

NEWS BRIEF

TAXIS TO JOIN LICENSED APPS STARTING OCT 1

Muscat - The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has announced a schedule for initiating enforcement of a directive that mandates taxi owners to join the apps licensed by the ministry.

This will be carried out in three phases.

The ministry stated that Phase 1 of the programme will commence on October 1, targeting taxi drivers working operating at Oman's airports. Phase 2, set to start on November 1, will involve taxi services at tourist complexes, hotels, commercial centres and ports. Phase 3, commencing on January 1, is for white and orange taxis.

OMAN-USA MILITARY DRILL 'VALLEY OF FIRE 2023' CONCLUDES

Muscat - Joint Oman-USA military drill 'Valley of Fire 2023' concluded on Wednesday in Dhofar. The drill was conducted with the participation of Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and infantry units of the United States Army. Other personnel of RAO and Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) also took part. Simulation and role-playing tasks of the drill were aimed at providing training in accordance with RAO's training plan for preparedness and achieving the desired national objectives. It was held within the context of annual training programmes that aim to exchange expertise in military fields.

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Oman receives world's first liquefied hydrogen carrier

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Foreign goods flood Muttrah Souq



Governors' Forum focuses on investment promotion

Our Correspondent Muscat

Sessions of the Governors' Forum, organised by the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, started on Wednesday under the theme 'Cooperation and Progress'.

The two-day forum figures among activities of Khareef Dhofar 2023. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Marwan Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The forum's programme includes a dialogue session to discuss mechanisms for enhancing investments, revenues and economic diversification in the governorates.

The programme also covers

This forum needs to be a platform for exchanging ideas and visions regarding the governorates' works, strategic plans and challenges to achieve decentralisation

H H SAYYID MARWAN TURKI AL SAID

visits to tourism landmarks, recreational sites and heritage monuments in Dhofar.

H H Sayyid Marwan stressed the importance of cooperation and exchange of experiences between the governorates in all fields to achieve progress at the local level of the governorates in particular, and at the national level in general.

He also noted the need to or-

ganise the Governors' Forum to be a platform for exchanging ideas and visions regarding the governorates' works, strategic plans and challenges in order to achieve decentralisation.

On the sidelines of the forum, Dr Saud Mohammed al Farsi from the Office of the Governor of Dhofar presented a working paper entitled 'The Draft Strategic Plan for Dhofar Governorate.'

It highlighted five main pillars - legislation and policies, institutional governance, state development, investment, partnership, and innovation and technology - for progress in the governorates.

Tariq bin Amer al Kathiri from Dhofar Municipality also presented a working paper on the Draft Strategic Plan for Dhofar Municipality (2023-2040). It highlighted a plan for digital transformation in the governorate, which aims to provide high quality, safe and reliable digital services through a unified portal, in addition to keeping abreast of the developments of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, AI and digital integration with all relevant institutions.

185,000 waste bins to be monitored by AI, enabling real-time data collection

Our Correspondent Muscat

Two Omani technology companies have collaborated with Oman Environmental Service Holding Company - be'ah - to monitor 185,000 waste bins across Oman through artificial intelligence.

Technology solutions provider Rihal has partnered with Onsor Technologies, a specialist in technologies based on Internet of Things (IoT) and AI, to help be'ah change the way waste bins are monitored and waste collected.

'Integrating environmental solutions with artificial intelligence technologies improves operational efficiency and provides effective monitoring and protection for the environment. At Rihal, we are proud of this partnership with Onsor Technologies and be'ah,' Rihal said in a statement.

Rihal added that 185,000 waste bins are planned to be monitored with AI. This will help



be'ah has partnered with Omani technology companies Rihal and Onsor Technologies for the project

in enabling waste collection staff to cover a larger area in record time, as well harness accurate data for collection.'

In May this year, be'ah signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Rihal for the project, clearing the way for development of an AI-based platform that automates bin monitoring

and inspection activities. The 'Detection and Classification Platform' presents a major step towards be'ah's strategic objectives of excellence in waste management.

be'ah aims to use machine learning and AI to automate bin monitoring and inspection for effective coverage of municipal

6 sites offered for private schools in 2 governorates

Our Correspondent Muscat

In an effort to energeise the real estate and education sectors, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, has announced the opening of six investment sites in Dhofar and Muscat governorates. These sites are earmarked for setting up private schools.

The initiative is designed to support population and economic growth objectives, particularly within commercial and industrial real estate units. It also seeks to empower the private sector to bring investments to the governorates, thereby contributing to the development of cohesive and sustainable urban communities.

An official from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning confirmed that land, ranging from 3,000sqm to 6,000sqm, will be offered for usufruct contracts via public auction.

The plan is to establish

four private early education schools across different regions of Muscat. Two schools are slated for the Mabela area, one in the Al Khoudh area of Seeb, and one in the Al Awabi area of Bausher.

The plan includes establishment of two private early education schools in different regions of Dhofar. One school is slated for Al Morouj and the other in the Sahalnut area of Salalah.

The ministry confirmed that the investments are for a 30-year period, subject to renewal, and fees exemption for a period of two years.

Bidders must be Omani citizens, aged 23 years or older at the time of bidding. If bidding as a company, it must have a stake of least 30% held by Omani or GCC national, the official explained.

To participate in the auction, interested parties must register through the electronic system of the Real Estate Development Services Centre, using their ID number or commercial register.



Subvariant of COVID found in Kuwait

bins.

The platform will use computer vision to scan, identify, inspect, classify and report bin-related service defaults. The platform will also empower be'ah service providers with actionable intelligence to address areas requiring immediate attention via a secure system that enables real-time data collection and reporting. In the long run, the platform will allow be'ah to analyse data clusters, trends and service delivery issues.

At the signing of the MoU, Ahmed Mohammed al Aamri, General Manager for Digital Transformation and Cybersecurity at be'ah, said, "We are excited about this partnership with Rihal as it allows us to integrate innovative technologies into our waste management practices. By emulating the cognitive capabilities of be'ah, the platform will efficiently monitor and inspect bins, reducing manual inspection time and improving waste collection."

Kuwait City, Kuwait - Kuwait's Ministry of Health announced on Tuesday detecting EG.5, a COVID variant belonging to a subset of the virus. In a statement, the ministry noted that the 'expected' detection was not 'alarming', as the mutant bug was spotted in around 50 countries. EG.5, which has been unofficially nicknamed 'Eris' online.

It seems to be more transmissible than other circulating variants, likely due to a mutation in its spike protein, and the WHO said it has shown an ability to evade immunity. But there is no sign that EG.5 causes more severe COVID symptoms.

It poses a "low" risk to global public health, the WHO said, comparing its threat to other recent Omicron subvariants. Nonetheless, WHO chief Tedros Ghebreyesus warned that "the risk remains of a more dangerous variant emerging that could cause a sudden increase in cases and deaths".

Seven dolphin species identified in Musandam marine survey

Our Correspondent Muscat

Preliminary results of a research project surveying marine mammal species in the Musandam governorate has revealed the presence of seven distinct dolphin species. These include the spinner dolphin, striped dolphin, Indian Ocean humpback dolphin, and both long-beaked and spotted common dolphins.

Aida bint Khalaf al Jabri, who leads the project team from Environment Authority (EA), in-

formed that this study which commenced in 2023 aims to span three years. Its goal is to discern the number and distribution of marine mammals in the governorate. It will also assist in the establishment of a comprehensive database detailing marine mammal viewing sites, she stated.

Elaborating on the research methodology, Aida explained that the team covered approximately 621km during the project's inaugural phase. Field surveys utilised a structured approach with parallel lines encir-

cling Musandam's National Natural Park Reserve. With each line stretching around 10km, the team successfully completed 21 such lines. This endeavour saw collaboration from various departments within the EA and the involvement of several official bodies and civil society organisations.

Aida informed that the second phase will start in the year's final quarter. It will be preceded by workshops aimed at educating local fishermen, tourism enterprises and women's associations about the survey's



findings. "These workshops will also aim to encourage community involvement in reporting

and monitoring regional marine mammal activities."

Highlighting the significance

of multi-entity collaboration, Majid bin Ahmed al Shehhi, a specialist from the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, underscored the directorate's role in emphasising the value of marine mammal conservation to local fishermen. He stressed the importance of notifying experts when any marine mammal, especially whales and dolphins, are spotted, and of recognising fishing sites that overlap with marine mammal survey areas.

Ali bin Saeed al Shehhi, from

the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, emphasised the ministry's commitment to fostering developmental projects that promote marine conservation. He said that familiarising tourists with marine life conservation efforts is vital, urging them to enjoy marine activities like diving and kayaking without disturbing the ecosystem.

Many marine mammals are at risk. The International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List cites six marine mammal species in Musandam's waters as endangered.

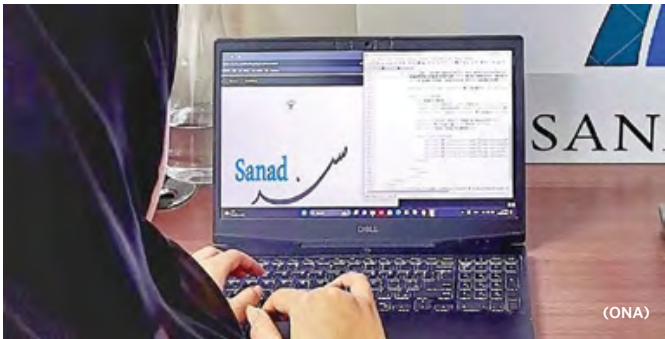
Ibri students develop site for autistic children

Our Correspondent Muscat

An innovative platform developed by students of University of Technology and Applied Sciences Ibri is making waves for its potential to assist children with autism.

Called Sanad, the student team has been lauded for the ingenuity of the project. Hajar Khaled al Zaidia, the team's leader, described the platform as a comprehensive website containing meticulously curated audio and video clips. Its objective is to improve the skills of autistic children, enabling them to assimilate into society, become independent and discover their innate talent.

Delving deeper into the platform's broader goals, Hajar said, "It is designed to assess the actual experiences of children on the autism spectrum, understanding the challenges they often encounter in getting appropriate therapy. With parents' access to this platform, they can tap into specialised physical treatments formulated by experts."



standing the challenges they often encounter in getting appropriate therapy. With parents' access to this platform, they can tap into specialised physical treatments formulated by experts."

The team's efforts haven't gone unnoticed, having showcased their work at multiple exhibitions, receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees and the broader community. It has also hosted numerous workshops, lectures and exhibitions in conjunction with INJAZ Oman, which partners with educational institutions, targeting individuals aged 11 to 25, thereby enriching the students' experience.

Sanad is in talks with Omani Autism Society and the National Centre for Autism, exploring potential synergies and avenues to refine the platform.

Looking ahead, the team intends to enhance the platform and form a dedicated support team to nurture and foster identified talents in children.

Integrated transport hub for Nizwa soon

Muscat - The Governorate of Dakhliyah, in collaboration with Mwasalat, is inviting bids for an ambitious public transport facility in Nizwa. This integrated station for buses and taxis will ensure smoother transportation within and outside the city.

Spread over 11,412sqm, the project will include a passenger waiting area, shaded parking for taxis, public parking area and various commercial outlets aiming to create employment opportunities in the region.

The project's investment duration has been set for 50 years. Last date to submit bids is December 17.

The project is part of the Governorate Development Programme, which witnessed a substantial funding boost from RO10mn to RO20mn by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. This increment is earmarked for each governorate in the ongoing Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) starting from 2022.

Besides the transportation project, Dakhliyah has a slew of development works in the pipeline. Earlier this year, the governorate sought proposals for 17 projects, including public parks, leisure zones and livestock barns. An official of the governorate



The project is part of the Governorate Development Programme, which witnessed a substantial funding boost from RO10mn to RO20mn by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq

Nizwa's Tanuf Park, spread over 10,789sqm, is also on the bidding list, as are livestock barns in Nizwa and Manah.

Additionally, Manah is slated to get a new municipal park of 7,787sqm area, with a dedicated zone for bicycles and electric scooters, which will take up 448sqm of Manah Public Park.

Also in the pipeline are cafes in Nizwa and Jabal Akhdar to be made available on lease.

informed that three recreational facilities, ranging from 2,500sqm to 9,000sqm, are in the pipeline for the wilayat of Al Hamra.

Additionally, agricultural nurseries are planned in Nizwa and Izki, covering areas of 560sqm and 1,439sqm, respectively.

Municipality frees 760sqm of land from encroachments in Musannah

Our Correspondent Muscat

South Batinah Municipality has removed encroachments spread over 760sqm in Musannah.

A statement from the municipality said several infringements were identified in the wilayat, notably involving a substantial area of land used primarily for agricultural purposes. It responded promptly, employing both legal and procedural measures to rectify the situation.

It stated that the approach to handling such cases vary based on the situation. Initially, individuals found in violation are informed and advised to cease their encroachment. However, if compliance is not observed, the municipality takes necessary measures to evict occupants



based on existing regulations, or forwards the case to the appropriate authorities for intervention.

The decision to remove any encroachment comes after a thorough verification process, ensuring that no existing legal ownership documents are held by the alleged violators. As a preventive measure, the municipality places a notice at the contested site, urging the individual or party involved to produce any ownership evidence before the municipality.

If there is no response from the violator, local community leaders, including the area sheikh, are approached to assist in locating the land's owner. If the encroacher remains unreachable, a case is initiated against the unidentified party. Such cases are managed by the department of the competent directorate, concluding with a referral to the Public Prosecution, which then determines the appropriate resolution, often leading to an eviction order.

400 to take part in mountain race 'Run and Explore' in Jabal Akhdar on Friday

Our Correspondent Muscat

Dakhliyah governorate, in cooperation with the organisers of Himam Trail Run, will organise a race called 'Run and Explore' on August 18 in which close to 400 people are expected to participate.

Assem Abdullah al Saqri, head of the Himam Trail Run team, informed that the race will have two categories. The first is for adults, a 10km race on a route starting from the village of Saiq, passing through neighbouring villages before ending at Sih Qatanna Park.

"The second category is a 4km race for 12 to 15-year-olds. It will be flagged off from Hail al Yaman and end at Sih Qatanna Park. Race supervisors will provide nutrition, technical support, physical fitness checks and medical aid to participants," Saqri informed.

"The race aims to highlight the tourist and natural features of Jabal Akhdar."

The fourth edition of the Himam Trail Run will be held from November 23 to 25 with hundreds of trail running enthusiasts and professionals expected from more than 50 countries.

WEATHER WATCH		
	Max	Min
Muscat	32	25
Abu Dhabi	43	30
Doha	41	31
Kuwait City	37	29
Manama	41	32
Riyadh	44	29

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	4.23am
Sunrise	5.43am
Duhr	12.16pm
Asr	3.42pm
Maghrib	6.45pm
Isha	8.00pm

SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO

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ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date For Collection Of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2988/2023	General maintenance in Yanqul hospital and public health in Yunqul	Thursday 31/ Aug /2023	Before 9 am on Monday 18/ Sep /2023	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board-fourth grade.	R.O 25/= Per set

Notes:-

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The DGHS is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

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

Any Clarification, you may contact via

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MAFWR invites local companies to bid for construction of three dams before Sept 6

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources (MAFWR) is inviting local companies to construct three dams in North Sharqiyah and South Batinah governorates in a bid to enhance agricultural investments in Oman.

