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H M satisfied with fiscal performance

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq chaired a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday.

His Majesty the Sultan reviewed domestic affairs and expressed his satisfaction with Oman's fiscal performance over the past three years. He valued the good outcomes that, he said, strongly contributed to consolidating the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP), upgrading the country's financial and economic indicators and generating financial surplus that will be utilised in meeting a number economic and social priorities.

To this end, the Council of Ministers reviewed the draft of the State Budget for 2024, which is deemed consistent with the goals of the 10th Five-Year Plan.

In affirmation of his Royal attention to the care and welfare of youth - including proper grooming of youth as the best asset for subsequent generations - His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to begin work on establishing an integrated Sports City capable of hosting regional and international tournaments and competitions.

In this context, His Majesty

HIS MAJESTY'S DIRECTIVES

- Establish integrated Sports City for hosting global tournaments
- Citizens must participate in Majlis A'Shura elections
- Address challenges facing the implementation of Al Batinah Coastal Road project

H M affirms Oman's solidarity with Palestinian people

Muscat - Speaking on regional and international affairs at a Council of Ministers meeting on Wednesday, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq reviewed the critical developments and violence taking place in the Palestinian arena. In this context, His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed the Sultanate of Oman's solidarity with the Palestinian people. He reiterated Oman's support for all efforts calling for de-escalation, notably cessation of attacks on children and innocent civilians.

His Majesty the Sultan also called for release of hostages in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian laws. He urged the international community to shoulder its responsibilities by protecting civilians and lifting the illegal siege on Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian territories.

His Majesty the Sultan called for a resumption of the peace process to enable the Palestinian people to regain all their legitimate rights, notably the establishment of their independent state on the 1967 borders, with Al Quds Al Sharqiyah (East Jerusalem) as its capital, as per the principle of the Two-state Solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and all relevant UN resolutions.

the Sultan gave directives to develop infrastructure for camel races, serving as one of major sports events to which the activities of a large number of citizens are linked. These include building racecourses in the governorates in coordination with offices of governors and Oman Camel Racing Federation. This is envisaged to activate tourism activities in the governorates.

Next, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed the outcomes of assessment of all government units and their performance during the first half of 2023. He commended the tangible progress made in performance by most government units. He also gave directives to exert more efforts and sustain these over the upcoming period to help raise the standard of government performance, with emphasis on improving governance of procedures, organising business practice, gaining the confidence of beneficiaries and upgrading services.

The Council of Ministers hailed the preparations for the Majlis A'Shura elections undertaken by the Ministry of Interior and all other departments concerned to elect members for the shura's tenth term.

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Oman inks pact to develop green aviation fuel facility

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Civil Aviation Authority inked a memorandum of cooperation with OQ Group and SkyNRG, a sustainable aviation fuel solutions leader based in the Netherlands, aimed at studying the development of a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production facility in Oman, on Wednesday.

The memorandum will serve as the framework for the trio to leverage global expertise to set the core prerequisites of setting up an innovative facility focused on researching cutting-edge technologies that drive the production of SAF.

The agreement was signed by Naif bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority; Ghaleb bin Saeed al Maamari, Vice-President of Alternative Energy at OQ Group; and Oskar Meijerink, head of Future Fuels at SkyNRG.

The partnership underscores Oman's aspiration to be at the



(Supplied photo)

forefront of green fuel innovation, signalling its intent to weave sustainable practices into its everyday fabric and march towards carbon neutrality by 2050.

Abri emphasised the authority's commitment to curtail the environmental ramifications of aviation operations. He highlighted the Civil Aviation Law, issued by Royal Decree No 76/2019, which entrusts the authority with the mandate to formulate guidelines that mitigate environmental impacts,

keeping pace with global benchmarks.

Maamari lauded the memorandum as an embodiment of Oman's vision to tap into its green potential. He highlighted the transformative impact of SAF in curbing carbon emissions in the aviation sector.

According to Meijerink, the memorandum highlights the commendable strides made by both the authority and OQ Group in championing green fuel in the sultanate.



Manufacturing in Oman gets a new prestige!

OMAN

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2023



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H M RECEIVES CALL FROM PRESIDENT SISI

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq received a phone call from President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt on Wednesday.

During the phone call, the two leaders reviewed bilateral relations and means of enhancing these in various fields. They also exchanged views on several regional and international matters of mutual interest.



ESG Football Academy U16 Girls runners-up in Bahrain

Arab Regional Cybersecurity Centre event sets five Guinness records

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The ITU-Arab Regional Cybersecurity Centre (ITU-ARCC), headquartered in Oman, created five Guinness World Records with events of the 11th Regional Cybersecurity Week from October 9 to 12 in Abu Dhabi.

These records are for the most expansive cybersecurity attack simulation model, featuring over 50 experts; the largest cybersecurity attack simulation contest, drawing participation from 11 global organisations; a cybersecurity competition with representation from over 30 countries, setting a record for participant diversity; the largest city-based threat simulation in cybersecurity; and the largest number of nationalities participating in a lecture to spread awareness on cybersecurity, with attendance of over 500 people.

Coinciding with Regional Cy-



bersecurity Week, the 11th Regional Cybersecurity Conference was inaugurated on Wednesday. Themed 'Innovation in Cybersecurity', this flagship event is an ITU-ARCC brainchild, hosted by the UAE and backed by its Cybersecurity Council. The conference boasted an impressive line-up of international speakers and participants, representing both regional and global organisations.

The conference will spotlight pioneering strategies and innovations in cybersecurity, both in the Arab world and globally.

According to Badr bin Ali al Salhi, Chairman of ARCC and Di-

rector General of National Centre for Information Safety, the cybersecurity market could grow to a staggering US\$657bn by 2030 from its valuation of US\$247bn in 2023.

He projected robust growth of cybersecurity within sectoral markets, anticipating an 18% surge in health and a 29% uptick in industry by 2026. Further, with Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies gaining momentum, the field of cybersecurity is poised for exponential expansion, especially in artificial intelligence - from a valuation of US\$8.6bn in 2019 to a projected US\$102bn by 2030.

Spotlight on Dhofar as French, Czech media converge on it

Our Correspondent
Salalah

In a move poised to shine the global spotlight on Omani tourism, Dhofar is set to welcome a delegation of French journalists and a TV crew from the Czech Republic. They will showcase the governorate's prime attractions, according to Marwan bin Abdul Hakim al Ghassani, Director of Promotions in Dhofar's Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism.

