo before being substituted in the last-32 first-leg clash.

Ahmed Abdelkader, one of many substitutes introduced in the second half by Swiss coach Marcel Koller, completed the scoring in added time.

Saint George, regular but largely unsuccessful African campaigners, were forced to



Al Ahly's Hussein el Shahat celebrates with teammates after scoring against Saint George

cede home advantage because they do not have an international-standard stadium.

The return match will be played on Friday at the same venue, Cairo International Stadium, with record 11-time African champions Ahly virtually assured of a ninth straight appearance in the group stage.

From 2016, the Cairo Red Devils have won the competition three times, been runners-up three times, quarter-finalists once and failed to get beyond the group phase once.

Victory over Saint George came one week after a shock 1-0 loss to USM Alger of Algeria in

Saudi Arabia in the CAF Super Cup.

Ahly coasted to victory despite the unavailability of new signing Anthony Modeste, who is ineligible for the last-32 round, and suspended Moroccan Reda Slim.

The winners of 24 African titles across four competitions also missed defender Mahmoud Metwally and midfielder Amr el Sulaya due to injuries.

Koller chose three non-Egyptian starters - Tunisian defender Ali Maaloul, Malian midfielder Aliou Dieng and South African forward Percy Tau.

AFP

Team World win Laver Cup

Ben Shelton and Frances Tiafoe seal victory over Hubert Hurkacz and Andrey Rublev

Vancouver, Canada - Team World won a second straight Laver Cup title Sunday as Ben Shelton and Frances Tiafoe sealed a 13-2 victory over Team Europe with a 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5) doubles win over Hubert Hurkacz and Andrey Rublev.

Team World captain John McEnroe, who had endured four straight defeats in the event that began in 2017 before seeing his side rally for victory in London last year, was thrilled to celebrate a triumph that began with a four-match sweep on Friday.

"It felt unbelievable to kick their ass, baby!" McEnroe crowed. "They kicked ours many



Ben Shelton (R) and Frances Tiafoe of Team World celebrate after defeating Andrey Rublev and Hubert Hurkacz of Team Europe (AFP)

This was like a special year for us. I know they're going to come back strong, but I'll take two in a row any day. And I'm starting to think it's possible three in a row, Team World?

JOHN MCENROE

times, OK. It was a battle to the end when we won last year."

This time around, with a blend of youth and experience, McEnroe said he "felt it from the word go" against a Team Europe side that was without fourth-ranked Holger Rune of Denmark and world number five Stefano Tsitsipas of Greece, who both withdrew from captain Bjorn Borg's side with injuries.

That left sixth-ranked Rublev and Norway's ninth-ranked Casper Ruud as Europe's top players.

Ruud nabbed the visitors' only points of the three-day event with his victory over Tommy Paul on Saturday.

Europe was unable to build on that win, with Tiafoe downing Hurkacz in singles on Saturday night before Felix Auger-Aliassime and Shelton teamed up to beat Hurkacz and Gael Monfils in doubles and put Team World one win away from victory heading into the final day. "We stepped up, and I thought all the guys played great," said McEnroe, who also had singles wins from Americans Shelton and Taylor Fritz, Canada's Auger-Aliassime and Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo.

Every World Team player contributed at least a point, with Paul gaining a win alongside Tiafoe in doubles on Friday.

"This was like a special year for us," McEnroe said. "I know they're going to come back strong, but I'll take two in a row any day. And I'm starting to think it's possible three in a row, Team World?"

Auger-Aliassime, who had two key wins on the final day as Team World rallied for victory last year, was thrilled to lift the trophy in front of his home fans in Canada. "Amazing to win on home soil with the crowd behind us," he said.

Shelton, the 20-year-old whose stunning run to the US Open semi-finals saw him rise to 19th in the world, relished the team tournament environment.

CAS to hear appeal of Valieva

Lausanne, Switzerland - The doping case of Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva whose positive test ignited a scandal at the 2022 Winter Olympics will be heard behind closed doors on Tuesday by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

While the case was the latest in a string of doping scandals involving Russian Olympic athletes, it also raised questions about how the 15-year athlete was treated, the way the test was conducted and the value of the drug involved for enhancing performance.