With a final submission date set for September 6, two primary tenders have been released. The first involves the construction of two underground recharge dams in the wadis of Umda and Al-Ghubaira in the wilayat of Dima Wa Al Taien in North Sharqiyah. The second one focuses on another underground recharge dam in Rustaq in South Batinah.

By bolstering the nation's water capacity, the ministry aims to further support farmers and extend the agricultural reach while working on a self-sufficient model. This initiative is part of the ministry's broader strategy, which has already seen the development of various dams across the country.

Discussing these efforts, a

By bolstering the nation's water capacity, the ministry aims to further support farmers, and extend the agricultural reach while working on a self-sufficient model

ministry official shared insights on additional undertakings, revealing plans for maintenance at the Wadi Salhnut dam in Salalah and the surface storage facilities in Wadi Al Dar and Al Duwairat dams in Rustaq.

Additionally, the ministry has opened bids for the design and construction of a port in Haramel village, Muscat, and rehabilitate the fishing port in Raysut, Salalah.

Highlighting the significance of these projects, the official pointed out that Oman's ground-water constitutes 94% of its

WORK BEGINS ON RO2.5MN WATER PROJECT IN YANQUL



Muscat - Namaa Water Services on Wednesday announced the commencement of a water network project in Al Ulu, in the wilayat of Yanqul, Dhahirah governorate.

The project budget has been placed at an estimated RO2.5mn.

During a media gathering at the wali's office in Yanqul, Eng Badr bin Salem al Rabaani, project manager at Namaa Water, detailed the timeline, stating that the project work, which began in July this year, will take 18 months for completion.

The construction will feature a distribution network spanning 75km accompanied by 700 connections in response to the area's urban growth.

Initially, 4,200 residents will benefit from the implementation of this project. It will cover 10,000 residents in the foreseeable future, officials added.

fresh water resources. Numerous exploratory drillings, including the Masarat water basin, Sharqiyah Sands water basin, Runab water basin, and Najd

basin projects are currently underway to tap into these reserves. According to MAFWR, the country grapples with a water

deficit of 316mn cubic metre annually. The increasing strain on the available 1,318mn cubic metre of renewable water, especially from an agricultural sector

consuming around 83% of the nation's yearly water needs, underscores the urgency of such projects. To date, Oman has con-

structed 181 dams, of which 63 are underground feeders, 115 surface storage sites, and three are protective dams, all aimed at improving water security.

EA removes over 7,000 mesquite trees

Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 7,000 mesquite trees were removed from the roots in the wilayat of Salalah in Dhofar governorate so far, according to the Environment Authority (EA). "The authority has begun the second phase of the campaign in Dhofar governorate to remove mesquite trees from the reserves stretching from Khor Al Mughas-sil in the wilayat of Salalah to Khor Rori in the wilaya of Taqa," an EA official said.

"More than 7,000 trees have been removed so far. The campaign aims to preserve the natural environment and protect livestock."

The authority members regularly burn the pestilent shrubs



and trees for a lasting solution, and in the mission often face the challenges due to strong winds that raise the chances of fire spreading to vegetation in the immediate surrounding.

The EA official explained that

this species of the tree needs to be removed regularly, as it is a "menace that threatens indigenous flora, competing for water and soil nutrients".

Leaves of mesquite shrubs and trees contain a toxic sub-

stance, and the thorns cause serious injury to human beings.

According to the official, mesquite pollen has been identified as a respiratory allergen, and consumption of the pods by animals leads to teeth decay. The shrubs and trees also affect soil salinity.

While removing harmful shrubs and trees, the EA official affirmed the need for simultaneous afforestation so as to increase the green cover in Oman. "We encourage parents to inculcate a culture of environmentalism in children by joining our initiatives and growing trees."

"We call upon people to cooperate in the authority's endeavours to save the environment," he appealed, while thanking those supporting them.

Muscat Municipality opts for native trees for greening

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality is ushering in a greener future for the governorate by opting for native trees in public spaces.

Recognising the inherent resilience of these local species, the municipality has chosen them for plantation in areas such as walkways, gardens, parks and on the roadsides.

These trees are especially suited to the region, known for their ability to withstand drought, high temperatures, and sporadic



rainfall.

Part of the landscaping also involves removing harmful and invasive trees that threaten the country's water resources and

eliminate other alien species disrupting the local ecosystem.

The initiative is not just about planting; it is also about strategic removal of harmful and invasive

trees that jeopardise the country's water resources. In a nod to sustainable practices, removed trees are not just discarded they are turned as organic fertilisers.

"By recycling tree residues, the municipality ensures that they are repurposed into environmentally friendly nourishment for other plants", officials said.

"This process integrates environmental preservation with sustainability," said municipality. "Our goal is to foster a city that is not only vibrant and green but also healthy, clean, and devoid of pollutants," it added.

CPA raids two firms for commercial fraud in Dhahirah governorate

Muscat - The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) on Wednesday raided two shops in Dhahirah for violating the Consumer Protection Law.

"The Department of Consumer Protection in Dhahirah closed two shops after they were

caught tampering with vehicle engine filters by placing counterfeit filters in boxes meant to contain well-known brands," CPA stated.

It called upon consumers to report any such suspected practice in the sultanate.



Mobile lab in Khareef Dhofar for food safety

Muscat - In a bid to ensure the well-being of visitors attending Khareef Dhofar, a cutting-edge solution has been launched by Dhofar Municipality to monitor food safety and compliance.

The mobile food laboratory - a pioneering initiative - has been introduced to swiftly analyse food and beverage samples on-site, ensuring vendors meet the highest standards of safety and hygiene.

According to Dhofar Municipality, one of the key advantages of the laboratory lies in its ability to expedite the analysis process.

Instead of relying on time-consuming conventional tests, the lab can quickly evaluate samples on-site.

This efficient approach ensures that corrective measures can be taken promptly if any deviations from safety standards are detected.

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Oman receives world's first liquefied hydrogen carrier

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman on Wednesday received at Sultan Qaboos Port the world's first liquefied hydrogen carrier ship 'Suiso Frontier' as part of the Japanese tanker's regional tour in the Middle East.

H E Eng Salim Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, alongside officials from the sectors of hydrogen, transport and logistics, toured the carrier ship's facilities.

They also toured the hydrogen transfer control room, which was notably augmented with cutting-edge reality technology. This innovative feature displayed the scenarios of transporting liquefied hydrogen on a commercial scale, besides the economic feasibility of transport projects.

H E Auqi said that the visit comes within the framework of getting familiarised with the capabilities of transporting hydrogen and the challenges faced by the carrier. The visit also aims to review the company's future plans in building huge hydrogen carriers to meet increasing international demand during the upcoming stage.

The minister also pointed out that Oman has come a long way in the hydrogen field and strives to become among the first countries that export green hydrogen to various parts of the world, as well as utilising green hydrogen



in local industries as a substitute for gas.

H E Jota Yamamoto, ambassador of Japan to Oman, said the carrier's visit to Oman contributes to enhancing bilateral relations in all fields, especially in the energy and hydrogen fields. He also underscored the importance of the availability of hydrogen carriers to connect suppliers

with the market.

Moreover, the carrier ship 'Suiso Frontier' was manufactured by the Japanese company Kawasaki Heavy Industries and it is operated by Shell Japan.

The ship is considered a significant experimental station, notably catalysing research and development in the hydrogen domain. Suiso Frontier ferries

substantial hydrogen volumes, with cargo capacity reaching 1,250 cubic meters. The financial expenditure in the construction of this ship has been appraised at approximately US\$359mn.

Meanwhile, Oman strengthened its position in green hydrogen projects by signing several projects to produce 750,000 tonnes of green hydrogen with

an investment value of \$30bn in the initial bidding phase.

Oman inaugurated three concession areas within the Governorate of Dhofar within the second bidding phase which are expected to be awarded by the end of the first quarter of 2024.

The sultanate's future ambitions include producing more than 1mn tonnes by 2030 and 8mn tonnes by 2050.

Japan stands as a key strategic partner to Oman, particularly in the energy domain. This strategic partnership was solidified through the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation in January 2023.

This collaboration between Oman and Japan encompasses a spectrum of sectors, including hydrogen, ammonia fuel, carbon recycling, and modern methodologies used in methane production.

TotalEnergies says gas exploration rig arrives off Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon - French firm TotalEnergies said Wednesday that a drilling rig had reached Lebanese waters ahead of exploration for offshore gas reserves, months after a landmark accord demarcating the Lebanon-Israel maritime border.

"TotalEnergies, the operator of Block 9, announces the arrival of the drilling rig, Transocean Barents, on the block, at around 120km off the coast of Beirut," a statement said, adding that a transport helicopter had also reached Beirut airport.

Beirut divided its exclusive economic zone at sea into 10 blocks, and Block 9 was part of an area disputed with Israel.

"The arrival of the equipment marks an important step in the preparation of the drilling of the exploration well in Block 9, which will begin towards the end of August," TotalEnergies added.

In October last year, a US-mediated maritime border agreement between Lebanon and



A picture taken on August 16, 2023 shows a helicopter next to the emblem of TotalEnergies during the inauguration ceremony of a logistics base at Beirut international airport to host helicopters slated for servicing a drilling rig for gas exploration in Block 9 off the coast of Lebanon (AFP)

Israel opened up potentially lucrative offshore gas fields for the eastern Mediterranean neighbours.

Block 9 contains the so-called Qana field or Sidon reservoir, parts of which fall in Israel's territorial waters. Under the deal,

Lebanon gained full rights to operate and explore Qana, but Israel will receive compensation from the firm operating the reservoir.

There are still no proven gas deposits there, but a 2012 seismic study by the British firm Spectrum estimated Lebanon's

recoverable gas reserves at 719.2bn cubic metres (25.4tn cubic feet).

Lebanese officials have announced higher estimates.

"A new page has been written today. When the logistical team is ready in a few days, drilling will

begin," Energy Minister Walid Fayad said.

The results will be known in two to three months, he added.

Since late 2019, Lebanon has been caught in an economic collapse that has plunged most of its population into poverty and been described by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern history.

The country is plagued by chronic power cuts and has at times seen fuel shortages.

Many Lebanese politicians have expressed hope that gas exploration can offer a way out of the economic crisis, as officials fail to implement reforms demanded by international creditors in return for bailout funds.

But analysts have warned Beirut cannot count on gas alone to ease its economic woes, and that it will take several years to begin exploiting the Qana field, should a commercially viable discovery be made.

AFP



Omantel Group's H1 profit rises 31% to RO169mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) announced that its group net profit increased by 31.3% year-on-year for the six-month period ended June 30, 2022.

Omantel Group reported a net profit of RO168.9mn for the first six months of 2023 compared to RO128.6mn posted in the corresponding period of 2022. After adjusting for minority interest, the net profit for the six-month period is RO38.5mn, compared to RO34.6mn in 2022, an increase of 11.2%, according to Omantel's financial results submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Group revenues increased by 11.2% to RO1.439bn during the January - June period of this year from RO1.294bn recorded in the same period last year. Omantel's group revenue includes the acquired business of Zain Group, which contributed RO1.149bn in group revenues in the first half of 2023.

Omantel Group's total operating expenses (including depreciation) increased to RO709.4mn in the first half of 2023 from RO631.4mn for the corresponding period of 2022, an increase of 12.3%.

Domestic performance

As per the company's financial report, Omantel's net profit from domestic operations remained almost stable for the first half of this year.

The company's domestic net profit came in at RO39.8mn in the January - June period of 2023 compared to RO40.2mn reported for the same period of the previous year.

'Despite aggressive competition in both mobile and fixed segments, net profit is maintained at similar levels compared to last year due to sustainable revenue growth in postpaid mobile revenue, fixed broadband revenue, and a reduction in financing costs,' Omantel said.

The company's revenues from domestic operations increased by 10.3% to RO305.4mn for the first six months of 2023, com-

pared to RO276.8mn in the same period a year ago.

Omantel noted that revenue growth mainly came from wholesale transit voice revenue, which increased by 37.7%, and device revenue, which increased by 56%. 'Besides this, growth was also achieved in core revenues coming from mobile post-paid revenue, which increased by 11.1%, and fixed broadband revenues, which increased by 4%,' the company said.

Omantel's domestic mobile market share (including mobile resellers) currently stands at 47.5%, while the fixed telephone (post and prepaid) market share is at 72.8%.

Omantel's revenues from domestic operations increased 10.3% to RO305.4mn for the first six months of 2023, compared to RO276.8mn in the same period a year ago

Subscriber base grows

Omantel's total domestic subscriber base as of June 2023 (including mobile and fixed businesses) rose to 3.3mn (excluding mobile resellers), compared to 3.1mn a year ago, an increase of 5.6%.

The company's total subscriber base with mobile resellers reached 3.8mn as of June 30, 2023.

Zain Group's total subscriber base as of June 2023 was at 53.4mn compared to 51.7mn in the corresponding period of the previous year, an increase of 3.3% over the last year.

Zain Group's revenues grew by 12.4% to RO1.149bn during the first half of 2023, compared to RO1.022bn in the same period of 2022. Zain Group's net profit grew by 39% to RO188.1mn during the January - June period of 2023, compared to RO135.4mn in the corresponding period last year.

Norway's sovereign wealth fund earns €131bn in H1

Oslo, Norway - Oil producer Norway's sovereign wealth fund earned €131bn in the first half of the year, the country's central bank said on Tuesday.

The performance, lifted by the financial markets, represented a return of 10% and helped boost the fund's value to 15,299bn kroner (€1,332bn) at the end of June.

In six months, the fund has almost wiped out the huge 1,637bn kroner loss in-

curring last year as a result of the war in Ukraine and the global economic downturn.

Norway's wealth fund is the world's biggest, according to the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, just ahead of two Chinese funds.

Fuelled by revenues from Norway's state-owned oil and gas companies, the fund is aimed at financing future spending in the generous welfare state.

Since the start of the year, the vast fund has also

benefited from the weakening of the krone, which has increased the value of assets held in dollars, euros and other foreign currencies.

In total, the fund's value increased by 2,870bn kroner over the first six months of the year.

Norges Bank had been set to publish the half-year results on Wednesday, but they were mistakenly sent to the media late Tuesday.

AFP

Oil prices decline on bleak China data

Muscat - Oil prices inched lower on Wednesday, influenced by weak economic data from China, the world's largest oil importer.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$84.86 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 0.04% drop from the closing price of \$84.89 per barrel on Tuesday.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at \$80.92 per barrel, down 0.09% from Tuesday's session close of \$80.99 per barrel.

The most recent data from China exacerbated fears of a slowing economy in the post-Covid period, sending oil prices



lower in anticipation of weaker oil demand.

Data released last week in China showed a decrease in imports of major industrial raw materials in July, a new sign of the

fragility of the country's economic recovery. Other statistics revealed a decrease in the country's imports of crude oil, iron, steel, copper and coal over the last seven months.

In addition, retail sales and industrial production in the country were below expectations, increasing concerns about the country's economic growth.

Meanwhile, the American Petroleum Institute released crude oil inventory expectations late Tuesday. Inventories in the US fell by about 6.2mn barrels last week, signaling a rise in demand in the world's largest oil consumer and limiting oil price declines.

The US Energy Information Administration will release official oil stock data later in the day. In the case of a fall in stocks, a rise in oil prices is expected.

Agencies

China says economic recovery set to be a bumpy process

Beijing, China – China said on Wednesday its economic recovery "will be a bumpy and tortuous process", but insisted Western critics "will for sure be proven wrong".