As winter sets in, Dhofar comes alive for the tourism season, which continues till April. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is intensifying efforts and campaigns to promote tourism in the governorate in this period with diverse events and entertainment options.

"Next week, Dhofar will welcome French media guests to explore renowned archaeological sites and pen features for prominent French publications. Concurrently, a Czech television crew will make a film spotlighting Dhofar's uniqueness, targeting the Czech and broader Eastern European markets," Ghassani elaborated.

He shed light on impressive connectivity, citing 478 direct flights from European cities to Salalah Airport in the 2022-2023 season, when 30 cruise ships



(Supplied photos)



Dhofar is hosting iconic Dutch football veterans, amplifying the governorate's appeal via their media presence

MARWAN AL GHASSANI

also docked. MHT held over 60 promotional events and hallmark festivals, including the Empty Quarter Festival and Frankincense Season Festival.

"Our ministry's promotional department has organised 33 media focused tours to Dhofar, launched over 30 expansive campaigns encompassing exhibitions, ad placements, influ-

encer partnerships and published numerous reports across media platforms."

In collaboration with industry partners, the ministry in spotlighting Dhofar's winter allure. "Notably, Mughsail Beach has garnered acclaim as one of the globe's pristine beaches."

Ghassani informed that currently Dhofar is hosting iconic

Dutch football veterans, amplifying the governorate's appeal via their media presence and facilitating an exploratory journey for Indian tour and travel firms alongside the Indian Tourism Representative Office.

"With its temperate climate, expansive shores, scenic wonders and Unesco World Heritage Sites such as Al Baleed, Sumharam and Al Shahr, Dhofar beckons. Add to this, the Land of Frankincense Museum, historic forts in locales like Taqah and Mirbat, bustling markets, springs, caves and endless adventure options from water sports to desert escapades in the Rub al Khali desert," Ghassani added.

Travel industry abuzz with optimism

UNIFIED GCC VISA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Travel industry executives have hailed the unified GCC visa - expected to be implemented soon - as a milestone for residents and international tourists alike. The decision, endorsed by the Gulf Cooperation Council member states' tourism ministers on October 8, was reached unanimously at a meeting held in Muscat.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

The minister expressed his enthusiasm, stating that the unified Gulf visa is "coming very soon". This development is expected to enhance tourism across the GCC, making it easier and more convenient for tourists to visit and explore the diverse attractions of the region.

According to Sunil D'souza, CEO of Travel Point, the visa overhaul will be advantageous for GCC residents and international visitors alike, facilitating seamless access to all six member states. "The wealth of tourist hubs and event locales in the GCC stand to gain immensely," he noted.

"Visitors can now pre-plan their holidays without juggling multiple visa applications. This breakthrough will undoubtedly elevate tourism and broaden market access."

Addressing concerns about a potential loss for travel agencies, D'souza clarified, "While visa-related revenue may dip, burgeoning opportunities in hotel



(Supplied photo)

The visa overhaul will be advantageous for GCC residents and international visitors alike

SUNIL D'SOUZA

bookings, sightseeing tours and other ventures will more than compensate. We anticipate a significant uptick in travel activities."

Echoing this opinion, Rohith Asokan from Global Holidays, highlighted the probable surge in tourist numbers, benefitting travel industry stakeholders.

This visa unification will reflect positively across nations, invigorating the sectors of hospitality, transportation and dining. "It's a monumental stride in fortifying

regional synergy and collaboration," said Asokan.

"The Gulf states, with their rich tapestry of culture, legacy and scenic natural wonders, have long been a magnet for global tourists. Travel agencies shouldn't fret over this policy - an influx of travellers within the GCC is virtually guaranteed."

Sreedhu Nair, Director of Sales at Travel Diaries, too, anticipates an increase in tourist traffic as a result of the convenience of a common visa. "As soon as the visa systems are in place, we expect it to help improve the economy and encourage GCC residents who are hesitant to travel."

Nair is confident that the GCC region is going to be the next hot tourist destination in the world "which might even challenge the Schengen countries in terms of tourism".



(Supplied photo)

Drive to eradicate adult illiteracy through digital outreach

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is intensifying its efforts to combat adult illiteracy, leveraging the power of digital and social media platforms to expand the reach of adult education. A total of 2,623 individuals across Oman have enrolled in adult literacy programmes for the academic year 2022-2023.

Recent data from the Ministry of Education (MoE) reveals a 2.60% illiteracy rate in the 15 years and older category. Committed to the goals set by the Arab Decade for Eradication of

Illiteracy (2015-2024), Oman is striving for a zero illiteracy rate by 2024.

The sultanate's focus on the crucial demographic of 15-44 years has borne fruit - the illiteracy rate in this category reduced from 2.2% in 2015 to 0.44% by the end of 2022.

National Centre for Statistics and Information data further breaks down the enrollment in adult literacy programmes for 2022-2023. Of the 2,623 students enrolled, 2,535 are female.

At the governorates level, Muscat has 293 enrollments, including 272 female students, fol-

lowed by Dhofar with 130 students, of which 105 are female; Musandam 44 (all females); Buraimi 60 (all females); Dakhliyah 300, of which 293 are female; North Batinah 568 (all females); South Batinah 360 (all females); South Sharqiyah 293 (all females); North Sharqiyah 116, of which 111 are females; Dhahirah 217, of which 215 are female; and Al Wusta 242, of which 214 are female.

The total number of educators engaged in the adult literacy programmes across governorates for the academic year 2022-2023 is 413.

49% of dam project in Wadi Adoubab complete

Salalah - The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has stated that work is progressing on the flood protection dam project in Wadi Adoubab in the wilayat of Salalah. The project is now 49%

complete at a cost exceeding RO23mn.

According to Rashid bin Saeed al Ghafri, Direct General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar, the project is important for the free

zone and port in Salalah while essential for residential and economic facilities in the governorate.

Salalah Port stands out as a crucial commercial port in the Middle East.

Recall



Mitsubishi
Outlander 2023

Recall Date : 12 October 2023

Brand of Commodity

Year of Production

Number of Affected Commodities

Mitsubishi
Outlander

2023

22

Recall consequence

Arabic language issue in combination meter on OUTLANDER (7.0" Multi-information display) control program update

Recall Action

Use latest software package, Ver.SDB_X230701/SDBN_X230801NR onward.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>



For more information, please call
24 500 500 or 24 500 502
from Sunday to Thursday between
08.00 am to 05.30 pm.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30

4,778.47

Sensex

66,473.05

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India

216.01

Pakistan

725.45

Bangladesh

286.41

Philippines

147.21

Sri Lanka

843.02

*Rates as on October 11

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Chinese electric vehicle firm files for bankruptcy

Chinese electric vehicle company WM Motor has filed for bankruptcy, it said in a statement, a stark reminder of the fierce domestic competition in the world's largest car and EV market.