Tuesday's hearing follows the exoneration of the Russian teenager by Russia's anti-doping agency (RUSADA).

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the International Skating Union (ISU) then appealed RUSADA's ruling, as did RUSADA itself.

The three CAS judges will meet in Lausanne, while the young skater - now 17 - and some of the experts and witnesses will be heard by videoconference.



Kamila Valieva

Miami draw with Orlando without ex-Barca trio



Megan Rapinoe of the US leaves the pitch after being substituted during their women's friendly match against South Africa (AFP)

Rapinoe makes triumphant US farewell in win over South Africa

Chicago, United States - Megan Rapinoe was a winner in her farewell game for the United States on Sunday, setting up a goal with a corner kick in a 2-0 triumph over South Africa.

The iconic 38-year-old striker, celebrated for off-field activism as well as glories on the pitch, ended her epic US career with 63 goals in 203 caps over more than 17 years with a 54th-minute exit at Chicago's Soldier Field.

"It makes me really proud to know we've been as successful on the field as we have, but also that we've helped make the world a little bit better of a place," Rapinoe said after the victory.

Rapinoe sparked the Americans to crowns at the 2015 and 2019 Women's World

Cups and gold at the 2012 London Olympics, but was a champion for social causes as well.

A vocal advocate for LGBTQ rights who has supported an array of US social justice issues, Rapinoe was presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's top civilian award, in 2002 by President Joe Biden.

Rapinoe, FIFA's 2019 Women's Player of the Year, also was among the leaders of the US women's successful fight with US Soccer for equal pay and conditions with the men's squad.

"She has affected so many people's lives in a positive way. She has changed this sport forever," US forward Trinity Rodman said of Rapinoe.

Miami, United States - Inter Miami, without Lionel Messi, Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba, battled to a 1-1 draw at Orlando City in Major League Soccer on Sunday.

The result leaves Miami five points adrift of the last playoff spot with five games of their regular season campaign remaining.

Miami can win their second trophy of the Messi era on Wednesday when they look to add the U.S. Open Cup to the League Cup they won last month and with that goal in mind head coach Gerardo Martino took no risks with his line-up.

As well as Messi and Alba, both ruled out for fitness reasons, Martino opted to rest Spanish midfielder Busquets who had been ever-present since joining the club in July.

With homegrown youngsters Noah Allen and David Ruiz brought into the side, Miami fielded a line-up similar to the ones that had seen the team fall to the bottom of the Eastern Conference before Messi's arrival.



David Ruiz of Inter Miami tackles Mauricio Pereyra of Orlando City (AFP)

Orlando, second in the East and already assured of a playoff place, began the brighter and could have grabbed the lead in the 29th minute when striker Duncan McGuire found himself in space on the edge of the box but his shot was well saved by Drake Callender.

At the other end, in-form Ecuadorean striker Leonard Campana went close for Miami with a header from a corner which Orlando keeper Pedro Gallese got down well to.

Miami broke through in the

52nd minute when Campana fed Josef Martinez whose low shot was parried out but David Ruiz slid in the loose ball.

Callender did well again to keep out a curling left-footed effort from Martin Ojeda and then Orlando wasted another chance

when Ivan Angulo found himself clear on goal but poked his shot wide.

But the home side finally got their reward in the 66th minute when a deflected pass fell into the path of McGuire who drilled a first-time shot through the legs of Callender.

Miami tired badly in the final stages as they hung on for a point. "They are a very competitive team just like us and we just try to fight through and get the get the win," said Ruiz.

"Sadly we didn't get the result, but it's just another point to give us a hope to go to playoffs," he added.

"Obviously we didn't have players key players like Busi, Jordi and Messi, but we've been working every day hard to get a spot on the team and I mean you can see that in the game," he added.

After Wednesday's U.S. Open Cup final against the Houston Dynamo, Miami face one of their direct rivals for the playoffs - New York City FC.