The comments follow a raft of recent figures that have stoked concerns over China's stuttering post-Covid recovery, and after US President Joe Biden said the country's mounting economic problems made it a "ticking time bomb".

"After the smooth transition of the epidemic prevention and control, China's economic recovery is a wave-like development and a tortuous process, which will inevitably face difficulties and problems," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular news conference.

"A number of Western politicians and media have hyped up the periodic problems in China's post-epidemic economic recovery process. But eventually, they will for sure be proven wrong," he added.



China's unemployment among 16-24-year-olds hit a record 21.3% in June

Retail sales, a key gauge of consumption, grew 2.5% year-on-year in July, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Tuesday, down from 3.1% in June and falling short of analyst expectations.

The NBS also said it would no longer release age-specific unemployment data, citing the need to "further improve and optimise labour force survey statistics".

The decision sparked a social media backlash on Tuesday, with internet users accusing the authorities of attempting to hide the extent of rising youth joblessness.

Unemployment among 16- to 24-year-olds hit a record 21.3% in June.

Overall unemployment rose to 5.3% in July compared with 5.2% in June, while industrial production grew 3.7% in July from a year ago, down from 4.4% in June.

Chinese leaders have sought to boost domestic consumption in recent weeks, with the State Council releasing a 20-point plan last month to encourage citizens to spend more in sectors including vehicles, tourism and home appliances.

The country's top brass has warned that the economy faces "new difficulties and challenges" as well as "hidden dangers in key areas".

"But we never shy away from problems, we have taken proactive measures to solve problems, and the results have been or are being seen," the foreign ministry's Wang said.

'Time bomb'

Recent data suggests China may struggle to achieve the five per cent growth target it set for the year, with the economy growing just 0.8% between the first and second quarters of 2023, according to official figures.

Speaking at a fundraising event last week, Biden had pointed to the country's high unemployment and ageing workforce, saying "China is in trouble".

The world's second-largest economy slipped into deflation for the first time in more than two years in July, due to waning consumption and flagging exports.

While cheaper goods may appear beneficial for purchasing power, falling prices can actually lead to decreased demand, fuelling a vicious cycle that drags down the wider economy.

AFP

US Fed 'not ready' for end of rate hikes

Washington, US – US inflation may finally be moving in the right direction, but the Federal Reserve shouldn't declare victory just yet, a member of the Fed's interest rate-setting committee said Tuesday.

"I'm not ready to say that we're done, but I'm seeing positive signs," Minneapolis Fed President Neel Kashkari told a conference in the city.

The Fed has raised interest rates 11 times since last year to tame high inflation, which surged above the US central bank's long-term target of two per cent.

But while inflation has come down sharply in recent months, it remains stuck above the Fed's target – especially when stripping out volatile food and energy prices.

With inflation heading in the right direction, the Fed could now afford to "take a little bit more time to get some more data in before we decide whether we need to do more," Kashkari said Tuesday.

Futures traders currently assign a probability of close to



Neel Kashkari

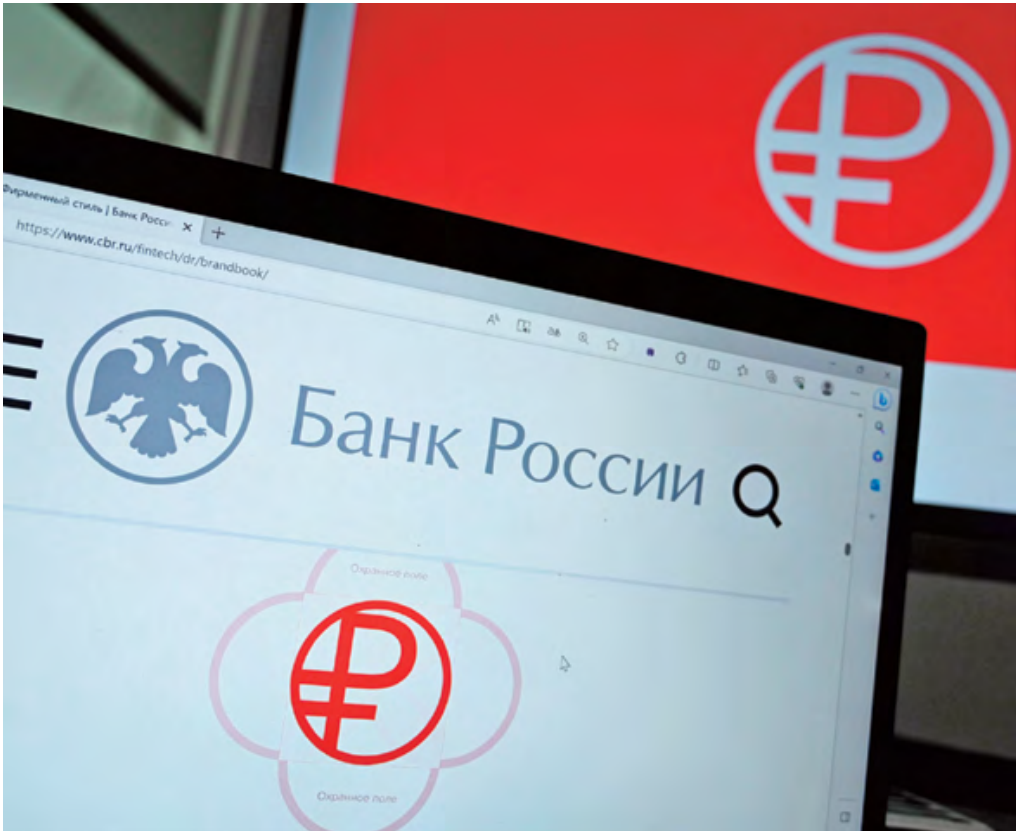
90% that the Fed will vote to hold interest rates steady at its next rate-setting meeting next month, according to data from CME Group.

"I want to see convincing evidence that inflation is well on its way back down to two percent, and then it needs some time to run," Kashkari said in response to a question about when the Fed would begin to cut rates.

He added that the Fed could begin cutting its headline or "nominal" interest rate next year if price increases continue to slow, which would in effect hold the "real," inflation-adjusted interest rate steady.

AFP

Russia tests digital ruble in bid to bypass sanctions



This photograph taken on Tuesday, shows the logo of a new Russian digital ruble displaying on the laptop screen in Moscow (AFP)

Moscow, Russia – Russia began testing its new digital ruble with consumers on Tuesday, in the hope blockchain technology will help it evade sanctions and tighten control over its citizens.

The testing phase comes as the ruble lingers at its lowest level against the dollar since March 2022, weeks after Moscow launched its full-scale offensive in Ukraine.

While Moscow has been mulling the idea of creating a digital currency for years, development of the digital ruble took off after Western sanctions blocked Russia from parts of the global banking system.

Russia joins 20 other countries worldwide that have entered the pilot stage of launching a digital currency, according to a tally from the Atlantic Council think tank.

Moscow's aim is clear: to make its financial system more flexible and limit the impact of international restrictions.

"It will enhance Russia's ability to evade sanctions," said Mikkel Morch, founder of crypto-focused investment fund ARK36.

He said the move will allow Russia to avoid banks where it faces restrictions, and that the blockchain is "much less easy to sanction and attack".

Most Russian banks have been banned from the main system used for international trans-

actions, pushing Moscow to look for other ways to de-dollarise.

The creation of the digital currency, Morch said, is "part of a geopolitical war between pro-dollar countries and anti-dollar countries", in which the latter are trying to rid themselves of the US currency for trading.

In October 2020, the Russian central bank said it wanted a digital ruble "to make payments secure, protected, fast, convenient, and accessible for any individual anywhere across Russia".

Morch said, however, that digitising the ruble would give authorities "immense control" over Russians.

It could be used as "the ultimate social control tool", he warned, giving the government the power to issue fines or freeze assets with "the click of a button".

In Russia, it is the FSB security service that oversees the safety of the digital ruble's financial architecture.

Some NGOs have already warned against possible abuse.

"In the wrong hands, this data could be used to spy on citizens' private transactions," researchers from the Atlantic Council have warned.

Russians not convinced

Ordinary Russians are not yet sold on the idea of actually using

the digital ruble, with many cautious about its effectiveness and safety.

According to a survey by state-owned pollster VCIOM, around six out of 10 Russians have a "weak understanding" of the government's aims and are not ready to use the currency.

Economist Sofia Donets said ordinary Russians and companies are unlikely to feel much change in their daily lives during the testing phase.

Despite fears the scheme could be abused, Donets said Moscow was trying "not to lag behind in the global (financial) context".

To convince wary Russians, authorities have promised its use will be voluntary.

They also argue it will make the lives of Russians easier and more convenient.

One senior lawmaker, Anatoly Aksakov, said it would allow parents to have greater control over how their children spend their pocket money.

"For instance, you give money to a child who goes to school, saying it can only be spent on breakfast, buying books or textbooks," Aksakov told a government paper.

"No matter how great the desire of the user to spend it on other purposes, it will be impossible to do."

AFP



Gulf International Chemicals SAOG

(An ISO 9001:2008 Certified Company)

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Gulf International Chemicals SAOG (GIC), I am pleased to present you a brief report on the company's activities for the second quarter of 2023

The Group's total revenue for the period under review was RO 930,509. The net profit after taxation amounted to RO 44,840 and the net asset per share stood at 125 Baiza

During the second quarter of 2023, regional construction markets continued the slow pace. Both Oman and UAE markets are in oversupply and less demand situation for construction chemicals due to sharp reduction in construction projects which is mainly attributable to limited government spending on construction and infrastructure projects.

However, major raw material prices and disruptions in global supply chain have shown better stability during the period. The construction chemicals industry globally has gone through tough times in the last 2-3 years which led to major consolidations (mergers and acquisitions) in the industry which in turn will have its consequences in our regional markets soon.

The outlook for the remaining of year 2023 is very conservative due to the competition from international companies which is expected to put further pressure on margins. The improvement in purchasing power will not be rapid in the construction sector in our local markets, as it is mainly linked to the improvement of regional circumstances and improvement in the local investment climate and the real estate market.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty's Government for its generous support and for paving the way for growth and prosperity.

Best Regards,

Chairman

CONSOLIDATED UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2023 (EXPRESSED IN OMANI RIALS)

	Group 2023	Group 2022
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	101,165	143,110
Right-of-use assets	11,787	8,756
Intangible asset	63,251	71,163
Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	210,892	514,736
Deferred tax asset	74,017	80,232
Total non-current assets	<u>461,112</u>	<u>817,997</u>
Current assets		
Inventories	294,082	293,617
Trade and other receivables	1,217,901	1,141,480
Term deposits	650,000	-
Cash and bank balances	391,094	827,446
Total current assets	<u>2,553,077</u>	<u>2,262,544</u>
Total assets	<u>3,014,188</u>	<u>3,080,541</u>
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	2,100,000	2,100,000
Legal reserve	599,722	598,850
Fair value reserve	(191,066)	(123,747)
Revaluation reserve	50,110	50,110
Retained earnings	64,590	(2,010)
Total capital and reserves	<u>2,623,356</u>	<u>2,623,203</u>
Non-current liabilities		
Lease liabilities	12,251	8,053
Employees' benefit liabilities	89,701	77,716
Total non-current liabilities	<u>101,952</u>	<u>85,769</u>
Current liabilities		
Lease liabilities	967	914
Trade and other payables	284,959	370,655
Income tax payable	2,954	-
Total current liabilities	<u>288,880</u>	<u>371,569</u>
Total liabilities	<u>390,832</u>	<u>457,338</u>
Total equity and liabilities	<u>3,014,188</u>	<u>3,080,541</u>
Net assets per share (OMR)	<u>0.125</u>	<u>0.125</u>

CONSOLIDATED UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2023 (EXPRESSED IN OMANI RIALS)

	Group 2023	Group 2022
Revenue from contracts with customers	930,509	1,044,127
Cost of sales	(631,727)	(860,809)
Gross profit	298,782	183,318
Other income	24,466	23,970
	<u>323,248</u>	<u>207,288</u>
Expenses		
General and administrative expenses	(199,291)	(168,110)
Selling and distribution expenses	(82,060)	(65,290)
Profit from operations	<u>41,897</u>	<u>(26,111)</u>
Finance income	13,552	6,534
Finance cost	(362)	(570)
Profit before tax for the period	55,087	(20,147)
Taxation	(10,247)	-
Net profit after tax for the period	<u>44,840</u>	<u>(20,147)</u>
Earnings per share	<u>0.002</u>	<u>(0.001)</u>

INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE DAY

ISD refers to Indian President Murmu's address

Together with the rest of Indian citizens in Oman, Indian School Darsait marked the 77th Independence Day of their country on Tuesday with patriotic songs and other activities scripting the celebration of the day.

'A host of activities were conducted to commemorate great sacrifices of Indian freedom fighters to gain priceless freedom that reshaped our destiny and also to instill national pride in young minds,' said a press release.

Vijaya Saravanan Sankaran, president of the School Management Committee (SMC), was the chief guest of the event that witnessed the presence of other members of the SMC, the principal, staff, students, parents and well-wishers of the school.

Addressing the gathering, Sankaran read out the excerpts of the message delivered by India's President Droupadi



Murmu on the eve of the Independence Day.

In her address to the nation, the President called upon the fellow citizens to understand their fundamental duties towards the country. She urged to move forward in a spirit of harmony and brotherhood to realize the dreams of the builders of the nation. She also mentioned that we are in the Amrit Kaal

period and we need to develop the nation by 2047.

The chief guest appealed the gathering to their nationalistic spirit and urged them to take pride in being an Indian and fulfilling one's duty with responsibility. He also emphasised the role of youth today as the true wealth of a country. He further reiterated the need to nurture and care for the environment.

True stories of valour are not forgotten, they stay immortal in our hearts and in the pages of history. The joyous celebration commenced with India's national anthem followed by welcome address by the head boy, Aby Jacob Varghese.

Children from various classes participated with great enthusiasm and exuberance. The rendition of the Patriotic songs and medley by junior and senior school students relished patriotic fervour to the core.

'The 77th Independence Day's theme 'Nation First, Always First' is a powerful reminder of the responsibility we all share in ensuring the continued growth and prosperity of our nation,' the school stated.

'A beautiful Skit *Vatan ki Mitti* by the primary students was a short glimpse of Bhagat Singh's life that made one witness the brimming patriotic zeal and pride. Gaiety and enthusiasm found its vent in a graceful dance performance which was indeed a fitting tribute to our motherland depicting cultural heritage and diversity of the country,' the school further informed.

The programme came to an end with a vote of thanks from Aysha Davood, the head girl.

'This year's celebration was truly a memorable one efficaciously creating an ambience of patriotism, unity, integrity and harmony,' ISD stated.

Vibrant hues smear Muladha school

Indian School Muladha celebrated the 77th Independence Day of India with great pomp and patriotic fervour. The whole school campus was embellished with tri-colour flags and festoons to commemorate the day.

The chief guest on the occasion was School Management Committee (SMC) president A Anil Kumar. SMC members Dr Faheem Ahmad and T H Arshad, the principal and staff members graced the occasion, a release stated.

The sense of happiness and pride could be clearly seen on the faces of all people who were present on the day. The programme started invoking the blessings of the Almighty by the school choir.

It was followed by the national anthems of Oman and India sung by the school choir.

March Past led by the school



prefects council displayed their sense of dignity and pride and the guard of honour was received by the chief guest.