WM Motor was seen as one of the firms more likely to succeed, with primary backing from internet giant Baidu and additional support from tech titan Tencent.

But in a statement posted Tuesday on social media, it said that in recent years it had "entered a difficult operating environment".

It cited the Covid-19 pandemic, capital market downturn, the price of raw materials and a general shortage of funds as reasons for the bankruptcy filing.

"WM Motor's pre-restructuring will bring in strategic investors from around the world."

OQGN IPO oversubscribed 14 times, attracts RO4bn in orders

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The initial public offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the sole operator of Oman's gas transportation system, received a solid response from local, regional, and international investors and oversubscribed by nearly 14 times, making it the largest IPO in the sultanate.

Total demand for the RO288mn IPO surpassed RO4bn, resulting in an oversubscription level of 13.9 times, for all tranches combined, according to data released by OQGN on X, formerly Twitter.

The OQGN IPO had opened for public subscription on September 26 and closed on October 9.

The individual investors category saw tremendous appetite from local retail investors with demand collected in excess of RO487.03mn, implying an oversubscription level of 6.1 times. The size of this tranche in the IPO was RO80.08mn or 30% of the offering.

Local institutions category attracted demand of RO1.326bn, implying an oversubscription level of 22.3 times. The size of this tranche in the IPO was



Regional and international institutions category attracted the highest demand of RO2.099bn, implying an oversubscription level of 35.3 times

RO59.29mn or 20% of the offering.

Regional and international institutions category attracted the highest demand of RO2.099bn, implying an oversubscription level of 35.3 times. The size of

revocable commitments from Saudi Omani Investment Company, a wholly-owned entity of the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia, Falcon Investments, a subsidiary of the Qatar Investment Authority, and Fluxys International.

"We are proud to record the largest initial public offering in Oman, with the subscription volume in the company's shares amounting to more than RO4bn. We welcome our new investors

on our success journey. We sincerely thank our partners in success for their confidence in OQGN," OQGN said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

OQGN's Selling Shareholders offered 49% of the company's total share capital through the IPO. Following the completion of the IPO, OQ Group will continue to own 51% of OQGN share capital.

The shares of OQGN are expected to list on the Muscat

Stock Exchange (MSX) on or around October 24, 2023, as announced by the company earlier.

OQGN's listing on the MSX will provide investors with access to the growth of the company, which holds a natural monopoly over essential gas transportation in Oman.

As per the IPO prospectus, OQGN intends to adopt a semi-annual dividend distribution policy to pay dividends in cash after the offer.

The company expects to pay the first dividend distribution of RO33mn for the first nine months of 2023 around January 2024 and expects to pay the second dividend distribution of RO11mn for the last three months of 2023 around April 2024.

OQGN currently expects to pay a dividend for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2024, which will be the higher of 90% of the company's profit for the year or a 5% increase in the aggregate dividends paid for 2023.

For 2025, the company expects to pay a dividend, which will be the higher of 90% of the profit for the year ending December 31, 2025, or a 5% increase in the dividends paid for 2024.

Oman's government revenues fall by 15% in first 8 months of 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's public revenues fell by 15% to RO7.923bn in the first eight months of 2023 from RO9.325bn recorded over the same period in 2022, according to the Ministry of Finance.

Net oil revenue declined by 10% to RO4.145bn at the end of August 2023 compared to RO4.594bn in the same period in 2022. During the first eight months of this year, Oman's average oil price amounted to \$82 per barrel, and average oil production reached 1,056,000 barrels per day.

Net gas revenue amounted to RO1.434bn, down by 40% when compared to RO2.386bn registered over the same period in 2022.

"This decline is due to the de-

duction of gas purchase and transport expenses from the total revenue collected from Integrated Gas Company," the Ministry of Finance said in its Fiscal Performance bulletin.

Of the total public revenues, current revenue increased to RO2.334bn compared with RO2.331bn collected over the same period in 2022.

Public spending amounted to RO7.149bn during the first eight months of 2023, down by 13% compared to actual spending over the same period in 2022.

Current expenditure amounted to RO5.463bn during the eight months period this year, a decline of 13% from



RO6.286mn registered over the same period in 2022. Development expenditure of civil ministries reached RO572mn, representing 64% of total development spending, i.e. RO900mn, allocated for 2023.

Total of contributions and other expenses amounted to RO914mn, down by 21% compared with RO1.150bn recorded over the same period in 2022. The electricity sector subsidy and oil product subsidy amounted to RO244mn and RO206mn, respectively. Furthermore, an amount of RO266mn was transferred to future debt obligations budget-item.

By the end of August 2023,

the state's general budget registered a surplus of RO773mn compared to a surplus of RO1.090bn achieved over the same period in 2022.

The Ministry of Finance noted that Oman's efforts exerted towards fiscal consolidations, public debt reduction and liability management operations, besides high oil prices, led to an improvement in public finance. This also prompted the global ratings agencies to improve the credit rating of Oman, after significant decline over the past years.

In September, S&P Global and Fitch Ratings upgraded the credit rating of Oman. These agencies pointed out that the credit rating of Oman could be further upgraded in case the government continues the fiscal consolidation measures and reducing public debt, notably external debt.

Deal signed for polymer products factory in Samail Industrial City

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman-based Oranss Technology Company and Egypt-based Mobel Polymers have signed an agreement to establish a polymer products manufacturing factory in Samail Industrial City, with an initial investment of \$7mn.

The signing ceremony, attended by Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), took place on the sidelines of the two companies' participation in the ongoing Home and Building Expo at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The agreement was signed by Sharifa al Naamani, chairperson of Oranss Technology's board of directors, and Dr Hany Makary, chairman of Mobel Polymers'



board of directors.

In a press statement, Sharifa pointed out that the factory's output will serve as a pivotal source of raw materials for various manufacturing sectors within the sultanate, which were previously reliant on imports, thereby catalysing the growth of Omani industries.

"The partnership forged between Oranss Technology and Mobel Polymers represents the

strong bond between Oman and Egypt, encouraging innovation, economic growth, and international cooperation," she said.

Sharifa underscored Oranss Technology's vision, which aims to boost Oman's industrial sector, explore new opportunities for Omani investors, attract international expertise for knowledge exchange, and develop a highly skilled Omani workforce.