AFP

DeChambeau edges Lahiri to capture LIV Golf Chicago title

Chicago, United States - Bryson DeChambeau birdied three of his last five holes to win the LIV Golf Chicago title on Sunday when Anirban Lahiri missed an eight-foot par putt on the 18th hole.

DeChambeau, who began the day eight adrift, fired an eight-under par 63 in the closing round at Rich Harvest Farms in suburban Chicago to finish 54 holes on 13-under 200.

That was good enough to give the 30-year-old American a one-stroke triumph over Australian Marc Leishman and India's Lahiri, who led most of the last round and would have forced a playoff with a closing par.



(From left) Bryson DeChambeau, Anirban Lahiri, Charles Howell III, and Paul Casey pose with the LIV Golf trophy

It made for a bittersweet victory for DeChambeau, captain of the triumphant Crushers team whose lineup includes Lahiri.

"I wanted to be in a playoff with 'Ban,'" DeChambeau said. "He has worked his butt off all year.

"I couldn't be happier that I won but I feel so bad for 'Ban. I wanted to go into a playoff and battle it out with my brother. I love him to death. He's a grinder."

DeChambeau made six birdies on his back nine and birdied the par-5 second, his penultimate hole, to grab a share of the lead on 13-under with Lahiri, who had stumbled with a

bogey at the par-3 15th.

At 18, Lahiri left a long birdie attempt short and sent his par putt left of the hole.

"He had this won but I just luckily snuck in there and took it down," DeChambeau said.

DeChambeau could capture the season title in the Saudi-backed series with a victory in a regular-season finale next month in Saudi Arabia.

US Open 2020 champion DeChambeau, who won his first LIV title last month at Greenbrier thanks to a final-round 58, answered a bogey at nine with three consecutive birdies, the last a long effort over a ridge.



Divyansh Singh Panwar (L), Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (C), and Rudranksh Patil

BANG ON TARGET

India fires first world record of Asian Games as Japanese teen dazzles

Hangzhou, China - India claimed the first world record of the Hangzhou Asian Games on Monday as hosts China snapped up more gold medals and 15-year-old skateboarder Hinano

Kusaki triumphed for Japan. The Indian trio of Divyansh Panwar, Rudranksh Patil and Aishwary Tomar blew away the field with a new world best 1,893.7 points to win the men's 10m air rifle team event on day two of the multi-sports extravaganza. They beat the previous mark of 1,893.3 set by China last month in Baku. In doing so they won India's first gold of a Games where the hosts have swept 28 of the 44 titles decided so far. "In the 10m event they are both perfect athletes," Tomar

The Indian trio of Divyansh Panwar, Rudranksh Patil and Aishwary Tomar blew away the field with a new world best 1,893.7 points to win the men's 10m air rifle team event on day two of the games

said of his teammates. "Playing with them is huge, it's really good." Another shooting world record fell to China's Sheng Lihao in the men's 10m air rifle with his 253.3 points surpassing teammate Yu Haonan's 252.8 from

first woman in history from the Chinese territory to earn an Asian Games gold. "I'm really proud. This one completes the process so I feel really fortunate," said the 31-year-old. "This maybe brings my 20 years as an athlete to a perfect end." In other early action on day two, Kusaki dazzled in skateboarding to easily win the women's park final at Qiantang Roller Sports Centre. "I am very happy with how everything went," said the teenager.