In his presidential address, Anil Kumar paid homage to the brave martyrs of the country and discussed in brief the significance of Independence Day.

The school principal also addressed the gathering and gave his valuable message.

A cultural extravaganza was presented by the students of various classes. The melodious songs sung by the students of Classes II to VII stole the audience's hearts.

The graceful and frenetic dances performed by the students of Classes V & VI aroused a sense of patriotism in all.

The recital of a Hindi poem by Sumaiya Zeenath of Class XI

Indian School Sur showcases patriotism, unity in diversity

The school premises of Indian School Sur came alive with fervour and patriotism as the institution celebrated the 77th Independence Day with an unforgettable event.

The chief guest for the occasion, Harith Mohammed Ali al Sulti, assistant director of Sur Municipality, graced the event with his presence, accompanied by School Management Committee (SMC) president Jami Srinivas Rao, and SMC members Pradeep Kumar A V and Nishreen Basheer.

The celebration resonated with the theme of unity in diversity, showcasing the rich tapestry of Indian culture and heritage. The event commenced with a solemn invocation, followed by an inspiring portrayal of various freedom fighters by



the primary students. Poem recitations in different languages from across India added a touch of linguistic diversity, underscoring the nation's unity.

Captivating speeches highlighting the significance of Independence Day, delivered proficiently in both English and Hindi, captured the audience's attention. The atmosphere swelled with patriotism as a CCA group song competition

filled the air with resonating melodies of patriotism.

A mime performance vividly showcased India's remarkable achievements, while an energetic group dance infused the gathering with a sense of national pride.

The pinnacle of the event arrived with the distribution of prizes and medals by the chief guest to meritorious students who excelled in various fields.

Omantel brings people together for joyful khareef in Dhofar

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, participates in Khareef Dhofar (monsoon season) with several community initiatives and activities as part of its strategy for corporate social responsibility. These initiatives are aimed at engaging with the local community and visitors in the region and contributing to the promotion of sustainability programs for all segments of society in the Sultanate of Oman.

Omantel's initiatives for this year are part of the 'To Dhofar' campaign launched by the company to showcase its presence in the region as a technology sponsor, along with other corporate social responsibility initiatives. These initiatives include involving individuals with visual impairments, orphans, and children with Down syndrome in collaboration with associations representing these groups in Dhofar in various interactive activities.

Additionally, Omantel focuses on environmental programmes, participating in volunteer efforts for awareness-raising, tree planting, and nature care in collaboration with various community groups.

As part of Omantel's corporate social responsibility strategy, we are focusing on engaging people with special needs within the community and developing their technology skills.

Therefore, Omantel has or-



ganised a training course for individuals with visual impairments in partnership with Al Noor Association for the Blind in Dhofar. The programme aimed to enhance digital literacy for this group and enable them to benefit from technology through specialised training programme on the use of smartphones. The participants received iPhones which are equipped with built-in applications and programmes tailored for the visually impaired. The programme focused on three main areas: Familiarisation with smart devices and their features for the visually impaired, adjusting individual settings, and training on writing, editing, copying, and pasting text on iPhones.

Furthermore, Omantel's corporate social responsibility team organised a workshop on robots and technology for children in collaboration with Bahja Omani Association for Orphans and Kidsity Oman Company.

The workshop aimed to involve orphaned children in various initiatives to make them feel part of the community and enhance their technological knowledge. The children learned about robotics, its components, building and programming their robots, as well as various sensors and their functions. The workshop also focused on developing problem-solving skills through algorithm development and implementation.

CMYF organises blood donation camp

Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF) - a voluntary non-profit organisation - conducted a blood camp on Friday ahead of their favourite South Indian megastar Chiranjeevi's birthday on August 22.

The camp was held at Bausher blood bank, opposite to Royal Hospital, a release stated.

"We received a very good response as more than 100 mem-



bers donated blood," a member of the group said.

CMYF founder-president Ramdas Chandaka thanked and appreciated all who came for this great humanitarian cause.

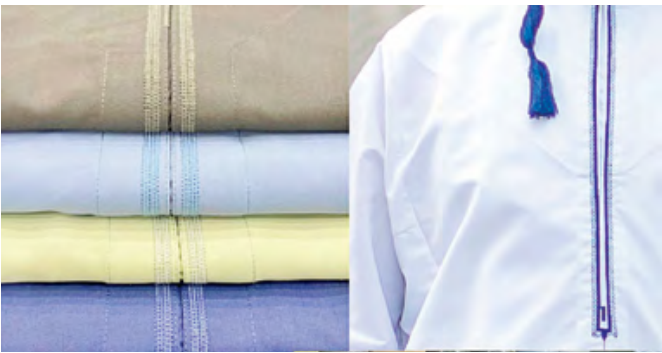
CMYF has been conducting three blood donation camps annually since 2004 at the same venue. It has been honoured by the Ministry of Health in recognition of its humanitarian service.

NaseejOman brings new range of blended dishdasha

NaseejOman, the flagship brand of Oman Textile Mills (OTM), has been at the forefront of innovation in traditional wear, catering to the ever-evolving needs of modern Omani men.

With over three decades of expertise, NaseejOman has re-engineered the traditional dishdasha using inhouse expertise that includes stain-free technology that allows its wearer to maintain a pristine look.

Faseem P P, the Chief Marketing Officer of Oman Textile Mills, says, "Our commitment to excellence and innovation has driven us to push the boundaries of traditional men's wear. With the incorporation of modern technological enhancements, such as stain-free finishes and blending with fibres like Modal, we aim to not only preserve the rich cultural heritage of the dishdasha but also adapt it to the lifestyle of the modern Omani men, providing unparalleled



comfort and convenience."

NaseejOman's finest thobe and dishdasha fabrics cater to the unique preferences across the GCC. With a diverse range of blends and colours, including an extensive collection of white fabrics, NaseejOman leads the way in contemporary dishdasha fashion that is true to its heritage.

Whether it's light or heavy, soft, or stiff, silky, or textured, NaseejOman processes ensure to meet the varying demands of its customers, offering a truly bespoke experience.

NaseejOman's extensive range of blends for thobe and dishdasha include 100% polyester (spun x spun, spun x filament, etc), exclusive cotton-rich blends, and off-late with Modal fibre catering to the diverse tastes of its esteemed customers.

In addition, 100% polyester white gotrah, available in various widths, has garnered immense popularity among the GCC community, setting new standards of excellence in design and finish.

At the heart of NaseejOman's

success lies OTM's state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Rusayl, Muscat. Explaining the stringent manufacturing process, Devraj Mehta - Factory Manager, Oman Textile Mills - says, "Equipped with cutting-edge European and Japanese production lines, including the coveted shuttleless projectile looms, the facility guarantees top-notch craftsmanship and quality. Moreover, the in-house design and technical team offers a bespoke service to create co-branded textile products personalised to meet each customer's unique requirements."

In addition, it also boasts advanced dyeing and finishing machines, screen and digital printing technologies in its Process House, and specialised machinery for high-value embellishments, including computerised embroidery, crystal embossing, gold foiling, and flock printing.

Cargo ship exits Ukraine port despite threat from Russia

Kyiv, Ukraine - Kyiv announced on Wednesday a cargo vessel had exited its southern port of Odesa along a new maritime corridor, despite an earlier warning from Russia it could target vessels using Ukrainian ports.

The announcement, which raises the spectre of an intervention by Russian warships, came hours after Ukraine said it had liberated a village as part of a grinding push to wrest Moscow's forces along the southern front.

Russia issued its maritime threat after scuppering a key deal last month - brokered by the UN and Turkey - that guaranteed safe passage for grain exports from three Ukrainian ports.

"The first vessel is moving along the temporary corridors established for civilian vessels to and from Black Sea ports," Ukraine's Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said in a statement.

He named the vessel as the Hong Kong-flagged Joseph Schulte, and said it had left the port of Odesa - one of three transit hubs that participated in the now-scrapped grain deal.

Since Russia's exit, it has stepped up attacks on Ukraine's Black Sea port infrastructure and facilities Kyiv uses to export grain through the Danube river.

Drones batter Odesa port

In the latest attack, the governor of the Odesa region said on Wednesday that Russian attack



The first cargo ship using new Black Sea shipping lanes is seen leaving the southern port of Odesa on Wednesday (AFP)

The first vessel is moving along the corridors for civilian vessels to and from Black Sea ports

OLEKSANDR KUBRAKOV

drones had damaged grain facilities at a river port near its western border.

The airforce meanwhile said it had downed 13 Russian drones over Odesa and the neighbouring Mykolaiv region.

The incident sparked an outcry in neighbouring Romania, which is now a key hub for Ukrainian grain exports abroad since the collapse of the exports deal. "I strongly condemn the continued (Russian) attacks on innocent people, civilian infrastructure, including grain silos in the ports of Reni and Izmail," Foreign Minister Luminita Odobescu posted on social media.

The possibility of a Russian attack on cargo ships on the Black Sea increased after last week, when Moscow said it fired warning shots from a Russian warship at a cargo vessel heading to-

wards Izmail.

The cargo ship left Odesa hours after Ukraine's military announced the capture of Urozhaine, a small hamlet in the industrial Donetsk region that the Kremlin claims is part of Russia. "Our defenders are entrenched at the outskirts. The offensive continues," Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malyar announced in a statement on social media.

Kyiv launched its long anticipated counteroffensive in June, but has acknowledged tough battles as it struggles to break through heavily fortified Russian positions. Malyar's announce-

ment comes one day after Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu said that Ukraine's military resources were 'almost exhausted', despite receiving arms deliveries from Western allies.

There was no immediate response to the Ukrainian claim from Moscow, which has repeatedly downplayed Kyiv's offensive capabilities.

The Donetsk region - which has faced the brunt of fighting in recent months - is one of four Ukrainian regions that the Kremlin claimed to have annexed last year, months after invading in February.

AFP



Forces affiliated with Tripoli-based GNU deploy following two days of deadly clashes between two rival groups in Libya's capital, on Wednesday (AFP)

Tentative truce in Libya capital after militia clashes kill 27

Tripoli, Libya - Gun battles between two leading armed groups in the Libyan capital Tripoli have killed 27 people and wounded 106, medics said on Wednesday, as a tentative truce took hold.

The clashes between the influential 444 Brigade and the Al-Radaa, or Special Deterrence Force, two of the myriad of militias that have vied for power since the overthrow of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, erupted on Monday night and raged through Tuesday.

A total of 234 families were evacuated from frontline areas in the capital's southern suburbs, along with dozens of doctors and paramedics who had got trapped by the fighting while caring for the wounded, the Emergency Medicine Centre said.

Three field hospitals and a fleet of around 60 ambulances had been deployed to the area after the fighting broke out.

The clashes were triggered by the detention of the head of the 444 Brigade, Colonel Mahmud Hamza, by the rival Al-Radaa Force on Monday, an interior ministry official said.

Late Tuesday, the social council in the southeastern suburb of Soug el-Joumaa, a stronghold of the Al-Radaa force, announced an agreement had been reached with Prime Minister Abdelhamid Dbeibah, head of the UN-recognised government based in the capital, for Hamza to be handed over to a 'neutral party'.

In a televised announcement, the council said a ceasefire would follow the transfer of the force's commander and late on Tuesday the fighting abated.

Both armed groups are aligned with Dbeibah's government, one of two rival administrations that vie for power through shifting alliances with the militias on the ground.

Overnight, Dbeibah visited the southeastern suburb of Ain

Zara, which saw some of the heaviest fighting on Tuesday, accompanied by Interior Minister Imed Trabelsi.

Dbeibah 'saw for himself the severity of the damage' as he toured the densely populated neighbourhood's unlit streets, his government's press office said on its Facebook page.

He gave instructions for a survey of the damage to be carried out so that residents could be compensated, it added.

The interior ministry put in

The clashes were triggered by the detention of the head of the 444 Brigade, Colonel Mahmud Hamza, by the rival Al-Radaa Force on Monday

place a security plan to deploy officers to battleground districts to oversee the truce announced between the two sides.

Airport reopens

The Libyan capital's only civilian airport, Mitiga, which lies in an area under Al-Radaa's control, reopened to commercial flights on Wednesday, officials said. Flights had been diverted to Misrata about 180km (110 miles) to the east throughout the day on Tuesday and again on Wednesday morning.

Libya has seen more than a decade of stop-start conflict since the NATO-backed revolt that toppled Gaddafi.

In May, the two armed groups had clashed for hours in Tripoli, also after the arrest of a 444 Brigade member.

AFP

Warrant issued to Assad's uncle for war crimes

Geneva, Switzerland - A Swiss court last year ordered an international arrest warrant for the uncle of Syria President Bashar al-Assad for war crimes allegedly committed in the 1980s, according to the ruling only published on Wednesday.

The decision was published a year after Switzerland's Federal Criminal Court ordered the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) to issue the warrant. The office of the Swiss attorney general had asked that the ruling be kept secret for fear that Rifaat al-Assad might take measures to dodge arrest, the Keystone-ATS news agency reported.

The attorney-general's office had already in 2021 requested the issuance of an international arrest warrant for the 85-year-



This file photo shows Syria's President Bashar al-Assad speaking during a press conference in Damascus on July 16 (AFP)

old, but the justice ministry had balked, arguing Switzerland did not have jurisdiction to pursue him.

At the time, it pointed out that he was neither a Swiss citizen, nor residing in the country, and that no Swiss citizens were

among the victims of the 1982 massacre in the Syrian city of Hama, which the accusations centre around.

But the court did not share that interpretation, highlighting that Rifaat al-Assad had been staying at a Geneva hotel when

Swiss prosecutors first launched their investigation into him in 2013.

'Executions, enforced disappearances'

That presence was enough, according to the court, to give Switzerland jurisdiction to pursue him over alleged war crimes, including the issuance of an international arrest warrant.

The warrant is meanwhile likely to go unheeded: The younger brother of former Syrian president Hafez al-Assad returned to Syria in 2021, after 37 years in exile.

Rifaat al-Assad, who is separately implicated in French and Spanish corruption cases, was forced into exile in 1984 after a failed attempt to overthrow his brother.

The complaint against Rifaat al-Assad was first filed a decade ago by TRIAL International, a rights group that works with victims and pushes Switzerland to prosecute alleged international criminals.

TRIAL said that much of the evidence it had compiled against him relates to his role in suppressing the 1982 Hama rebellion, where thousands of people were estimated to have been killed.

He was at the time in command of the Syrian Defense Forces, which is accused of 'executions, enforced disappearances, rape and torture on an unimaginable scale', according to TRIAL, citing estimates that as many as 40,000 people were killed in the span of three weeks.

AFP

Seventeen troops killed in new militant attack in Niger

Niamey, Niger - Seventeen troops died in a militant ambush in Niger, the government said, in a reminder of the nation's deep security crisis as its military rulers face off against neighbours determined to reverse last month's coup.

An army detachment was 'the victim of a terrorist ambush near the town of Koutougou' in the Tillaberi region near Burkina Faso on Tuesday, said a defence ministry statement published later that day. It added that another 20 soldiers had been wounded, six seriously, with all the casualties evacuated to the capital Niamey.

More than 100 assailants, who were travelling on motorbikes, were 'neutralised' during their retreat, the army said.

A militant insurgency has

plagued Africa's Sahel region for more than a decade, breaking out in northern Mali in 2012 before spreading to neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso in 2015.

The so-called 'three borders' area between the three countries is regularly the scene of attacks by rebels affiliated with the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda.