OOMCO expands Saudi operations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Marking the occasion of Saudi Arabia's 93rd National Day, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) recently celebrated opening three additional service stations in the western region of the kingdom. The company's network in Saudi Arabia expanded this year by 10 sites bringing the total number of operational service stations to 26.

The Oman-based fuel marketer announced that it aims to operate 30 stations across Saudi Arabia by the end of 2023, which aligns with its aim to become one of the top five fuel marketers in the GCC by 2026. OOMCO celebrated Saudi National Day at select service stations across the rapidly developing kingdom. It hosted festive and family-friendly activities at three of its sites in Jeddah in the west and at four stations in Al Ahsa,



Dammam, and Al Qatif in the east, according to a press statement.

"The International Monetary Fund recently confirmed that Saudi Arabia was the fastest growing G20 economy in 2022. By further expanding our operations, we are not only serving a vast market with a multitude of opportunities, but we are also allowing our business to grow. We are pleased an Omani has successfully traveled across borders," said Jaber Mansour al

Wahaibi, general manager of international retail, business development, strategic planning, marketing and digital at Oman Oil Marketing Company.

Serving a wide variety of customer segments and as part of its non-fuel growth and retail transformation process, OOMCO service stations have developed into welcoming one-stop destinations where customers can buy quality fuel, lubricants, and other products and services.

Global natural gas demand growth to slow: IEA

Paris, France – Growth in global natural gas demand is expected to slow in the coming years as consumption declines in mature markets following a decade of unprecedented expansion, according to the International Energy Agency's (IEA) latest report on Tuesday.

Triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, the global energy crisis has ushered in a different era for global gas markets, following a decade of strong growth from 2011 to 2021.

The increase in global natural gas demand will fall from an average of 2.5% in the 2017–2021 period to 1.6% in the 2022–2026 period, according to the IEA's new medium-term market report.

However, this growth is expected to slow down, especially in Asia-Pacific countries, Europe and North America by 1% annually through 2026.

Renewable energy deploy-



ment and energy efficiency improvements are primarily driving the decline in natural gas demand in these areas. This has been seen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when Europe lost access to piped gas and sought alternative energy solutions to ensure energy security.

Asia, the Middle East and Africa are forecast to be the mar-

kets where growth in gas demand will intensify. China is projected to account for half of the expected global gas demand growth between 2022 and 2026.

Also, new liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities commissioned in 2025–2026 are expected to partially relieve supply congestion in global gas markets. Global LNG capacity is set to grow by 25%

between 2022 and 2026, with the US strengthening its position as the world's largest LNG exporter with its new facilities.

Growth in LNG supply indicates a shift to a more globalised gas market, which will improve resiliency for suppliers and consumers to respond to supply and demand shocks, the report says.

Anadolu Agency

Qatar signs major gas supply deal with France's TotalEnergies

Doha, Qatar – Qatar has agreed to supply France's TotalEnergies with natural gas for 27 years, its state energy company announced on Wednesday.

Qatar will supply 3.5mn tonnes of gas a year under the deal, QatarEnergy said, following two agreements with Total last year for a share of the Gulf state's huge North Field gas expansion project.

"These two new agreements we have signed with our partner TotalEnergies, demonstrate our continued commitment to the European markets in general, and to the French market in particular, thus contributing to France's energy security," Qatari Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi said.

Total signed a \$1.5bn deal with QatarEnergy in September last year giving it a 9.3% stake in Qatar's North Field South project, the second phase of the field's expansion.

In June 2022, the French energy giant became the first partner in the first phase of the expansion, North Field East, investing more than \$2bn for a 6.25% total share.

Deliveries of the gas to southern France are expected to begin in 2026.

"Our commitment to ensure continued and reliable supplies of energy to Europe and the rest of



The agreements were signed by Saad al-Kaabi (right) and Patrick Pouyanné, chairman and CEO of TotalEnergies, on Tuesday (QatarEnergy)

Our commitment to ensure continued and reliable supplies of energy to Europe and rest of world is underpinned by our substantial and ongoing investments across entire gas value chain

SAAD AL-KAABI

the world is underpinned by our substantial and ongoing investments across the entire gas value

chain," Kaabi, who is also chief of QatarEnergy added.

Energy security

After Moscow invaded Ukraine last year, European nations have scrambled to replace lost deliveries of natural gas following the withdrawal of Russia from the market.

Under Qatar's North Field expansion of the world's biggest natural gas field, which extends under the Gulf into Iranian territory, Qatar is set to raise its output of liquefied natural gas (LNG) by 60% or more to 126mn

tonnes a year by 2027.

The main market for Qatari gas has traditionally been found in Asia, led by nations like China, Japan and South Korea.

Qatar's deal with Total is equal in length to those agreed by the China National Petroleum Corporation in June and China's Sinopec in 2022, making it the third such deal, all of which have been the longest in the liquefied gas industry.

Speaking to reporters at the start of construction at the North Field expansion last week, the chairman of TotalEnergies, Patrick Pouyanné, told reporters the North Field Expansion would offer energy security.

"We need more supply. That's clear. Still the market is fragile," Pouyanné said.

"This project is a major one and will give some relief to this market," he added.

Britain's Shell, Italy's Eni and US giants ConocoPhillips and ExxonMobil have also signed deals to partner in the expansion.

Qatar is one of the world's top LNG producers, alongside the United States, Australia and Russia.

Qatar Energy estimates the North Field holds about 10% of the world's known natural gas reserves.

AFP

US Fed 'on track' to avoid recession

Washington, US – The Federal Reserve is on track to tackle US inflation without pushing the country into a damaging recession, a senior official on the bank's rate-setting committee said.

After pushing its key lending rate to a 22-year high to tackle stubborn inflation, the Fed recently slowed down the pace of its hikes, citing a need to be data-dependent.

Consumer inflation has fallen sharply since the campaign began in March 2022, but remains stuck above the Fed's long-term target of two percent, maintaining the pressure on policymakers.

"We feel like we're on track for a soft landing," Minneapolis Fed President Neel Kashkari told a conference in North Dakota, using a popular term to describe tackling inflation while avoiding a recession.

"Inflation has come down quite a bit, the labor market has remained strong, maybe we can get inflation all the way back down and avoiding (sic) a deep recession," he said.

Kashkari also engaged with recent comments from Dallas Fed President Lorie Logan, who said elevated long-term interest rates could mean there is "less need" for another rate hike.