Lee 'Faker' Sang-hyeok

Desperate eSports fans in ticket-grabbing frenzy at Asian Games

Hangzhou, China - eSports tickets costing up to \$137 are like gold dust at the Asian Games with desperate fans signing up multiple times through a lottery system in hope of seeing their gaming heroes live. Tickets run up to 1,000 yuan (\$137), making eSports one of the most expensive events to watch at the Asiad. For the unlucky ones, they have instead waited outside the gates of the futuristic-looking Hangzhou Esports Center, craning their necks to look inside the official Games buses passing through. eSports is making its debut as a medal event in the Chinese city, seen as a major step towards the Olympics one day, with renowned gamers such as South Korea's Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok in action. Medals are up for grabs in seven gaming titles, including Arena of Valor, League of Legends and EA Sports FC Online. Underlining just how popular it is, eSports is the only competition at the Games where tickets were allocated through an initial online lottery, before being opened up last week for direct purchase. Tickets run up to 1,000 yuan (\$137), making eSports one of the most expensive events to watch at the Asiad. "Getting tickets for this eSports competition was quite intense," said Xu Kezhen, a 20-year-old fan. "I had to try five or six times before finally getting one. Everyone wants to come and support the Chinese team and their favourite players, so there is a rush to grab the tickets and show their support." The hassle and expense did not deter Zhao Xiaohan, who signed up for all possible lotteries before eventually winning a prized spot. "It felt like quite a challenge to secure the ticket and luck played a role as well," Zhao, 23, said.

'So fun!' says 9-year-old skateboarder Alegado

Hangzhou, China - She probably ought to have been in primary school, but instead Mazel Paris Alegado - aged nine - competed in skateboarding at the Asian Games on Monday. Alegado, thought to be the youngest athlete at the Games in Hangzhou and representing the Philippines, qualified for the "women's" park final and came seventh out of eight. Japan's Hinano Kusaki, a comparative veteran at 15, won gold. Alegado, who turned nine in March and reportedly comes from California, said she got into skate-boarding when she saw her brother doing it while they were at a cousin's house. "And I was like, 'Can I try? Can I try?'" she said. "And I got on the board and just loved it." Talking on her feelings about taking part in a major international competition, Alegado said:



Philippines' Mazel Paris Alegado competes in the women's park skateboarding event (Photo AFP)

"I was so excited because I was about to skate the Asian Games - and I just did, so it was so fun!" Asked if her brother still skates, she replied: "No because he was like, 'Oh dang, she's better than me now', so he stopped." In the final, Alegado avoided the wooden spoon, which instead went to Taiwanese 11-year-old Lin Yi-fan.

Qin lights up Asian Games pool as Haughey claims 200m free gold

Hangzhou, China - World champion Qin Haiyang surged to the world's second fastest time this year and the Asian Games 100m breaststroke title Monday while star freestyler Siobhan Haughey clinched Hong Kong's first-ever swimming gold medal. China won four of the seven titles on offer in the Hangzhou pool, but Haughey and South Korea's Ji Yu-chan denied them a clean sweep, taking out the women's 200m freestyle and men's 50m freestyle crowns respectively. South Korea also upset China in the men's 4x200m freestyle, but needed a new Asian record to do so. Chinese superstar Qin was the overwhelming favourite after a stunning swim to win the world championship this year in Fukuoka in the absence of British great Adam Peaty. He went on to complete an



China's Qin Haiyang on his way to gold in the men's 100 breaststroke (AFP)

unprecedented sweep of the breaststroke races, an achievement he is aiming to match at his home Asiad as he builds towards next year's Paris Olympics. He first cracked the Asian Games record in the heats and bettered it again in the final to touch in 57.76sec - the second quickest of 2023 after his world championship-winning exploits. Qin finished a gaping 1.33sec ahead of teammate Yan Zibei with South Korea's Choi Dongyeol bagging bronze. "I'm quite pleased with the result today. My form is quite similar to what it was at the world championships, and I'm trying out some new race strategies," he said.

India's women strike cricket gold on debut

Hangzhou, China - India struck gold on their Asian Games cricket debut when they beat informal Sri Lanka by 19 runs in the women's final in Hangzhou on Monday. They had declined to enter any teams on the two previous occasions cricket was played at the multisport event, at Guangzhou in 2010 and Incheon in 2014. "It's a gold medal for the whole of India," said batter Richa Ghosh. Batting first India reached 116-7 in their 20 overs with Smriti Mandhana (46) and Jemimah Rodrigues (42) putting on 73 for the second wicket. "Winning a gold medal is