The unrest across the region has killed thousands of troops, police officers and civilians and forced millions to flee their homes.

Anger at the bloodshed has fuelled military coups in all three countries since 2020, with Niger the latest to fall when its elected president, Mohamed Bazoum, was ousted on July 26.

AFP

Trump's legal woes set stage for volatile election campaign

Washington, US - Four indictments of Donald Trump have set the stage for a surreal and potentially explosive US presidential election, with the presumptive Republican nominee on trial for seeking to overthrow the very democratic process he hopes will restore him to the White House.

The 77-year-old former Republican president will likely have to juggle campaign events with court appearances as he seeks to win the party's nomination next year and another term in the Oval Office. Trump alleges that the barrage of federal and state charges filed against him in recent months is a plot by Democratic President Joe Biden - his likely 2024 opponent - to hamstring his White House bid.

"How can my corrupt political opponent crooked Joe Biden put me on trial during an election campaign that I'm winning by a lot?" the billionaire real estate tycoon said at a campaign rally in



This file photo shows Donald Trump delivering remarks at the Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, NJ, on August 14, 2020 (AFP)

New Hampshire.

Trump said he was being forced to 'spend time and money away from the campaign trail in order to fight bogus made-up accusations and charges'.

While complaining about his legal woes, Trump has sought at the same time to turn them to his advantage, appealing for dona-

tions and claiming that they have only increased his popularity.

"Any time they file an indictment, we go way up in the polls," he said. This does appear to be generally the case - at least among the Republican rank-and-file who make up Trump's loyal base of supporters.

Jordan Tama, an associate

professor at American University, said the upcoming criminal trials facing the former president are 'certainly going to complicate Trump's campaign'. "He may need to leave the campaign trail at times to participate in the legal processes," Tama said, and divert some of his campaign cash to his burgeoning legal fees.

"But it's not really clear that having to participate in these trials is going to alter the contours of the election from a broad political standpoint," he said. The standing of the key candidates has remained largely unchanged, he added.

Trump has been charged by special counsel Jack Smith with conspiring to overturn the results of the 2020 election he lost to Biden and with retaining top secret government documents after he left office and thwarting investigators trying to recover them.

Smith has asked the judge

who will preside over the conspiracy case to set a January 2024 date for the start of the trial, just days before the first Republican primary nominating contests in Iowa and New Hampshire. The documents case is scheduled to go to trial in May 2024. Trump also faces election-related racketeering charges in Georgia and a trial in March in New York for allegedly paying hush money to a porn star.

Trump's rivals for the Republican nomination have tiptoed around his worsening legal woes while he continues to enjoy the support of the party faithful.

"The consensus is that at some point Republicans will catch on to the fact that Trump's baggage is getting heavier and heavier and losing to the Democrats is a greater probability," said Larry Sabato, who heads the University of Virginia's Center for Politics.

AFP

Outrage in Vietnam over elderly elephants in chains at Hanoi zoo

Hanoi, Vietnam - Legs in iron chains and unable to roam freely, the treatment of two elderly elephants at the Hanoi public zoo has drawn outrage in Vietnam, with animal rights groups demanding the pair be relocated.

The groups are calling for the two female elephants - Thai and Banang - to be released to a national park, and close to 70,000 people have signed an online petition in support.

State media has also covered the story widely in recent weeks.

On Wednesday morning, the pair's legs were in chains as zookeepers fed them grass and sugarcane, AFP journalists observed. "The elephants are quite fierce. With a broken electric fence, we had to chain them," a zoo staff member told AFP on the condition of anonymity.

Staff said the two elephants were brought to the zoo from the country's south and central highlands in 2010 and 2014.

"They were not in the same herd. We had to do our best to help prevent fighting between



An elephant with a shackled leg is seen at the Hanoi public zoo in Hanoi, Vietnam on Wednesday (AFP)

them and ensure safety for carers," the zoo employee said, adding the animals were well cared for and given three meals a day.

But Animals Asia sent a letter to city authorities earlier this month urging the creatures be returned to the jungle at the Yok Don National Park in the country's central highlands.

"Elephants at the Hanoi zoo have been chained for a very long period," the group said in the letter.

"The health of the two ele-

phants will deteriorate if they remain as they are."

Vietnam Animal Eyes, a group of local animal advocates, started a petition to remove the pair from the zoo at the beginning of August.

Zoo director Le Si Dung, however, has characterised the push to free the animals as 'illogical', according to state media.

"The two elephants, aged 60-70 years old, have been at our zoo for more than 10 years... They will die if they are

put back to nature as they do not know how to seek food or protect themselves," Dung was quoted as saying by the Dan Tri news site.

David Neale, animal welfare director at Animals Asia, told AFP the elephants were likely frustrated they couldn't carry out their natural behaviours.

"Yok Don National Park... has all of the elements which an elephant needs to be able to live well and live happily," he said.

AFP

Hawaii wildfire toll tops 100

Kahului, US - The number of people known to have died in the horrific wildfire that levelled a Hawaiian town reached 106 on Tuesday, authorities said, as a makeshift morgue was expanded to deal with the tragedy.

State governor Josh Green has repeatedly warned that the final toll from last week's inferno in Lahaina - already the deadliest US wildfire in over a century - would grow significantly, urging Hawaiians to gird for a number that could be two or three times its present level.

Maui County officials updated the death toll to 106 on Tuesday, with Green saying earlier that over a quarter of the disaster zone had been searched by dogs trained to sniff for bodies.

Refrigerated containers were being pressed into use as makeshift morgues at the Maui Police Forensic Facility on Tuesday, an AFP journalist observed, as the largely rural island struggled to cope with the sheer number of dead.

Green warned against any attempt at a land grab in the devastated remains of Lahaina, as locals fret that deep-pocketed developers might take advantage of people's desperation and try to buy up plots that can be turned into luxury housing or more lucrative short-term rentals.

"Our goal is to have a local commitment - forever - to this community, as we rebuild," he said.

"So we will be making sure that we do all that we can to prevent that land from falling into the hands of people from the outside."



Workers wearing 'Morgue Operations' shirts move a body bag into a refrigerated storage container adjacent to the Maui Police Forensic Facility where human remains are stored in the aftermath of the Maui wildfires in Wailuku, Hawaii on Tuesday (AFP)

Our goal is to have a local commitment - forever - to this community, as we rebuild

JOSH GREEN

DNA

The difficult process of identifying the dead inched forwards on Tuesday, with officials saying they had collected DNA samples from 41 people whose relatives were missing. Only five of the dead have been identified so far,

with officials from Maui County releasing two of the names after notifying their families.

"We offer our deepest condolences to the families who are beginning to receive notifications about their loved ones," Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen said in a statement.

The island's police chief has said that many of the bodies are so badly charred that they are unrecognisable, such was the ferocity of the blaze.

Stories of horrifying escapes continued to emerge, as did more testimony about the lack of official warning of the fast-moving blaze.

Annelise Cochran told AFP she had been reassured when officials said a small blaze in the hills had been contained last Tuesday morning.

But it had suddenly, and dramatically, flared.

"We saw smoke billowing and the blue sky had turned a dark shade of brown and the wind was whipping at 80-plus miles an hour. It was very, very fast; shocking to see," the 30-year-old said. "We saw flames, and we realised it was coming right for us," she said, adding no evacuation order had been issued.

After trying to flee by car only to find her way blocked by vehi-

cles abandoned by their terrified drivers, she decided the ocean offered her only escape.

"We fully submerged ourselves into the water to get our faces down as much as we could, so that we were breathing the air that was only on the surface of the water, because the air got very acrid and horrible to breathe," Cochran said.

It was hours before she was plucked from the water.

Residents desperate to get back to check on the homes they fled have expressed frustration at bans that have prevented people from getting into Lahaina.

AFP



An injured man is transported on a motorcycle to a hospital after he was shot during gang violence in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Tuesday (AFP)

Thousands flee gang violence in Haitian capital

Port-Au-Prince, Haiti - Crammed into cars, on motorcycles or on foot, thousands of residents on Tuesday fled a gang-ridden district of the Haitian capital, an AFP reporter observed.

"We're living in an extremely difficult situation," said Elie Derisca, a resident of the Carrefour-Feuilles district in southern Port-au-Prince.

"I don't even know where to go. I had to flee my house," he told AFP.

At least 3,120 people have fled the district, according to an estimate by the Haitian Civil Protection Department and officials say more are likely to follow.

The neighbourhood is regularly attacked by a gang led by Renel Destina, known by his alias Ti Lapli, who is wanted by US authorities for kidnapping American citizens.

"Police officers who live in the area no longer have the means to defend us. As a result, the bandits were able to take over our

homes," said Derisca.

He added that criminals looted and set fire to houses in the neighbourhood and caused several deaths.

Haitian authorities also said that houses in the area had been burnt down and that there had been 'loss of human life', but they gave no specifics.

Chaos was palpable on the streets of Carrefour-Feuilles on Tuesday. Some residents were carrying their suitcases on their heads, while others stacked mattresses and furniture on top of their cars.

Still others sought refuge in public squares and inside schools in safer neighbourhoods, according to images posted on social media.

On Monday, residents in the besieged neighborhood demonstrated against the security crisis, and the Haitian National Police intervened to restore order in the area.

AFP

NZ court finds mum guilty of murdering 3 daughters

Wellington, New Zealand - A New Zealand court on Wednesday found a woman guilty of murdering her three young daughters after a harrowing month-long trial.

Lauren Dickason was accused of strangling and suffocating her twins Maya and Karla, aged two, and first daughter Liane, six, while her husband was out to dinner with colleagues, according to local media reports.

Dickason admitted killing the girls, but had argued a defence of insanity and infanticide. Under New Zealand law, infanticide is a defence for a mother who causes the death of her child when, 'at the time of the offence, the balance of her mind was disturbed'.

The girls were killed at their home in the South Island city of Timaru soon after the family arrived in New Zealand from South Africa.

A jury at Christchurch High Court found Dickason guilty of all three charges of murder.

As the verdict was handed

down, Dickason's lawyer looked on in shock. In New Zealand, murder carries a prison term of at least 10 years.

Following the verdict, Detective Inspector Scott Anderson said in a statement that police extended their 'sympathies to the families who will never get to see Liane, Maya, and Karla grow up'.

"Words cannot begin to express the tragic circumstances of this investigation," he added.

During an emotional trial, the prosecution and defence lawyers had agreed Dickason was mentally unwell when she killed her children.

However, they differed as to whether her mental state was such that she was not fully aware of what she was doing.

In court, crown prosecutor Andrew McRae told the jury that anger had driven Dickason to murder her children.

But Dickason's lawyer Kerry Beaton had argued that the girls deaths were the result of a 'severe mental illness'.

AFP

Biden seeks to cement 'new era' with Japan, S Korea

Washington, US - For years, US ambitions in Asia, a top priority as China's power grows, have faced a seemingly insurmountable obstacle - animosity between Washington's key allies, Japan and South Korea.

On Friday, President Joe Biden will seize on a breakthrough between the Asian neighbours' leaders with a first-of-a-kind three-way summit, hoping to institutionalise the new spirit of cooperation.

Against a backdrop of high tensions and rising missile tests by North Korea, Biden, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida are expected to announce new initiatives to work together on missile defense, intelligence-sharing and technology.

Hoping to bring added pomp, Biden has invited Yoon and Kishida to Camp David, the presidential resort in the hills outside Washington synonymous with Middle East peacemaking, in the first major diplomatic event since 2015.

Biden will 'mark what we believe is a new era in trilateral cooperation', Secretary of State



US President Joe Biden will seize on a breakthrough between the Asian neighbours' leaders with a first-of-a-kind three-way summit on Friday (AFP)

Hoping to bring added pomp, Biden has invited Yoon and Kishida to Camp David, the presidential resort in the hills

Antony Blinken said on Tuesday after a virtual meeting with the Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers to prepare the

summit.

Employing the veiled US language for countering China's assertiveness in Asia, Blinken said the summit would promote a shared vision of a 'free and open, resilient, secure, connected Indo-Pacific'.

Making cooperation permanent

Relations between Tokyo and Seoul have long been marred by memories of Japan's harsh 1910-1945 occupation of the Korean

peninsula.

Yoon, a conservative elected last year, has taken political risks at home by resolving a dispute related to forced labour, a move reciprocated by Japan.

Yoon in May paid the first trip to Tokyo by a South Korean leader in 12 years and on Tuesday, marking the anniversary of independence, described modern-day Japan as a partner that shares values and interests.

But Christopher Johnstone, an expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that the efforts by Yoon - restricted to a single presidential term that ends in 2027 - remain deeply controversial at home and that many Japanese are skeptical the reconciliation will last.

The focus of the summit will be to 'look for ways to institutionalise the progress that's been made, and to make it harder for future leaders in any of these countries to walk away from it', he said.

Grievances linked to wartime history have quickly escalated in the past.

In 2019, South Korea for months said it would exit an in-

telligence-sharing pact with Japan. Two years later, a Japanese diplomat abruptly declined to share the stage with his South Korean counterpart at three-way talks in Washington.

But concerns have grown in both countries over North Korea, which has raced ahead on its missile programme and refused dialogue with the Biden administration after unusual summit-level talks with his predecessor Donald Trump.

On China, public opinion in Japan and South Korea has deteriorated sharply in recent years following heavy-handed pressure by Beijing, which in recent months has softened its tone and sought dialogue.

Eighty per cent or more of adults in both countries see China negatively, according to a Pew Research Center survey last year.

Shedding earlier reticence, Japan and to a lesser extent South Korea have increasingly joined the United States in voicing alarm over a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the self-governing democracy claimed by Beijing.

AFP

Wave of violent muggings in Indonesia

The muggings draw coded calls from politicians for thieves to be killed-on-sight by police

Medan, Indonesia - A spate of violent muggings by machete-wielding thieves in Indonesia has drawn coded calls from prominent politicians for them to be killed-on-sight by police, in comments condemned by rights groups as condoning extrajudicial murders.

Last month, police in the northern Sumatran city of Medan shot dead a 'begal' - a term used to describe a type of street thief known for their brutality - as part of what the force said was a bid to 'eradicate' them.

Bobby Nasution, Medan mayor and President Joko Widodo's son-in-law, lauded the officers involved, saying such criminals should be shot dead on



This file photo shows Indonesian police escorting Baghastian Wahyu Kisara, accused in the robbery and murder of a motorist amid a spate of violent crimes, prior to a press conference in Semarang, Central Java on July 24 (AFP)

the spot.

"I appreciate this because begal and criminals have no place in Medan," he wrote in an Instagram post on July 9, sharing footage of the suspect's dead body.

President Widodo has not commented on Nasution's state-

ments. Other leaders, including the governor of North Sumatra province, have supported the comments.

Rights groups want an investigation into the killing, and have condemned the rhetoric as giving officers and citizens the right to take the law into their own

hands.

"It is inappropriate for public officials to declare support for such extrajudicial actions," Amnesty International Indonesia director Usman Hamid told AFP.

"The shooting not only violates human rights principles - such as the right to life, the right

to a fair trial - but also the regulations." Indonesian police rules state that firearms should only be used as an officer's last resort.

Indonesia's Institute for Criminal Justice Reform called Nasution's words 'irresponsible'.

Some public sentiment, however, is on the mayor's side.

Under viral videos of the begal attacks, social media users call for the thieves to be shot dead or to face the death penalty.

And in a village east of Jakarta, local leaders have issued a 10mn rupiah (US\$662) bounty for the capture of begals.