Yields on the 10-year US Treasury recently rose to a 16-year high as traders raised their



Neel Kashkari

expectations that interest rates will have to remain higher for longer to bring inflation down.

Higher yields on longer-term notes feed into increased consumer borrowing costs, which can act to constrain economic activity and reduce the rate at which prices increase.

"It's certainly possible that higher long term yields may do some of the work for us in terms of bringing inflation back down," Kashkari said Tuesday.

But he warned that if yields rose due to a change in expectations about Fed policy, the US central bank "might actually have to follow through on their expectations in order to maintain those yields."

"So it's a little bit circuitous, and it's hard for me to say definitively, 'hey, because they've moved therefore we don't have to move,'" he added.

AFP



ExxonMobil to buy Texas shale producer Pioneer for \$60bn

New York, US – US energy giant ExxonMobil sealed a megadeal to acquire Pioneer Natural Resources for about \$60bn, bolstering its holdings in the Permian Basin, a key US petroleum region, the companies announced Wednesday.

Under the all-stock transaction, ExxonMobil will buy Texas-based Pioneer for \$59.5bn based on ExxonMobil's closing price on October 5. The overall transaction, including debt, is valued at around \$64.5bn, the companies said.

ExxonMobil said the takeover, the company's biggest since the late 1990s acquisition of Mobil by Exxon, will enable greater economies of scale, permitting it to deploy drilling and operating technologies over a bigger region.

"The combined capabilities of our two companies will provide long-term value creation well in excess of what either company is capable of doing on a standalone basis," said ExxonMobil Chief Executive Darren Woods.

The "highly contiguous" drilling acreage of the two companies will allow "for greater opportunities to deploy our technologies, delivering operating and capital efficiency as well as significantly increasing production," Woods said.

Production in the Permian Basin, located in western Texas and eastern New Mexico, accounts for a whopping 5.8 million barrels of oil per day, or about 45 % of US output.

The region has a long and storied history, with the first wells dating to 1920. The basin soared

during the energy boom of the 1970s before experiencing a steady decline in subsequent decades.

The US shale boom of the 2010s revived the area, with fracking and new drilling techniques that make development more affordable.

Both ExxonMobil and fellow US petroleum behemoth Chevron have invested heavily in the region in recent years.

With the Pioneer acreage, ExxonMobil will be able to drill

ExxonMobil said the takeover will enable greater economies of scale, permitting it to deploy drilling and operating technologies over a bigger region

some wells as long as four miles, boosting efficiency the oil giant said would enable it to produce the acquired acreage for less the \$35 a barrel.

The takeover comes as oil currently trades at more than \$85 a barrel, a relatively high historical benchmark. ExxonMobil vowed that it would employ best practices on the environment, accelerating Pioneer's plan to reach "net zero" emissions by 15 years to 2035 and employing technology to limit methane emissions.

But as a longterm bet on oil and gas, the merger is unlikely to please climate activists.

AFP

World Bank needs to get 'better', 'bigger': President

Marrakesh, Morocco – The World Bank's new president, Ajay Banga, said Wednesday that the global lender must become "better" and "bigger" to boost its capacity to help developing countries battle climate change, poverty and pandemics.

Banga, who was appointed in June, made his plea at the annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank in the southern Moroccan city of Marrakesh where reform of the Washington-based institutions is a major agenda item.

The former CEO of Mastercard has previously vowed to "fix the plumbing" at the bank, saying it was "dysfunctional" despite a dedicated staff.

Banga said at a press conference on Wednesday that a "deep cultural change" is needed at an "institution that has a proud history and done an amazing job over the last 78 years."

He noted that countries have to deal with various departments and that it can take 27 months between the time a project is discussed and is finally approved.

"The idea of a better bank is a bank that works better with itself, is more efficient in its own processes," Banga said.

'Livable planet'

The Indian-born, naturalised US citizen has vowed to make climate change a top priority after he took over from David Malpass, a former US Treasury official who stepped down early from his five-year term amid questions about his stance on the issue.

Banga wants to redefine the vision of the bank towards "eradicating poverty on a livable planet".

He said poverty, pandemics and climate change were "almost like a perfect storm" that can no longer be treated separately.



World Bank president Ajay Banga

He cited an independent expert group commissioned by the G20, which recommended the tripling of financing of multilateral development banks.

"The G20 expert group has put out its own thinking on that. That has not yet been accepted by the G20," Banga said.

"I'm definitely going to go back to our shareholders to seek a bigger bank because I believe that is what the world needs for the next coming decades," he said.

US President Joe Biden has asked Congress for support to unlock concessional financing for the World Bank, which Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said could amount to \$27bn.

But work in Congress is being held up as Republicans look for a new House speaker following the ouster of Kevin McCarthy by hardliners last week.

Banga, however, said he was

"hopeful" that Congress would approve the measure.

"There are plenty of people on both sides of the House, as well as both sides of the Senate, who understand the value of multilateral banking system as a key to way for the Western and developed world to continue to do the right thing around the world," he said.

Other countries such as Germany have contributed while Nordic nations and Saudi Arabia are discussing ways to contribute through various instruments, he said.

Yellen said at a separate press conference that she would ask other countries to provide immediate concessional finance for the World Bank.

"We're receiving some positive responses," she said. "This is a very important priority for the president."

AFP

German economy to shrink this year, govt says

Frankfurt, Germany – The German government slashed its growth forecast Wednesday, predicting Europe's top economy will shrink this year as it battles high inflation, elevated energy prices and a manufacturing slump.

Output will shrink 0.4%, the economy ministry said in its latest projections.

This is a marked downgrade from its last estimate in April, when Berlin forecast growth of 0.4% in 2023.

The economy has faced severe headwinds since Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year sent inflation, particularly the cost of energy, soaring.

The crisis has been compounded by a slowdown in the energy-hungry manufacturing sector, weakness in key trading partner China, and aggressive eurozone rate hikes aimed at



Robert Habeck shows a GDP graph as he gives a press conference on the new 2023 economic growth forecast, in Berlin (AFP)

taming runaway consumer prices.

"In a difficult geopolitical environment, we are emerging from the crisis more slowly than expected," Economy Minister Robert Habeck acknowledged in a statement.

The German economy fell into

recession around the turn of the year and has since been struggling to get back on its feet, registering zero growth in the second quarter.

The government's prediction is in line with other recent gloomy estimates.

The International Monetary

Fund on Tuesday forecast Germany will be the worst performing major economy in 2023, shrinking 0.5%.