something you dream about," said Rodrigues. "It's a reward for all the efforts we have put in over so many years." Sri Lanka's chase started badly when they were reduced to 14-3 in the fifth over by a devastating spell from right-arm seamer Titas Sadhu. She took two wickets in her first four balls and another in her third over to finish with remarkable figures of three wickets for six runs. Sri Lanka, who had beaten England in a white-ball series for the first time earlier this month, were always behind the run rate despite Hasini Perera looking to accelerate, hitting four fours and a six in a rapid 25. When Nilakshi de Silva was out after a battling 23, Sri Lanka were 78-5 needing 39 more with only 23 balls remaining. Two more wickets saw them face a near-impossible 25 off the last over and could only muster five as India began to celebrate. "It's a golden first for us," India assistant coach Rajib Dutta told AFP. "Many more to come I hope. "It's a low-scoring wicket so we thought 110 would be a good score, but when Jemimah and Mandhana were together we thought 130-135 might be possible so we were a little disappointed by 116," he added. Sri Lankan all-rounder Oshadi Ranasinghe said they had missed

a good opportunity to win gold. "Looking at the way we batted, we have to get more disciplined," she said. Accumulating runs has not been easy all tournament at the Zhejiang University for Technology Pingfeng Cricket Field, on a flaky wicket affected by rain last week. India won the toss and opted to bat even though both semi-finals and the bronze medal match were won by the team chasing. They lost star opener Shafali Verma with the score on 16, but steadied to 35-1 at the end of the six-over power play where only two fielders are allowed outside the 30-metre circle.



Indian players celebrate the fall of a Sri Lankan wicket



Tadhg Beirne

Ireland’s Beirne eyes South Africa sequel at World Cup

Paris, France - Rugby fans could be in for a sequel to the memorable tussle Ireland and defending champions South Africa served up on Saturday with Irish lock Tadhg Beirne believing they can meet in the final.

It may have been a low-scoring match - 13-8 to Ireland - but the top two ranked sides in the world served up a high class physical encounter with the game swinging back and forth in favour of one team then the other. Beirne put in another outstanding performance, even hoofing the ball down the field late in the game crucially eating up time and easing pressure on the Irish.

The explosion of joy at the final whistle said it all about how much the win, albeit in a pool match, meant for the Irish.

Beirne, though, thinks it has

wider implications that could lead all the way to the final on October 28 back at the Stade de France which is the only time they can meet again.

There is, of course, the match no one wishes to play in the third-place play-off but Beirne clearly had his eyes fixed on the battle for the Webb Ellis Trophy.

“It’s a huge confidence booster,” he said.

“You know, we beat them back in November, they’re going to grow as the competition goes on, if we can keep going in the competition I’ve no doubt we’ll probably meet them again.”

The 31-year-old former Scarlets star, who had to wait till he moved to Munster in 2018 for his first cap as Irish policy forbade selecting players playing abroad, said Ireland had yet to produce a perfect display.

WALES BLOW AWAY WALLABIES

Warren Gatland’s side reach World Cup last eight, Scots win

Paris, France - Wales became the first team to qualify for the quarter-finals of the Rugby World Cup as they produced a record-breaking performance to hammer Australia 40-6 in Lyon on Sunday.

Scotland also remained in contention for the quarter-finals with a 45-17 bonus point win over Tonga, although they will likely need to beat Ireland in their final Pool B match to progress.

Warren Gatland’s Wales side, who had laboured to victory in their previous matches against Fiji and Portugal, looked to be in trouble when they lost influential fly-half Dan Biggar after just 12 minutes.

However, tries from Gareth Davies, Nick Tompkins and skipper Jac Morgan, and an exemplary kicking display from replacement fly-half Gareth Anscombe, who mustered 23 points in total, saw Wales into the last eight. It was the most points they have ever scored against the Wallabies and the 34-point gap eclipsed their 28-3 win in Cardiff back in 1975.

“We’ve played well in the last two games but there were a few things we could improve on and today the discipline was better



Liam Williams of Wales grabs the ball during their World Cup Pool C match against Australia on Sunday (AFP)

and we were great,” said Morgan.