'Begal' terror

Begals have savagely attacked their victims with sickles, airguns

and cruelly to make the victim surrender," said Adrianus Meliala, a criminologist at the University of Indonesia.

"Begal run away using the city labyrinth they have mastered."

Medan, Indonesia's fifth-largest city, has been hit by 45 begal attacks since January, police say, and one brutal case two months ago caused an uproar.

Student Insanul Anshori Hasibuan was riding a scooter home when a man hacked him in the head with a machete, stealing his wallet.

Hasibuan, 22, died in hospital after the attacker and several accomplices escaped with the contents of the wallet: just 70,000 rupiah (US\$4.60).

Four suspects were later arrested, and face up to 15 years in jail if convicted.

Such brutal attacks have been splashed across Indonesian media, raising public fear and allowing Nasution to cast himself as a champion for law and order.

According to official data, the rate of robberies has risen in 2023, but experts say Indonesian criminal data is often incomplete due to underreporting. AFP

It is inappropriate for public officials to declare support for such extrajudicial actions

USMAN HAMID



This file photo shows ISRO launching Chandrayaan-3 mission from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, in Sriharikota on July 14 (ANI)

India's Moon mission carries out final orbital manoeuvre

Bengaluru, India - Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Wednesday successfully carried out the final orbit reduction manoeuvre of the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft, a week ahead of its scheduled landing on the moon.

"Today's successful firing, needed for a short duration, has put Chandrayaan-3 into an orbit of 153km x 163km, as intended. With this, the lunar bound manoeuvres are completed," ISRO said today.

The spacecraft that was launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh's Sriharikota on July 14 this year is expected to touchdown on the South Polar region of the Moon on August 23.

A GSLV Mark 3 (LVM 3) heavy-lift launch vehicle was used for the launch of the spacecraft that was placed in the lunar orbit on August 5 and since then it has been through a series of orbital manoeuvres been lowered closer to the moon's surface.

Today's fifth and final orbit-reduction manoeuvre was performed from ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC) in Bengaluru.

With the lunar-bound manoeuvres now concluded, ISRO said that the focus of the Chandrayaan-3 mission shifts towards the next stages of preparations as the Propulsion Module and the Lander Module gear up 'for their separate journeys'.

Separation of the Lander Module from the Propulsion Module

is planned for August 17.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh posted on X: "A step closer towards the MOON! Today's successful firing, needed for a short duration, has put Chandrayaan3 into an orbit of 153 km x 163 km, as intended. With this, the lunar bound manoeuvres have been completed." ISRO is attempting to make a successful soft landing on the Moon, which will make India the fourth country in the world to achieve the feat, joining the ranks of the United States, Russia and China.

India's third lunar mission, Chandrayaan-3, marks the coun-

The spacecraft that was launched on July 14 is expected to touchdown on the south polar region of the Moon on August 23

try's second attempt at a gentle lunar landing. It is a follow-up to Chandrayaan-2, the moon mission that failed in 2019. It will show off India's complete capability for a secure lunar landing and roaming, says ISRO.

The components of Chandrayaan-3 include several electronic and mechanical subsystems designed to ensure a gentle and safe landing.

ANI

Death toll from Myanmar jade mine landslide hits at least 31

Yangon, Myanmar - The death toll from a landslide at an unregulated jade mine in a remote part of Myanmar has hit at least 31, with eight people still missing, rescuers said on Wednesday.

The disaster struck on Sunday outside northern Kachin's Hpakant township, after torrential rain and floods ravaged the region over the weekend.

Jade mining in Myanmar is lucrative due to high demand from neighbouring China, but the unregulated industry is plagued with frequent worker deaths.

"We found six more dead bodies this morning," a rescue worker told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. They added that eight people remain unaccounted for, with the search continuing.

Rescuers dug through thick mud to find bodies, while others were discovered floating in water.

A massive pile of earth about 150 to 180 metres (500-600 feet) high - left behind by mining excavations - was loosened by the intense rainfall and collapsed, according to rescuers.



Bodies in bags are seen at the site of a deadly landslide at an unregulated jade mine near northern Kachin's Hpakant township on Tuesday (AFP)

The rainy season had forced the suspension of mine operations but those caught in the landslide are believed to be locals who were trying to find something valuable in the mud.

Myanmar is the world's biggest source of jade and in 2020 nearly 300 people lost their lives in a massive landslide at a Hpakant mine.

Jade and other abundant natural resources in Myanmar's

north - including timber, gold and amber - have helped finance both sides of a decades-long civil war between ethnic Kachin insurgents and the military.

While environmentalists and rights groups have long called for reforms, a 2021 military coup effectively ended hopes for better standards in the industry, according to international watchdogs.

AFP

HANGING RAIL



A view of damaged Shimla-Kalka railway track, an UNESCO world heritage, after 50 metres of a bridge was swept away due to landslides caused by incessant rains near Summer Hill on the outskirts of Shimla, India, on Wednesday (AFP)

Afghan women demand education rights in UN appeal

United Nations, US - Engineering student Somaya Faruqi had to flee Afghanistan to continue her studies after the Taliban government returned to power two years ago and banned more than 1.1mn girls and women from schools and universities.

The 21-year-old, now living in the United States, is the face of a campaign launched on Tuesday by the UN's Education Cannot Wait global fund to combat the crisis, marking the two-year anniversary of the fall of the internationally recognised government in Kabul.

Under the motto #AfghanGirlsVoices, the operation is spearheading a global call to respect all Afghan girls' and women's right to education. Countless girls and women have already had to leave the country to continue their education.

Faruqi, for example, finished high school in Qatar after she and nine other girls from her robotics team, 'The Afghan Dreamers' left



Afghan women hold placards as they protest for their right to education, in Mazar-i-Sharif on August 12 (AFP)

Afghanistan in 2021. Now, she is beginning her second year studying engineering at Sacramento State university in California, thanks to a scholarship from Qatar.

'Forgotten'

"This campaign is meant to bring the attention of the world again to the girls in Afghanistan, and (their) education issues," Faruqi

told AFP by telephone.

"Afghanistan seems to be forgotten," she added.

The near-total exclusion of women from Afghan public life, including in education and employment, has become one of the major sticking points preventing the international community from offering aid and official recognition to the Taliban government. "The path to any more

normal relationship between the Taliban and other countries will be blocked unless and until the rights of women and girls, among other things, are actually supported," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Washington.

Conditions for women and girls in Afghanistan are the 'worst globally', a UN report found last month, saying that the Taliban

government's policies could amount to a 'gender apartheid'.

In fact, the state of women's rights in Afghanistan 'should count as a crime against humanity, and it should be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court', the UN special envoy for global education, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, told reporters during a video meeting on Tuesday.

In 2021, only one month after returning to power for the first time in 20 years, the Taliban authorities banned girls from attending secondary school, before closing university doors to them in December 2022 and then heavily restricting their participation in the workforce. For Faruqi, these circumstances cannot stand: "We have to make sure that (girls and women) have access to equal opportunities, and they have access to education, because education is the key to freedom," she told AFP.

AFP

Oman Cricket to launch #Cricket4Her in October

New initiative aimed at promoting the game among girls

Muscat - The national cricket governing body, Oman Cricket, is all set to launch a new initiative focusing on the development of cricket among girls and women with #Cricket4Her programme.

Oman Cricket hopes to attract the girls in Oman to play the game and take it up at a competitive level. The start of the initiative will begin with the hosting of indoor and outdoor softball tournaments for girls and women in October. The indoor softball event begins on October 6 while the outdoor softball tournament will begin on October 19.

Oman Cricket's treasurer and one of the brainchild behind the new initiative, Alkesh Joshi, said: The #Cricket4Her is an exceptionally important programme for Oman Cricket. We hope to revitalise the approach towards women's cricket and the entire OC board and the cricket fraternity are behind this programme.

"The aim is to bring more girls and women to play cricket and we will start the #Cricket4Her programme with the hosting of indoor and outdoor softball cricket tournaments in October. We hope to introduce the girls to hardball cricket gradually as the aim is to have a big pool of cricket-playing women and girls."

The top OC official revealed that the blueprint of the #Cricket4Her programme has received approval from the International Cricket Council (ICC) and they "have appreciated the initiative and are delighted with the progress made by Oman Cricket."



Oman Cricket will host indoor and outdoor softball tournaments for girls and women in October

Joshi said: "We would like to have more and more girls and women embrace this lovely game. We have begun an exciting journey of women's cricket and we hope that women's cricket can flourish in the future in Oman. We believe that the women cricketers could carry the legacy forward of the men's national team that has reached great heights at the international level."

Elaborating further, OC's chief development officer Duleep Mendis said that "the Cricket4Her programme will es-

tablish a pathway for women and girls in cricket across Oman."

He added, "By providing dedicated tournaments, we aim to foster a supportive environment where women and girls can excel in cricket. This pathway will lead the way for talent development, skill enhancement, and the nurturing of a strong and empowered community of women cricketers."

Among the major highlights of the new initiative are the mantra of 4Cs - coaching, competition, commitment and community. #Cricket4Her will focus on

providing coaching and training to women and girls through qualified coaches. Participants could receive expert guidance and support to enhance their skills and performance. First-timers will be given special attention by OC coaching staff.

Mendis said: "The programme also lays emphasis on the importance of fostering a competitive spirit among women cricketers. #Cricket4Her aims to develop skills in an action-packed environment, with focus on having fun and being active. The initiative will ensure that cricket is rep-



Alkesh Joshi



Duleep Mendis

Pakistan pacer Riaz retires from international cricket

Lahore, Pakistan - Pakistani fast bowler Wahab Riaz announced his retirement from international cricket on Wednesday, three years after playing his last match for the country.

The 38-year-old left-armers said he felt it was the right time to draw the curtain on a 15-year international career.

"I wanted to play the 2023 World Cup but felt that I stand no chance of a comeback, so this is the right time," Riaz told a news conference in Lahore.

Known for his pace and aggression, Riaz made his one-day debut in 2008, and played his first Test in the spot-fixing-marred 2010 series in England.

The last Test of that series resulted in five-year bans for captain Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Amir for conspiring to bowl deliberate no-balls in return for money.

Riaz went on to anchor Pak-



Wahab Riaz

istan's pace attack, and made a big impact with a five-wicket haul in the highly charged 2011 World Cup semi-final against arch-rivals India in Mohali, which he called "the most memorable match in my career". "I could have achieved more than what I did but there are no regrets," he said.

Riaz took 83 wickets in 27 Tests, and 120 wickets in 91 ODIs. He also grabbed 34 wickets in Twenty20 internationals.

Stokes ends ODI retirement ahead of Cricket World Cup

London, United Kingdom - Ben Stokes has reversed his decision to retire from one-day internationals ahead of England's defence of their 50-over men's World Cup title in India.

Test captain Stokes quit the ODI format 13 months ago due to a demanding workload as a multi-format player and amid concerns about a chronic left knee injury.

That fitness issue meant the all-rounder did not bowl at all during the last three Tests of the recently concluded drawn Ashes series at home to Australia.

But Stokes, one of the stars of England's 2019 World Cup final

win over New Zealand at Lord's, could now feature as a specialist batsman when England look to retain their title in India starting in October.

England are at home to New Zealand in four warm-up ODIs next month, with Stokes included Wednesday in a 15-man squad that could well resemble the touring party selected for the World Cup.

England men's national selector Luke Wright said: "Any series against New Zealand is closely fought and will provide us with an ideal opportunity to test ourselves against one of the best teams in the world."

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RUTHLESS LIONESSES!

England beat Australia to set up Women’s World Cup final with Spain



England’s Lauren Hemp (L) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Australia in their Women’s World Cup semifinal in Sydney on Wednesday (AFP)

Sydney, Australia - Lauren Hemp and Alessia Russo did the damage late on in Sydney as England shattered Australian dreams Wednesday with a clinical 3-1 win to set up a Women’s World Cup final against Spain.

The Lionesses had stumbled at the same stage twice before but the European champions made no mistake this time to reach the final for the first time.

They took the lead nine minutes before the break with Manchester United’s Ella Toone unleashing a rocket just inside the box with the outside of her boot.

A fit-again Sam Kerr, starting for the first time this tournament,

The Lionesses had stumbled at the same stage twice before but the European champions made no mistake this time to reach the final for the first time

hit back for the home side in the second half with a world-class goal that set the game on fire, picking up the ball and letting fly from 30 yards after a weaving run.

It sparked ecstatic scenes from the 75,784-strong partisan crowd.

But they were silenced eight minutes later when Hemp mus-

led her way into the box and stabbed into the corner before Russo put the icing on the cake with four minutes left.

England now face a blockbuster final on Sunday at the same Stadium Australia against a dangerous Spanish side that beat Sweden 2-1 in the last four, with a new name to be engraved on the trophy.

England had been in this position before, in 2015 and 2019, losing 2-1 on both occasions, with a third-place finish their best World Cup before now.

But coach Sarina Wiegman led them to the European title last year on home soil and captain Millie Bright said before the match they were now better placed to handle big-pressure games. They demonstrated their resilience at a pumping and partisan Stadium Australia, successfully blanking out the noise to silence an expectant home nation. Victory was all the sweeter against an opponent who had beaten them 2-0 in an April

friendly - the only side to do so in 38 games since Wiegman took over.

Despite losing Australia have enjoyed their best World Cup ever, with a third-placed playoff against Sweden on Saturday still to play.

With Kerr fit again, Australian coach Tony Gustavsson moved Emily van Egmond to the bench in one of two changes with defender Clare Polkinghorne in for an ill Alanna Kennedy.

England stuck to the same XI that beat Colombia 2-1 with striker Lauren James serving the second of a two-match ban.

AFP



England coach Sarina Wiegman celebrate with the players

Wiegman living in a ‘fairytale’

Sydney, Australia - England coach Sarina Wiegman said she felt she was living in a “fairytale” after her team advanced to the Women’s World Cup final with a 3-1 win over tournament co-hosts Australia in Sydney.

Wednesday’s semi-final victory saw Wiegman become the first coach to guide two different countries to a Women’s World Cup final, after she took her native Netherlands to the 2019 showpiece match, where they were defeated by the United States.

It also left reigning European champions England, who face fellow first-time finalists Spain in Sunday’s title decider in Sydney, on course for a notable double.

“We achieved the final!” Wiegman told the BBC. “It’s unbelievable, it feels like we won (the tournament) which we didn’t, we just won this game - in an incredible stadium, an away game, the way we played - it was a hard game, but we found a way to

win again.”

The 53-year-old added: “People have been talking about ruthlessness all the time, in this team there is ruthlessness, up front or in defence. We really want to keep the ball out of the net and we want to win.”

“We stick together, we stick

People have been talking about ruthlessness all the time, in this team there is ruthlessness

SARINA WIEGMAN

to the plan, and it worked again.”

“Having the chance as a coach or a player to make it to two finals is really special. I never take anything for granted, but it’s like I’m living in a fairytale or something.”



Australia fans look dejected after their defeat to England on Wednesday (AFP)

Australian fans heartbroken but proud after agonising World Cup exit

Sydney, Australia - The buoyant mood across Australia abruptly burst on Wednesday when the nation was knocked out in the semi-finals of the Women’s World Cup by archrivals England.

Heartbroken Matildas fans insisted that, while they were devastated by the 3-1 defeat, they remained staunchly proud of the over-achieving Australian team.