In their forecasts Wednesday, the government predicted the economy would pick up next year with growth of 1.3%, and expand by 1.5% in 2025.

Inflation is expected to come in at 6.1% this year, before declining to 2.6% next year and two per cent in 2025, the economy ministry said.

Habeck sought to strike an upbeat tone, noting that "for the coming year, we expect growth again."

"The course for a sustainable economic recovery has been set: the decline in inflation is significant, and with it, real incomes are rising again."

The last official forecast in April came as hopes were rising that Germany had weathered the

energy crisis better than expected, with some indicators pointing to an industrial rebound.

But the picture has deteriorated again in recent months, with expectations growing the economy could tip back into recession.

While they have come down, energy prices are still far higher than prior to the Ukraine war. And while inflation slowed to 4.5% in September, it remains stubbornly high.

The worsening economic situation has led to debate about whether Germany is once again the "sick man of Europe", a label from the late 1990s when the country grappled with the costly fallout of reunification.

But some analysts have said this is going too far, pointing out the labour market remains robust despite the challenges.

AFP

Lynk & Co presents four models at Geneva International Motor Show

At the Geneva International Motor Show underway in Doha, Qatar, Lynk & Co is determined to provide an unforgettable moment for car enthusiasts and those seeking a stylish lifestyle.

CO:STORE showcases four Lynk & Co models in the exhibition space: Lynk & Co 01, Lynk & Co 03+, Lynk & Co 05, Lynk & Co 09. Exclusive Lynk & Co branded products are available for purchase here.

'This exhibition space is not just a place to display cars; it is a gathering point that sets the tone for the future of automotive culture and lifestyle,' Lynk & Co stated.

The Lynk & Co exhibition area is located in the D5-E7 of the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC). Within this 644sqm space, visitors can enjoy a range of exciting interactive and entertainment experiences across four main themed zones.

Lynk & Co 01 area features a vinyl record player and a camping setup, creating a cozy and relaxed atmosphere reminiscent of family vacations. Lynk & Co 03+ area is equipped with racing simulators, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the



excitement and prestige of a racing club-like environment.

Lynk & Co 05 offers VR driving equipment designed to blend the aesthetics of Mega-city Contrast with driving innovation. In Lynk & Co 09's opulent lounge area, visitors will be enchanted by the luxurious, comfortable sofas and the generous space available.

It's designed to provide a lavish seating experience and ample

room for relaxation, allowing you to unwind and indulge in a tranquil environment.

Each of the four exhibition areas is equipped with music experience installations and Harman Kardon audio systems, providing a delightful music experience.

The CO:FFEE offers customised beverages tailored to the car models, as well as delicious desserts, coffee, signature

cocktails, and meals.

Lynk & Co has officially unveiled its presence in Qatar on October 6th at the Geneva International Motor Show Qatar. This launch is facilitated by Auto Class Cars, the official distributor for Lynk & Co under the NBK Group, which will take full responsibility for Lynk & Co's sales and services in Qatar.

Nasser Bin Khaled Group, abbreviated as NBK, was founded

in 1950. In the automotive sector, it serves as the official agent for several renowned brands in Qatar, including Mercedes-Benz, Mitsubishi, MG (Morris Garages), Maxus (SAIC), FUSO, Harley-Davidson, Michelin Tires, and Bosch. In addition, NBK also operates across construction, real estate, and tourism.

Lynk & Co's showroom in Qatar is located on Salwa Road in Doha, amidst a bustling auto-

motive district with numerous car brands, making it a primary destination for consumers looking to purchase vehicles.

Following the Geneva International Motor Show Qatar, Lynk & Co's showroom will commence its official operations soon, gradually enhancing the overall development of Lynk & Co's presence in Qatar and other Middle East countries like Oman.

Lulu launches 'Discover America 2023' campaign

On October 9, Lulu Hypermarket in partnership with the US Embassy in Oman launched its eighth edition of the 'Discover America' campaign, an annual affair that enables shoppers to explore the wide range of American products available in Oman.

The event, being held from October 9 to 14 across selected Lulu outlets in Oman, showcases a wide range of more than 1,000 high-quality products specially flown in from the United States for Lulu shoppers.

The promotion includes food products, fresh meat, fresh fruits, vegetables and more. Lulu has stocked up on a range of America's favourite products and most popular brands, enabling Lulu shoppers to experience the quality and value of American products at attractive prices.

Leslie Ordeman, Chargé d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Oman, inaugurated the event at Lulu Hypermarket, Bausher, on October 9 in the presence of Lulu management, staff members, and customers.

Speaking on the promotion, Ordeman said, "Discover America celebrates the strong commercial partnership between Oman and the United States, anchored by the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement."



Bank Muscat celebrates Green Sports winners

In emphasis of its pioneering role in corporate social responsibility, community development and the youth, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, recently organised an event celebrating the 20 winning teams for this year's 12th edition of the 'Green Sports' programme, with the attendance of Sheikh Waleed Khamis al Hashar, the bank's Chief Executive Officer, in addition to other executives from the bank, representatives of the winning sports teams, and journalists from leading media houses in the country.

Since its inauguration in 2012,

the programme has benefitted 183 teams with over 50,000 members across the Sultanate of Oman. These sports teams attract a large number of young people in Oman, helping them showcase their talents and providing them with opportunities for physical, emotional, and mental development.

The Green Sports programme is one of the Bank's flagship CSR programmes aiming at sporting skills of the Omani talented youth in the sports and cultural domains. The support provided by the programme includes greening of football pitches, water desalination and lighting.

In addition, the programme annually receives excellent participation by sports teams from across the governorates desiring to enhance green spaces for the Omani youth to improve their sporting skills by equipping these spaces with sports facilities. This year, 124 teams have competed, thereby asserting the program's success and popularity among Omani youth.

During the celebration, Sami Bait Rashid, assistant general manager, Meethaq Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, delivered a speech where he said that year after year, the programme sees excellent participation by sports

teams from across the sultanate confirming the bank's tremendous support in making the program a great success among the Omani youth.

Considering that Bank Muscat plays a pioneering role in the CSR programmes, he further added that it will continue providing ample opportunities to young Omanis to develop their talents. He thanked the teams for their cooperation in making the programme a grand success.

Bank Muscat recently announced the winning sports teams across the sultanate who benefited from the support provided by the programme.

ahlibank's Ibri branch opens in new location

In a strategic decision to enhance accessibility, ahlibank, has recently relocated its Ibri branch. A grand opening event was held in celebration and was graced by the presence of Najeeb Ali al Rawas, Governor of Dhahira.