“I’m very proud of the boys, we’re prepared to go to the well for each other and everyone’s prepared so well.”

With Australia’s hopes of qualifying now depending on Fiji losing to Georgia or Portugal, the pressure will mount on coach Eddie Jones. It was his side’s seventh defeat in eight Tests since he took over the reins for the sec-

ond time in January.

Australia’s only victory since then was over Tier II Georgia.

“I would like to apologise to all Australia supporters,” said Jones. “Our performances were not up to the standards required. I take full responsibility for it. It is very disappointing.”

Wales got off to a dream start with a line-out move straight off the training ground as Morgan hit

a beautiful line onto Tompkins’ inside pass to break through the defensive line and tee up Davies to score by the posts.

Two Ben Donaldson penalties brought it back to 7-6 and with Biggar leaving the field with a shoulder problem, suffered tackling Richie Arnold, the Australians appeared to be in a good position.

Anscombe, though, proved a more than able replacement for

Biggar, despite missing his first kick at the sticks, punishing a series of Australian infringements.

Three penalties took it to 16-6 at the break after which Wales ran away with it, Anscombe adding another three penalties, a drop goal and converting Tompkins’ try in the 49th minute, which he had set up with a delightful chip over the Australian defence.



Dalton Papali'i

New Zealand seeking to emulate Ireland, South Africa

Lyon, France - New Zealand flanker Dalton Papali'i said on Monday the All Blacks were inspired by watching Ireland’s brutal victory over South Africa in the Rugby World Cup at the weekend, and they aspire to reach that level.

The world’s top two sides played out an enthralling low-

scoring match at the Stade de France on Saturday, with Ireland edging it 13-8 after wayward place kicking by the Springboks.

New Zealand sit fourth in the world and have lost their last match against the three teams above them, including the World Cup’s opening game with hosts France.

“If you want to play with the best you’ve got to play at that level,” said the 25-year-old back-rower. “We’ve shown glimpses throughout the year and this is where you need to do it because this is the tournament we all want to perform at.”

“We know what the standard is now, and we’re pretty excited

coming off that bye week to really show what we’ve got and the level we want to play at.”

Defence coach Scott McLeod said the players were “buzzing” after watching that match.

“I was hugely impressed with the intensity of the game,” he said.

“That’s what impressed me

the most, the speed of play but the collisions were clean. They were very clean and accurate, there was no infringing around that area.

“And that’s a bloody hard thing to do that speed, with those collisions and bodies are flying everywhere and both teams did that very, very well.”

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FASTING FADS

FASTING DIETS AND BUSY SCHEDULES HAVE LED MORE PEOPLE TO GO WITHOUT AN EVENING MEAL, BUT RESEARCH SHOWS THAT DOING SO HAS NEGATIVE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL CONSEQUENCES

Do you skip dinner often and feel you're doing great to control weight? Think again, for you might be walking the road to a series of health disorders – not just eating disorders but also cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and even certain mental disorders.

Everyone has heard the platitude that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. But dinner matters, too. However, for many people, dinner is the first thing that falls off their to-do list when schedules fill up with evening errands, events, and activities.

According to a recent article published by *Everyday Health*, dinner is not just a third daily meal. It's also the last opportunity of the day to give your body the calories and nutrition it needs to thrive before you go to sleep, which for most people, is the longest stretch in 24 hours they go without food. It's also a nightly occasion to connect with loved ones - eating dinner together has been shown to improve

academic performance, improve nutrition, and decrease obesity in children.

The past few years have changed how people think about dinner, however. According to a study commissioned by integrated marketing firm Hunter PR, 54% per cent of Americans cook more often than they did before the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, intermittent fasting has taken over as the most popular diet, with 1 in 10 people participating in it.

When you skip dinner...

Whenever you eat - or don't eat - it triggers a series of reactions in your body. Even small shifts in regular mealtimes can impair your ability to regulate your appetite because varying a daily eating routine disrupts circadian rhythms, the 24-hour cycle that governs many bodily functions. Over the long term, skipping meals regularly can have a negative impact on your health.