“I’m still proud of the girls. They always show a never-say-die attitude,” said Gemma Ritchie, 26, who works in the music industry.

“And even though they didn’t get the result, just making it this far, it’s still a monumental night for women’s sport in Australia.”

The Matilda’s run to the

World Cup semi-finals has captivated the rugby- and cricket-mad country, setting TV records, selling out merchandise, and fuelling talks of a public holiday if they went all the way.

Children at Sydney’s primary schools were encouraged to wear green and gold ahead of the clash, practising penalty shootouts during lunch breaks and sports lessons.

A capacity crowd of some 80,000 packed Stadium Australia in Sydney, while tens of thousands more crammed into fan sites at neighbourhood parks and sporting ovals.

“It’s a huge disappointment,” said 28-year-old office worker Costa Xarras, who watched from

a fan site at Moore Park, next door to the famed Sydney Cricket Ground.

“But I’m also so proud of their mammoth effort - both what they have achieved for Australia, and what they have done for women’s football.”

Newspapers and local media fanned the flames in the build-up to the match, with one Sydney tabloid even chartering a helicopter to spy on the England squad’s final preparations.

“Matildas poised to put Old Enemy to the sword,” *The Daily Telegraph* said on its front page, having renamed itself *The Daily Tillygraph* for the day in honour of the Matildas.

AFP

Emotional Sam Kerr says Australia inspired nation with World Cup run

Sydney, Australia - An emotional Sam Kerr said her Australia side had inspired the host nation despite the crushing disappointment of a 3-1 defeat to England in the Women’s World Cup semi-final on Wednesday.

Australia’s skipper and talismanic striker scored a stunning goal to drag the home side level in front of 75,000 in Sydney, before England pulled away with two goals late on to set up a final against Spain.

The Matildas still have a match left, against Sweden on Saturday to decide who comes third. Whatever happens, this is Australia’s best World Cup ever.

On top of that, the team’s exploits in reaching the last four for the first time have captivated Australia and won them legions of new fans.

Kerr, who missed a golden chance to equalise for a second time just a minute before Alessia Russo scored England’s third goal, said: “I can’t put all the blame on myself. “I have to think of all the things the team have done, and I have done, to be where we are now and to inspire a nation.”

“It is just really disappointing.”

Kerr was named in Australia’s starting line-up for the first time at the World Cup following a calf injury.

The 29-year-old Chelsea forward, who was supposed to have been the face of the tournament but saw her game time severely



Australia’s Sam Kerr (L) fights for the ball with England’s Jessica Carter

restricted by the injury, said their historic run into the last four should be the catalyst for broader change. “I can only speak for the Matildas but we need funding in our development, we need funding in our grassroots,” she told reporters at Stadium Australia.

“We need funding, you know, we need funding everywhere.”

That call was echoed by Aus-

tralia’s coach Tony Gustavsson, who was nevertheless proud of his players and said European champions England had been more clinical on the night.

“I hate to lose,” said the Swede, adding that he was looking at the bigger picture of what the Matildas had done over the past few weeks in attracting fans to women’s football.

“I’ve said it before - it’s bigger than 90 minutes of football.”

“We’re very disappointed that we lost, but hopefully we won something else - we’ve won the heart and the passion for this game in this country.”

England will play Spain on Sunday, also at Stadium Australia.

AFP

'I WANT TO WRITE NEW SPORTING HISTORY'

Neymar quits PSG to sign for Saudi Arabian club Al Hilal

Paris, France - Neymar said he was relishing "new challenges and opportunities in new places" after he joined Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal from Paris Saint-Germain on a two-year deal Tuesday, becoming the latest big name lured to the oil-rich Gulf state.

The Brazil forward, 31, ends a six-year stay in the French capital and follows in the footsteps of Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Sadio Mane in swapping Europe for the Middle East.

"I have achieved a lot in Europe and enjoyed special times, but I have always wanted to be a global player and test myself with new challenges and opportunities in new places," Neymar said in a statement from the Saudi Pro League. "I want to write new sporting history, and the Saudi Pro League has tremendous energy and quality players at the moment," he added.

"Al Hilal is a giant club with fantastic fans, and it is the best in Asia. This gives me a feeling that it is the right decision for me at the right time with the right club. I love winning and scoring goals, and I plan to continue doing that



Neymar poses for a picture in Al Hilal shirt during a signing ceremony in Paris

in Saudi Arabia and with Al Hilal." Neymar joined PSG from Barcelona in 2017 for a world record fee of 222 million euros (\$242 million), a few weeks before they recruited Kylian Mbappe.

The Brazilian scored 118 goals in 173 matches for PSG, winning five Ligue 1 titles and three French Cups, but his time at PSG was blighted by a catalogue of injuries. Although he helped the club to the 2020 Champions

League final, which they lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich, he was sidelined for key games.

Neymar underwent surgery on his right ankle in early March, only returning to join PSG on their pre-season tour of Asia.

However, he no longer figured in new coach Luis Enrique's plans and was immediately linked with a move to Al Hilal, where he will earn "100 million euros a season", according to a source close

to the negotiations.

PSG will not come close to recouping the fee they paid for Neymar but will still pocket close to 100 million euros as well, according to the same source.

"It is always difficult to say goodbye to an amazing player like Neymar, one of the best players in the world," said PSG president Nasser al Khelaifi in a statement from the French champions.

Al Hilal is a giant club with fantastic fans, and it is the best in Asia. This gives me a feeling that it is the right decision for me at the right time with the right club

NEYMAR

"I will never forget the day he arrived at Paris Saint-Germain, and what he has contributed to our club and our project over the last six years. We had a great moment and Neymar will always be a big part of our history."

Al Hilal have traditionally been one of Saudi Arabia's top clubs and have been crowned Asian Champions League winners on four occasions.

They are also one of the four

clubs - along with Al Nassr, Al Ahli and Al Ittihad - owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF).

Neymar goes after Mbappe reintegrated

Al Hilal are coached by Portugal's Jorge Jesus, who is in his second spell at the club, while the squad currently boasts four international players recently lured from Europe - Ruben Neves, Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Kalidou Koulibaly and Neymar's Brazilian compatriot Malcom.

Last month Al Hilal made a 300-million-euro bid for Mbappe, though the striker re-



Vinesh Phogat

Indian wrestler Phogat out of Asian Games with injury

New Delhi, India - Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat, who helped lead protests demanding the sport's national chief step down over sexual harassment allegations, has pulled out of next month's Asian Games with a knee injury.

Phogat, who won gold in the women's 50kg freestyle in the last edition of the Asian Games, injured herself during training and will undergo surgery on Thursday. "It was my dream to retain my Asian Games gold medal for India which I won in 2018 in Jakarta," Phogat, 28, wrote in a post on social media Tuesday.

"But unfortunately, this injury has ruled out my participation now."

Phogat and other wrestlers accused Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Singh of sexual misconduct in January and led a long sit-in demanding he step down.

Guardiola hits out at schedule as De Bruyne faces four months out

Piraeus, Greece - Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said a brutal schedule was not allowing players to rest "mentally or physically" after revealing Kevin De Bruyne could miss the rest of the year with a hamstring injury.

De Bruyne limped off early in City's 3-0 win over Burnley to open the Premier League season on Friday.

The 32-year-old had suffered a similar injury in the Champions League final just over two months ago as City beat Inter Milan to become European champions for the first time.

"It's a serious injury," said Guardiola ahead of the UEFA Super Cup between City and Sevilla in Athens. "We have to decide surgery or not surgery."

He added: "Surgery I think will be three or four months out."

De Bruyne joins a list of high-profile players to go down



We have to decide surgery or not surgery. Surgery I think will be three or four months out

PEP GUARDIOLA

early in the new campaign.

Chelsea's Christopher Nkunku had to undergo knee surgery on an injury picked up

on a poor pitch during a pre-season friendly in Chicago.

Arsenal's new £40 million (\$50 million) defender Jurrien Timber and Aston Villa duo Tyrone Mings and Emi Buendia have all reportedly suffered anterior cruciate ligament injuries. "In my first pre-season with Barcelona we had 25 days of preparation before the first game, which was a Champions League qualifier. This season we had four or five before the first game," added Guardiola.

"Look at all the cruciate ligament injuries there have been in all the big leagues this start of the season. The players don't rest either physically or mentally.

"They make them travel to Asia or America for the club's purposes and play really hard games on bad pitches and the players get injured, or will get injured, because they don't have these 25 days to prepare."

AFF

Arsenal's Timber out with knee injury

London, United Kingdom - Arsenal suffered a setback on Wednesday when they announced Dutch defender Jurrien Timber would be sidelined with a major knee injury.

The 22-year-old damaged the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee during the Gunners' 2-1 win at home to Nottingham Forest in their opening match of the new Premier League season last weekend.

A statement on Arsenal's website said: "Jurrien will undergo surgery in the coming days and will be out of action for a period of time."

"The support and expertise from our medical team and everyone at the club will now be focussed on Jurrien's rehabilitation programme, to ensure he recovers well and is back playing as soon as possible."

Timber only joined Arsenal, bidding to go one better than last season's second place in the Premier League, in July in an initial 40-million-euro (\$45 million) move from Dutch giants Ajax.

He won two Eredivisie titles in



Jurrien Timber leaves the pitch after suffering a knee injury during their match against Nottingham Forest

121 appearances for Ajax and was a member of the Netherlands squad that reached the quarter-finals of last year's World Cup. He can operate at both centre-back and right-back and it had been hoped he would bring added depth to an Arsenal defence that struggled to cope

with injuries to William Saliba and Takehiro Tomiyasu towards the end of last season.

Timber's arrival at the Emirates Stadium came as a part of a pre-season spending spree that saw Declan Rice and Kai Havertz join the club, with the trio's combined transfer fees totalling in ex-

cess of £200 million (\$254 million).

Arsenal, however, may now have to go into the transfer window again to get cover for Timber, with Mikel Arteta's side looking to overhaul treble-winners Manchester City as Premier League champions.



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring against Philadelphia Union on Tuesday (AFP)

Messi on target again as Miami rout Union to reach Leagues Cup final

Chester, United States - Lionel Messi extended his remarkable goal-scoring streak as Inter Miami powered into the final of the Leagues Cup with an emphatic 4-1 victory over Philadelphia Union on Tuesday.

The Argentina superstar took his tally to nine goals in six appearances for Miami in an entertaining semi-final at Philadelphia's Subaru Park.

Venezuelan international Josef Martinez, Messi's former Barcelona team-mate Jordi Alba,

and substitute David Ruiz scored Miami's other goals, with Alejandro Bedoya the lone scorer for outgunned Philadelphia.

The result leaves Messi preparing for the 42nd final of his career with Miami facing Nashville SC in Saturday's final of the World Cup-style tournament for teams from Mexico and Major League Soccer.

Nashville booked their place in the final later Tuesday with a 2-0 win over Mexican side Monterrey and will host the final this

weekend. Miami meanwhile were left basking in a victory which also sees them qualify for the CONCACAF Champions Cup regional tournament next season - potentially opening up a route into FIFA's expanded Club World Cup in 2025.

"Our goal was to qualify for international competition next season and we've done that tonight," said Miami head coach Gerardo 'Tata' Martino. "This most important thing was achieving qualification for Con-

cacaf Champions Cup, and now we have to prepare to win this tournament, which has us feeling very motivated and confident."

Miami's semi-final in Philadelphia was in theory supposed to be the toughest assignment yet faced by Messi since he made his debut for Miami on July 21 after joining from Paris Saint-Germain.

Philadelphia are one of the strongest teams in MLS, and are third in the Eastern Conference standings while Miami are bottom of the table.



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SEAFOOD SALADS
Light yet filling, seafood salads are a good choice for a light lunch



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IN TOWN
Celebrations mark 77th Independence Day of Pakistan and India



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood



Photos: V K Shafeer

IDENTITY

crisis

Old Muttrah Souq is fast losing its identity as a traditional Omani Souq as an array of foreign goods have flooded its heritage lanes

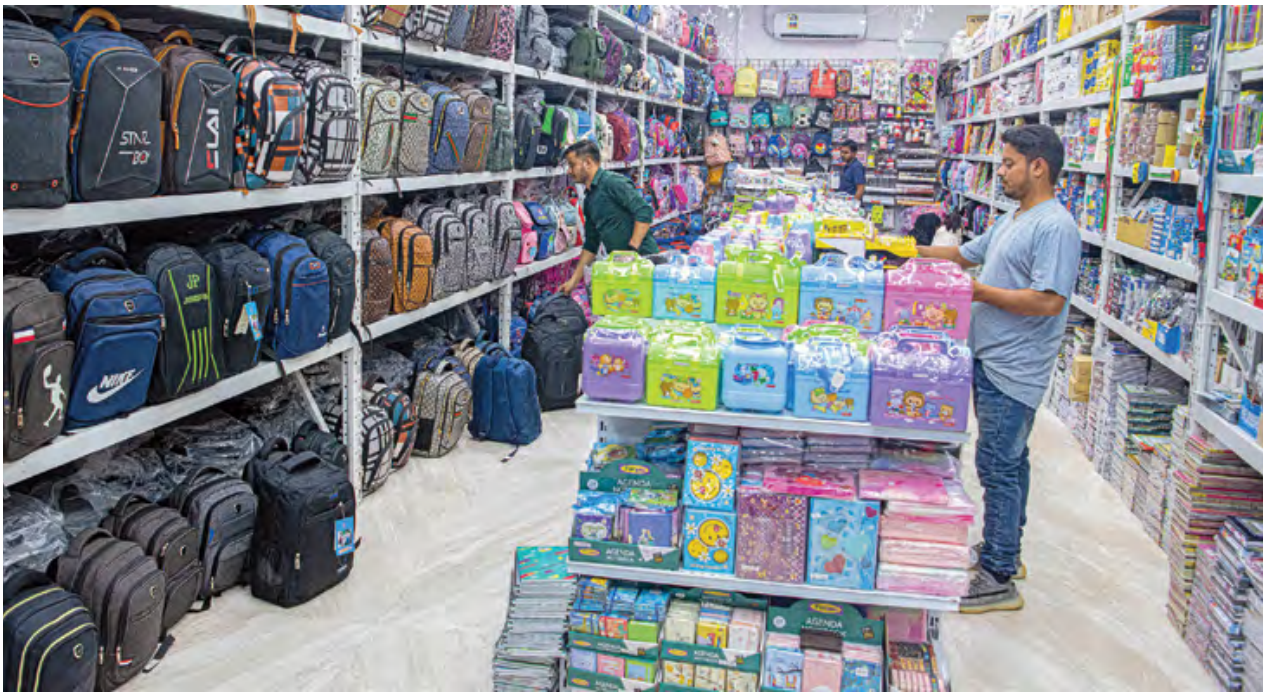
Our Correspondent

Attractive canvas school bags, pretty nylon dresses for girls, colourful sport T-shirts, fabulous plastic toys, electronic devices and playstations, dress materials, shoes, sunglasses... That's Old Muttrah Souq for you these days.

Ahem! What about the traditional items? Yes, there are quite a few shops selling these, but what hits you in the face are goods from China, Turkey, India, Bangladesh - stuff that doesn't belong here.

A string of foreign tourists who frequent this popular souq, on lightning visits to the capital, have expressed skepticism about the eroding old world charm of this souq - they point out that it is now filled with stuff you see in supermarkets and shopping arcades elsewhere. Only some shops sell traditional goods - whether handicrafts, traditional jewellery and trinkets, incense, Arabian perfumes - the rest is what you'd not like to see in a traditional souq, they assert.