'This new location has been carefully chosen to cater to the bank's growing customer base in the vicinity, and aligns with its objective of bringing innovative banking solutions to the sultanate,' the bank stated.

The event was held at the new location in Ibri. Alongside the Dhahira Governor, several managers and heads of ahlibank attended the opening celebration.

This is the 24th ahlibank branch in Oman and stands as a testament to the bank's unwavering commitment to provide the best for its clientele by being closer to them both physically, and digitally. Aside from the host of products and services offered by the bank, a well-experienced and skilled team at the branch



will provide services for SMEs through 'A'maali', the Value Plus Account that brings a host of financial solutions to support new or growing businesses in the vicinity. Offering several exclusive privileges and benefits to the bank's premium customers, the new ahlibank Ibri branch will also provide an advanced and personal banking experience that goes beyond meeting customer's expectations, through its Al Nukhba account.

"Upon relocating the branch, we at ahlibank are driven by our dedication to staying attuned to our customers' evolving needs and preferences. Our new branch in Ibri reflects not only our ambition for growth but also our mission to create an environment where customers can easily access a comprehensive range of banking products and services," said Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution at ahlibank.

ABQ opens new nursery school

ABQ, a prominent name in education in Oman, has opened a nursery school, catering to children aged 18 months to 3.5 years old. Nestled in the heart of Muscat Hills, ABQ Explorer promises a nurturing and inviting atmosphere designed to provide the perfect foundation for little ones.

Situated in a homely environment, ABQ Explorer Muscat Hills is strategically located to serve families residing or working in the surrounding areas. With state-of-the-art equipment and modern facilities, it offers a safe and enriching space for children to explore, learn, and grow.

ABQ Chief Executive Officer Humayun Kabir expressed his enthusiasm for the new venture. "We are proud to be part of building a brighter future for the children of Oman. At ABQ, we believe in the power of education to transform lives, and we are excited to extend our legacy of ex-



cellence to our youngest students."

ABQ is well-known for its commitment to quality education and has a strong track record of producing outstanding results in GED and A-level examinations. The team at ABQ understands the importance of instilling a solid educational foundation and fostering age-appropriate development in young

children to prepare them for a bright and successful future.

To achieve this goal, ABQ Explorer follows the International Early Years Curriculum (IEYC) from the UK, which emphasises the significance of play-based learning. Through play, children are encouraged to explore, discover, and develop essential skills, ensuring a well-rounded educational experience.

Italian Embassy, National Museum pay musical tribute to Ennio Morricone

In collaboration with the National Museum, the Embassy of Italy in Muscat began celebration of the Italian Language Week in the World in its 23rd edition with a concert by Il Quintetto that immersed the public in the music of one of the greatest composers of the 20th century: Ennio Morricone at the National Museum on Sunday.

Rightly considered one of the world's greatest film composers, Morricone's artistic career includes a wide range of composition genres, from absolute concert music to applied music, working as an orchestrator, conductor and composer for theatre, radio and cinema. During his long career, the maestro received several awards, including the Golden



Lion and the honorary Oscar, eight Nastri D'argento, five BAFTAs, five Oscar nomina-

tions, seven David Di Donatello, three Golden Globes, one Grammy Award and one Euro-

pean Film Award.

Events that are more exclusive dedicated to children and the Italian language cinema will be held during the week.

The Week of the Italian Language in the World is an initiative promoted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation through its Embassies abroad every year in October.

It focuses on a main theme, which stands as the basis of a vast cultural program all over the world with the aim to promote the beauty of Italian language and to encourage its study. The XXIII edition under the theme 'Italian and sustainability', aims to promote, through the Italian language, the culture of sustainability.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Israel strikes leave Gaza in rubble

More than 260,000 Gaza residents have been forced from their homes, UN aid agency OCHA said

Sderot, Israel - Israel kept pounding Hamas targets in Gaza, leaving entire city blocks in rubble on Wednesday, as its soldiers swept battle-torn southern towns and found more victims five days after the Islamist fighters' onslaught.

The army said a 'staggering 1,200' bodies had been discovered, while Gaza officials reported more than 1,000 people killed in Israel's withering campaign of air and artillery strikes on the crowded Palestinian enclave. Israel has massed forces, tanks and other heavy armour around Gaza in its retaliatory operation.

US President Joe Biden has pledged to send more munitions and military hardware to its close ally Israel.

Fears have been intense in Israel for the fate of at least 150 hostages - mostly Israelis but also including foreign and dual nationals - being held in Gaza by Hamas.

The fighter group has claimed that four of the captives died in Israeli strikes and has threatened to kill other hostages if civilian targets are bombed without advance warning from Israel.

Concern has mounted over the worsening humanitarian crisis in war-torn Gaza, where Israel had levelled over 1,000 buildings and imposed a total siege, cutting off water, food and energy supplies for 2.3mn people. The enclave's sole power plant shut down on Wednesday after running out of fuel, Gaza's electricity provider said.

More than 260,000 Gaza residents have been forced from their homes, a UN aid agency said, while the European Union



An Israeli army self-propelled howitzer fires rounds near the border with Gaza in southern Israel on Wednesday (AFP)

called for a 'humanitarian corridor' to allow civilians to flee the enclave's fifth war in 15 years.

Israel appeared to be readying for a possible ground invasion of Gaza, but faces the threat of a multi-front war after also coming under rocket attack from fighter groups in neighbouring Lebanon and Syria.

Biden, who has diverted an aircraft carrier battle group to the eastern Mediterranean, issued a stern warning to Israel's

foes: "To any country, any organisation, anyone thinking of taking advantage of this situation, I have one word: don't."

A first US aircraft has delivered 'advanced armaments' to southern Israel's Nevatim Airbase, the Israeli army said.

Israel has been badly shaken by the deadliest attack in its 75-year history and the intelligence failure that allowed more than 1,500 fighters to storm through the Gaza security barrier in their

We felt like we were in a ghost town, as if we were the only survivors

MAZEN MOHAMMAD

coordinated land, air and sea attack on the Jewish Sabbath.

Israeli forces have retaken more than a dozen southern towns near Gaza after days of

gruelling street battles that have left the bodies of at least 1,500 Hamas fighters strewn in the streets.

Troops have encountered and killed several holdout Hamas fighters, said Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari.

The Israeli army has called up 300,000 reservists for what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said will be a 'long and difficult' war.

'The war is progressing well,'

said Weizman Nissan, 72, a resident of Sderot near Gaza and a veteran of three of Israel's wars.