Eating just one meal a day was linked to a higher mortal-

ity risk, and skipping lunch or dinner specifically increased the risk of cardiovascular disease, according to a study published in March 2023 in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.

In the short term, skipping dinner can lead to fluctuations in blood sugar that can leave you feeling shaky or lacking energy. "It can make your body feel more stressed. It can make it harder to sleep," says Lena Beal, RDN, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

For people with diabetes, episodes of high or low blood sugar brought on by skipping dinner can be dangerous, according to the Cleveland Clinic. Skipping dinner doesn't really help in controlling weight. In fact, skipping dinner was the biggest predictor of weight gain in a study published in January 2021 in the journal *Nutrients*.

Even worse, passing up breakfast, lunch, or dinner may also make you more vulnerable to developing an eating disorder, according to a study published in April 2022 in the journal *Eating and Weight Disorders*.

DINNER?

HEALTHY GUT, HEALTHY MIND



VANDANA CHAWLA

NUTRITION & YOU

Gut health is of prime concern these days. Everyone, be it young or old, male or female, all have complaints related to their gut. A healthy gut is usually related to healthy digestion and absorption, but does it have a connection with our brain, that's something which has become a hot topic for scientists and health experts.

Did you ever hear the term, 'butterflies in my tummy', or experience nausea or stomach cramps before an important event? It's a well-known fact that our gastrointestinal tract is sensitive to emotions like anxiety, fear, sadness, stress and many more, and triggers various symptoms associated with the gut.

In the same way, just the thought of food in our brain starts releasing gas-

tric juices in our stomach. So, both are interrelated, which means that a disturbed brain sends signals to the gut and a disturbed gut sends signals to the brain. How do the two communicate?

Gut-brain axis

The communication system between the gut and brain is called the 'gut-brain axis.' The brain cells or neurons that give signals to the brain and body are found in the brain as well as in the gut. These cells found in the gut are connected to the nervous system via the nerves.

In addition, both, the brain and gut, are also connected through the messengers present in our brain - neurotransmitters. We all are aware of happiness messengers - serotonin, or anxiety-related chemicals. Many of these are produced by the gut cells and the microbes present in the gut.

Moreover, the microbes in the gut produce some other chemicals that have a role in controlling appetite or making compounds that affect brain health.

Probiotics and Prebiotics together help in maintaining gut health by increasing the number of friendly bacteria. Hence, they have been shown to reduce some of the emotions like, anxiety, and depression.



INCREASING THE FRIENDLY BACTERIA IN OUR GUT CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON BRAIN HEALTH

Now, can food affect the gut-brain axis? Certain groups of foods are beneficial for the gut-brain axis, which means keeping both, the gut and brain, healthy:

Omega 3-rich foods - These foods are also termed brainy foods. Nuts, like, walnuts, pistachios, pecans, or seeds,

the gut healthy, and via this, they improve cognitive functioning in terms of memory, learning etc. Vegetables, fruits, whole wheat products, beans, nuts, and seeds are all high-fibre foods.

Tryptophan-rich foods - Tryptophan is an amino acid, which gets converted to serotonin which, in turn, is vital for the processing of emotional regulation, hunger, sleep, and pain. This amino acid that plays an important role in keeping the gut-brain axis healthy is found in foods like, eggs, cheese, chicken, peanuts, pumpkin and sesame seeds and milk.

Polyphenol-rich foods - Polyphenols are the compounds found in foods like olives, green tea, coffee, and dark chocolate, again food for friendly bacteria in the gut which, in turn, have an impact on brain health.

To, conclude, the gut-brain axis helps us to understand, the importance of keeping our gut healthy. Increasing the friendly bacteria in our gut can have an impact on brain health. Hence, incorporating foods that can alter the gut microbiome, can have a positive impact on our brain and its functioning.

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

SIDE FAT

Side fat is the excess flab along the sides of your waist, commonly known as 'love handles', which simply don't go away, even if you exercise regularly. You need to direct your fitness moves to target your sides

SIDE PLANK CIRCLES

Side Plank Circles targets your oblique muscles, muffin tops, love handles, lower belly pooch, and tones your butt.