Originally, a popular hangout to purchase traditional goods as well as to socialise, the Old Muttrah Souq now sees less of its regular patrons who used to frequent it regularly, especially during Ramadan and other festive occasions. Tourist, too, take a quick round



within the souq and leave as fast as possible as expatriate vendors hanging out in the lanes hound them with stuff they'd rather not buy.

"We came here to buy local Omani goods - luban, bukhoor, frankincense, and oud, spices, halwa," said a German tourist in the souq last week. "But, it is sad to see foreign goods everywhere. Why would tourists come here to buy stuff that you get in your own country, and of better quality?"

Another French tourist commented, "It is fake, all the items I have seen here so far are not Omani. We know what a souq is supposed to have...the Moroccan souq sold real and authentic items. Here, all I can see around me are items

- In demand**
Traditional handicrafts/art
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Toys and playstations
Footwear/garments
School bags/stationery
Sportswear/dress materials
Plastic/aluminium utensils
Imported toiletries/detergents

from China, Bangladesh and Turkey, instead of Omani."

According to an Omani vendor in the souq, "Decades ago, business used to be great, but now, not so much." He said, most tourists come for luban but they also buy the cheap Chinese goods that are sold there. "It hurts to see people now flock towards such products as we don't get the sales we used to."

Deeper into the heart of the market, another Indian shopkeeper who has been working at the store, owned by an Omani, said that the majority of the items they sell at the shop are Omani but they also sell products from Turkey. He said, most locals buy Turkish items, that's why they sell them. He,

however, asserted, "Tourists are always looking for genuine Omani items, to take them as mementos of their visit to Oman."

Another shopkeeper from Dhofar said that the traditional souqs in Salalah have a lot more local stuff and that business there is very good, compared to Muttrah Souq or Nizwa Souq. He works in a 200 year old shop in Muttrah Souq and admits that business has been on a steady decline for the past two decades.

Another Omani vendor, who sells all sorts of items from Singapore, Italy, India, China, Turkey, and Oman, said the shop has been there since around 1983 but currently business is not doing well at all. When asked why he sells foreign goods along with Omani products, he said, "People like buying imported items, so we sell them. It is more profitable to sell these."

While the souq still sees a flurry of activity during festive seasons as well as on weekends, especially if foreign cruise liners are docked at Muttrah Port, the fact remains that the heritage souq is fast losing its image. What is needed is civic intervention to rid the souq of vendors selling foreign goods that take away from its traditional identity, say some residents who have stopped visiting the souq for years because of this reason.

(With inputs from: Yukta Matai)

cook-up

LIGHT LUNCH

Salmon and Avocado Salad

Ingredients

4 cups baby spinach
2 tomatoes - chopped
1 avocado - diced
1 cucumber - sliced
¼ cup red onion - chopped
2tbsp olive oil
2 salmon fillets
Salt and pepper, to taste
2tbsp lemon vinaigrette

Method

Heat olive oil in a large pan over medium-high heat. Season the salmon fillets with salt and pepper. Add the salmon fillets top side down and cook for 4-5 minutes. Flip the salmon and cook for an additional 2-3 minutes or until the salmon is mostly opaque, with just a smidge of softness still in the middle. Divide all of the other salad ingredients between two bowls, then place the cooked salmon on top. Mix the dressing ingredients together in a small bowl and drizzle on top.



Sesame and Tuna Salad

Ingredients

2tsp soy sauce
2tsp toasted sesame oil
2tsp brown sugar
1tsp sesame seeds
300g tuna chunks - canned
1 red bell pepper
2 green onions

Method

In a small bowl, stir together the soy sauce, toasted sesame oil, brown sugar, and sesame seeds. Drain the tuna, then add it to a bowl. Dice the red bell pepper and slice the green onions. Add the bell pepper and green onion to the bowl with the tuna. Pour the prepared sesame dressing over the tuna and vegetables in the bowl. Carefully fold the ingredients together until everything is coated in dressing. Refrigerate until ready to eat.



Seafood Salads

If you prefer to shun carbs for lunch, how about some seafood salads that give you your daily dose of protein and fibre, and which keep your weight under check

Prawn and Corn Salad

Ingredients

400g jumbo prawns - deveined
1 large garlic clove - minced
1tsp smoked paprika, ½tsp ground cumin
Salt and ground pepper, to taste
Juice of 1 lemon, 1tbsp olive oil
1 medium ripe avocado - chopped
1 medium red onion - chopped
1 cup cherry/grape tomatoes - halved
1 jalapeno - seeded and chopped
½ cup chopped coriander, Juice and zest of one lemon
2 corn on the cob - fresh or pre-cooked
Wooden skewers - soaked in water

Method

Place the shrimp into a bowl and sprinkle with the seasonings. Add lime juice, zest, and oil, and mix well to evenly coat. Thread about 3 shrimps over each wooden skewer. Heat a grill pan over medium heat. Cook the shrimp skewers for about 2-3 minutes on each side, or until shrimp is pink and opaque. Once the shrimp skewers are done, set aside on a plate. Meanwhile, in a salad bowl, add chopped avocado, onion, minced garlic, cherry/grape tomatoes, jalapeño, and cilantro. Stir in the juice of 1 lime, and season with salt and pepper to your taste. Keeping the grill pan over medium-high heat, place the corn over and grill until charred on all sides, flipping it frequently, for about 6-8 minutes in total. Allow the corn to chill until ready to handle, then using a sharp knife, slice the corn from the cob and add it to the salad. Toss the salad to combine one more time, then top with shrimp skewers and serve.

Kale and Sardine Salad

Ingredients

For the salad
½ bunch kale (about 3 cups), 2 small cucumber
¼ cup sauerkraut (pickled cabbage), ¼ cup peas,
2tbsp sunflower seeds, 1 green onion - chopped,
¼ cup olives, 1 can sardines in brine

For the dressing

1 clove garlic, 2tsp mustard, 1tbsp parmesan
Juice of one lemon, ¼tsp salt, 4tbsp olive oil
1tsp dried parsley, a pinch of red chilli flakes
A pinch of crushed black pepper

Method

Crush garlic and add to a small bowl with remaining dressing ingredients. Whisk well with a fork to combine. Taste and adjust seasonings to your liking. Remember, the dressing should taste slightly more salty and acidic than you require it as it will be spread out over the salad. Set dressing aside. Remove stalks from kale and discard. Tear leaves into small pieces and add to a medium bowl. Sprinkle kale with a tiny amount of salt, and massage leaves with your hands until they are tender. Slice cucumbers and green onion and add to the bowl along with sauerkraut, peas, and olives. Pour dressing over the salad and toss to coat. Divide between two plates and add few pieces of sardines to each plate. Sprinkle with sunflower seeds.



Taste delicious wafer rolls with smooth hazelnut and cocoa cream

feel the roll



take a break

IN TOWN

PAKISTAN'S INDEPENDENCE DAY



A celebration was held at Pakistan School Muscat to mark Pakistan's 77th Independence Day on August 14



Photos: V K Shafeer

India's Independence Day



A celebration was held at the Embassy of India Muscat to mark India's 77th Independence Day on August 15



Photos: V K Shafeer

BOGGLER

E	S	S	A
A	L	A	Qu
U	R	S	I
E	B	L	A

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. How many bones are there in the human body?
A 182
B 206
C 237
D 264



2. Tom Holland won a Teen Choice Award for which of the following films?
A Uncharted
B Avengers: Infinity War
C Spiderman: Homecoming
D The Impossible

3. What is the measurement (which is approximately six feet) used to measure the depth of water?

- A Fathom
B Litre
C Metre
D Gallon

Answer :
3. A
2. C
1. B

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

One of your most important relationships is going through a transition right now, and while it might be uncomfortable and worrisome for a while, it will all work out for the best in the end. In the meantime, you should go out and start exploring other kinds of relationships. Find out for yourself what it's like to be an independent person without any alliances to hold you back.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

A friend or family member is doing quite well right now, and while you're awfully proud of them, you might also be the teeniest bit jealous. Don't feel guilty about it. It's totally normal. But if you start to feel like you're getting left behind while they rush ahead, it would be a good thing just to have a small talk with them.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you're working in a group today, you might have an opportunity to make yourself stand apart from the rest of the crowd. The only trick is that you can't wait for the opportunity to be given to you. You have to take it. Step into the leadership role before anyone else beats you to it. If you take the initiative in the group, you will be rewarded with their trust.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

A friend is acting oddly right now, and you could be getting somewhat suspicious. Try not to jump to any conclusions. There is far too little information for you to go on. Put yourself in their place. If you were having a bad day going through some personal stuff or trying to figure out problems, would you want friends assume the worst?



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're constantly evolving as a person, which means your opinions are also constantly evolving. Changing your mind about controversial issues or political points of view isn't necessarily a sign that you're weak or just going along with whatever someone is telling you to believe. As long as you are revising your thoughts based on facts and not external pressure, you're being true to yourself.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You should think long and hard before sharing any of your resources today. There's a possibility that what you give away will never return to you. Your generosity usually helps you out in life, but today it could get you into some trouble. So keep to yourself and avoid any situations where everyone is pitching in.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A friend's romantic relationship seems to be taking over their entire life right about now. They're completely about the relationship and this other person and you're starting to feel overlooked, to say the least. Try not to push too hard for time alone with them. Just accept the fact that they're deep in the honeymoon phase. Call up your other friends.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If there's a tense situation today, you might think that you have the key to avoiding conflict. But you don't really know all of the players involved well enough to make that assessment, do you? Play it safe by keeping quiet and staying out of the fray. If and when the storm does hit, get the heck out of the way! Keep your head down and avoid getting involved.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Mixed messages can be unsettling to digest, especially if you spend your time analyzing and interpreting what it was you really think the deliverer meant. Stop trying to read into their intentions. Not only is it practically impossible but it's also a guaranteed formula for frustration. Instead, figure out what it is you need to do next to get the ball rolling in a less confusing direction.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Pay close attention to the quality of your home life right now, and do what you can to improve it. If things are broken or out of whack where you spend your downtime, it could be affecting your attitude a lot more negatively than you think. You need to get a handle on small repairs before they cause you any undue stress.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Even if you're in a long-term romantic relationship right now, you've got more freedom in your social life than ever before. Are you making the most of it? You should take advantage of your ability to go where you want to go even if no one else wants to go there with you. It's a wonderful time to plan a solo outing.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Keep an eye on the messages that come your way today, especially the ones from friends you haven't seen in a while. One of them has a great opportunity hidden inside, but you might have to read between the lines in order to find it. Written communication in its traditional and digital forms will all feel like it's full of clues and puzzles right now.

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

entertainment



FROM BRAD PITT TO JANE FONDA, STARS SUPPORT THE STRIKE

It's the first time members of SAG-AFTRA (the Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) and WGA (the Writers Guild of America) have been on strike simultaneously in 63 years. And now, a line-up of stars, from Brad Pitt to Jane Fonda, are supporting the strike. Some productions in the UK have also been affected, with filming paused on a Formula 1 movie starring Brad Pitt, as well as *Deadpool 3*, and the musical film *Wicked*.

BEYONCE SHOWS SUPPORT FOR SINGER AT SHOW

Beyonce showed her support for Lizzo during her show in Atlanta on Monday night, calling out the *About Damn Time* singer's name and exclaiming her love for her. In a clip from the Mercedes-Benz Stadium show circulating on social media, Beyoncé is seen performing her hit song 'Break My Soul' (The Queen's Remix), and during the part of the record where the singer name-checks iconic female musicians, she said, "Lizzo. I love you, Lizzo!" Beyoncé's support for Lizzo comes amid damaging allegations made against the latter in a lawsuit filed by three former dancers. The suit alleges that Lizzo and her company created a hostile work environment for the dancers.



Dev Patel, Mindy Kaling board doc 'To Kill a Tiger'

Mindy Kaling and Dev Patel have boarded the doc *To Kill a Tiger* as executive producers prior to the film's October 20 release. The synopsis for the film reads, 'Ranjit, a farmer in India, takes on the fight of his life when he demands justice for his 13-year-old daughter, the victim of a brutal gang rape. His decision to support his daughter is virtually unheard of, and his journey unprecedented.'

COMING SOON

KING OF KOTHA

In a crime-infested town, Kannan bhai and his gang are the reigning powers. To combat this reign and seek revenge, Inspector Shahul tactfully plots the return of the 'King', leading to a transformative turn of events. Genre: Action Release date: August 24 Starring: Aishwarya Lekshmi, Dulquer Salmaan, Soubin Shahir Language: Malayalam



'Barbie' star Margot to bag salary of US\$50mn

Barbie, led by Margot Robbie, had been in the news since its announcement following that also because of its clash at the theatres with Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*, yet it derailed the box office and earned over US\$bn globally. As per reports, Margot Robbie will be paid around US\$50mn, which includes her salary and box-office bonuses. *Barbie* is reportedly the second highest-grossing film in the history of Warner Bros, following behind *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*. But that's not all, this Margot Robbie-led and Greta Gerwig-directed is the highest-grossing film from a female director, which was previously held by *Frozen II*, co-directed by Jennifer Lee.



Alia Bhatt appreciated for retaining Indian accent

Alia Bhatt is among the most talented actors in all of Bollywood. Throughout her career of 12 years, she has proved her acting mettle in various genres and worked with celebrated Indian directors. She recently added another feather of success to her career by making her Hollywood debut with *Heart of Stone*. While the movie has received mixed reviews, fans are happy with Alia sticking to her Indian accent and are brutally trolling Priyanka Chopra for her previous works. *Heart of Stone*, which also stars Gal Gadot and Jamie Dornan, saw Alia play the lead antagonist Keya Devgan. The movie, helmed by Tom Harper, ditched theatrical release and arrived on Netflix on August 11.

BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: **JAILER (TAMIL)** Genre: Social drama Starring: Rajinikanth, Vinayakan, Ramya Krishnan, Vasanth Ravi

BRINGING OUT THE BEAST

If you love watching movies in a house-full auditorium, go watch a Rajinikanth film. And if the 2016 film *Kabali*, which raked in Rs650 crore

(US\$78mn) worldwide, was any indicator, *Jailer* - the latest Tamil film starring the 72 year old Indian superstar - only confirms the same.



You'd not be bothered who's sitting next to you as your eyes would be fixed on the big screen on which Rajinikanth's screen presence and charisma are unparalleled. The film has earned over Rs200 crore in the first six days of its release itself and is galloping ahead in full steam, also in Oman. The veteran actor plays Muthuvel Pandian, a retired jailer who spends his time helping shoot videos for his grandson's YouTube channel. When his son Arjun (Vasanth Ravi), a conscientious cop, digs deep into an idol smuggling racket, trouble knocks on Muthu's door. Blaming the situation on his honest ways that have apparently rubbed on his son, Muthu steps back into a world he voluntarily took a break from.

Jailer does remind one of *Thangapathakkam* (1974) as well as Kamal Haasan's latest hit *Vikram*, both of which are about men who were once in service but are now out for blood to avenge injustice towards their kin. However, *Jailer* portrays a unique cinematic universe and the host of characters packed into it by director Nelson all seem appropriately placed. The baddies in the film are led by Varman (Vinayakan), a manic crime boss. And the flimsy plot is quite predictable, but what makes the film palatable is Rajinikanth's sheer charisma, style and subtle humour on screen. A good weekend watch!

Rating ★★★★★