Action:

Get into a side plank position and lower the knee closer to the floor. Lift your upper leg until it is horizontal and straight.

Now start tracing big circles with that leg. Trace 20 circles clockwise and 20 anti-clockwise and then repeat on the other side.

TACKLE YOUR 'LOVE HANDLES'

Both, men and women, can develop love handles - it refers to the excess fat deposits at the lower midsection of the body. When small pockets of fat deposit above the hip bone and on either side of the waist, they are called love handles. Some also refer to it as 'muffin top' because it gives your midsection a similar appearance.

The main reason for fat accumulation along your sides is consumption of excess calories and lack of exercise. They say, 'side fat always overstays its welcome'. Hence, even dedicated fitness enthusiasts have a tricky time shedding those extra pounds around their sides.

Many ab exercises and routines fail to target side fat due to improper technique. In order to get rid of side fat, you need to design your exercise routine, such that it focuses on eliminating side fat which is a stubborn guest that simply won't leave.

Causes

The primary source for love handles is the storing of excess fat on the hips and abdomen. The extra fat retention can be due to multiple reasons, including high cortisol levels - a metabolic hormone that is produced during times of stress.

Production of cortisol in higher amounts leads to fat storage around the midsection. So, those who continuously go through stressful situations may develop 'Cushing's syndrome' due to excess of the hormone cortisol for a long time. It also causes a hump between the shoulders and a rounded face.

The other causes of side fat are aging which causes storage of fat around the belly and hip area, poor diet - excess calories, sleep deprivation which also causes reduced movement throughout the day, low physical activity levels, high-calorie alcohol consumption which brings on fat accumulation, and genetic disposition towards developing love handles.

LEG LIFTS

Leg lifts are very effective as lower belly fat and muffin top exercises and also as great core exercises.

Action:

Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor. Place your hand under your bum and straighten both your legs.

Lift your legs up as high as you can and lower them back without touching the floor. Keep the legs straight at all times.

Do 15 reps.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES TARGETED AT BURNING SIDE FAT



OBLIQUE CRUNCH
Oblique Crunch or bicycle crunch targets the oblique muscles and helps in reducing all the side fat. It is a good torso exercise that targets not just the lower fat but upper fat as well.

Action:

Lie down on your back and lift your legs with bent knees until your calves become horizontal. Put your left hand behind your head and straighten your right arm to your side.

Now press your right forearm onto the ground, lift the left side

of your torso and try to touch your left elbow to your left knee.

Turn your left knee towards your left elbow as you lift your left torso.

Do 10 reps and repeat on the other side.



PIKED ELBOW TWISTS
Piked Elbow Twist is an effective exercise to lose side fat by targeting your obliques.

Action:

Lie down on the floor with your legs straight and arms extended. Now lift your straight legs and arms in a sit-up position until your torso is off the floor and you are balancing on your butt.

If keeping your legs straight is very difficult for you, you can bend your knees until your calves are horizontal. Maintain that position.

Now twist your torso to your right side, bend your right arms and touch the right elbow to the floor.

Then, twist your torso to your left and touch your left elbow to the floor.

Keep alternating and do about 20 reps.



MERMAID
This pilates move concentrates on your side muscles specifically. It is a good muffin top or love handle exercise and is an effective waist slimming exercise.

Action:

Lie down on your right side with your legs straight and feet stacked together.

You can cross your ankles if it helps but keep them together.

Also, keep your legs slightly forward so that you rest on your bum cheek and not on your hip.

Lift your legs up as high as you can and lower them back down.

Do 15 reps.



STARFISH
Starfish is a variation of Side Plank exercise, which is a killer move for reducing side fat.

Action:

Get in the side plank position and get hold of your balance.

Once you are properly balanced, stack one foot on top of the other and raise your arm into the air.

Now, lift the leg on top and straighten it. At the same time, try to touch your toe with your hand and then return to the starting position.

Do 15 reps and repeat on the other side.

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