'In a ghost town'

Heavy bombardment again rained down on Gaza, where the sky was blackened and Hamas said at least 30 people were killed in overnight strikes.

Rubble, burnt out cars and broken glass covered roads in Gaza City, where bombs struck the Hamas-linked Islamic Uni-

versity. Also targeted were residential buildings, mosques, factories and shops, said Salama Marouf of the Gaza government's media office.

One Gaza resident, Mazen Mohammad, 38, said his terrified family had spent the night huddled together as explosions shook the area, before emerging in the morning to assess the total devastation of their neighbourhood. "We felt like we were in a ghost town, as if we were the only survivors," Mohammad told AFP.

Medical supplies, including oxygen, were running low at Gaza's overwhelmed Al-Shifa hospital, said emergency room physician Mohammed Ghonim.

Unrest has flared in the occupied West Bank, where protests have been held in solidarity with Gaza and 15 Palestinians have been killed in clashes since Saturday. "My entire life, I have seen Israel kill us, confiscate our lands and arrest our children," said Ramallah coffee vendor Farah al Saadi, 52, who praised the Hamas assault.

Israeli cities have been eerily quiet and tense, with some residents noting a growing sense of fear and distrust between Jews and members of the Arab-Israeli minority.

"Israeli people are scared of the Arabs and the Arabs are scared of the Jews... everybody is scared of each other," said Ahmed Karkash, a shopkeeper in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Israeli border police shot dead two Palestinians in annexed east Jerusalem after they threw fireworks and rocks at officers, the force said on Wednesday.

AFP



TOO YOUNG TO DIE

A man reacts as he holds the wrapped body of a child about to be buried at a cemetery in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday, after a family was killed in an Israeli airstrike (AFP)

Hezbollah says it fired missiles from Lebanon into Israel



A soldier stands guard outside a house shelled by Israeli forces on the outskirts of the southern Lebanese village of Dhaira on Wednesday (AFP)

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group said it fired missiles on Israel on Wednesday drawing retaliatory Israeli fire, after three of its members were killed earlier this week amid soaring border tensions.

The exchange of fire came as Israel massed troops and heavy armour around Gaza.

Hezbollah 'targeted a Zionist (Israeli) position... facing Dhayra village, with guided missiles', in a 'firm response to Zionist attacks... which led to the martyrdom of a number of brothers', the group said in a statement.

The group warned of a 'decisive' response to Israeli attacks 'targeting our country and the security of our people, especially when these attacks lead to the deaths of martyrs'.

The Israeli military said that 'in response to the anti-tank missile fired at IDF soldiers a

short while ago, an IDF aircraft struck a military observation post belonging to the Hezbollah in southern Lebanon'.

Israeli artillery shelled 'the area from which the launch originated', the military added.

Lebanon's National News Agency said three civilians had been wounded by Israeli fire on a border village, adding that 'around 10 houses have been directly hit'.

An AFP correspondent in the border village of Dhayra earlier reported shelling close to residential areas that triggered fires in nearby groves. The NNA said Israeli fire on several locations along the border had been 'countered by resistance (Hezbollah) machine guns'.

Both Israel and its closest ally the United States have warned Hezbollah against opening a second front as Israel battles Hamas in Gaza.

AFP

Israel's new Arab allies face uneasy balancing act

Dubai, UAE - Confronted with the war raging between Israel and Hamas, Arab countries which have normalised relations with Israel in recent years have been forced to balance diplomacy with fiercely pro-Palestinian Arab public opinion.

But as analysts predict a long and violent response from Israel in Gaza, the position faced by those nations is expected to become increasingly troublesome.

In the wake of the Palestinian fighters' surprise attack into southern Israel, the United Arab Emirates condemned the kidnapping of Israeli hostages in a break with other regional play-

ers. The oil-rich state was the first Gulf country to establish diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020 under the Abraham Accords. "We are very grateful to the United Arab Emirates for its stance supporting Israel," said Liron Zaslansky, Israel's Consul General in Dubai.

On Tuesday, as Israel bombed the besieged Gaza Strip, the UAE was also swift to announce US\$20mn in humanitarian aid for the Palestinians.

Joseph Bahout, director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs in Beirut, explained the UAE and other signatories to



Palestinians gather for a vigil outside the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Beirut, Lebanon on Wednesday (AFP)

the Abraham Accords - Bahrain and Morocco - would have to walk a 'fairly narrow line' as they weighed commitments to Israel with public sympathy for Palestinians. For the time being, they

are navigating this 'very uncomfortable' situation by 'focusing on the idea of protecting civilians', said Cinzia Bianco, Gulf specialist at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

However, Bahout explained the tactic would 'not hold for long in the face of Israeli reprisals, which will probably be very violent'.

In Bahrain and Morocco, which have so far not moved beyond denouncing civilian casualties, demonstrations in support of the Palestinians were organised in the first days of the offensive.

AFP

Ukraine seeks support to survive winter

On his first visit to NATO HQ since Russian invasion, Zelensky urged allies to step up weapon supplies

Brussels, Belgium - President Volodymyr Zelensky urged Ukraine's allies on Wednesday to step up weapons supplies to help his country survive through the winter, on his first visit to the military alliance's headquarters during Russia's all-out war.

Zelensky made a plea for air defence, long-range missiles and ammunition in the face of fears that the Hamas attack on Israel could distract key backer the United States from the conflict in his country.

"How to survive during this next winter for us is big," Zelensky said as he addressed the media with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg before meeting alliance defence ministers.

"We are preparing, we are ready. Now we need some support from the leaders. That's why I'm here today."

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin announced a fresh tranche of weaponry for Kyiv worth US\$200mn, including air defence missiles to help Ukraine stave off an expected winter onslaught by Russia.

"Make no mistake," Austin said at the start of the meeting with Ukraine's international backers. "The United States will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes."

The latest arms package from Washington is the first announced since turmoil in the US Congress cast doubt on the ability of President Joe Biden to maintain support.

The Ukrainian president has more recently expressed worries that the crisis in Israel could deflect attention from the war unleashed in his homeland by



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky is welcomed by Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg at the start of his visit to NATO's headquarters, in Brussels, on Wednesday (AFP)

How to survive during this next winter for us is big. We are preparing, we are ready. Now we need some support from the leaders... we must win the winter battle against terror

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY



Russian President Vladimir Putin almost 600 days ago.

Zelensky urged the West to rally around the Israeli people as Kyiv's backers did for Ukraine after Russia's invasion last year, and show them they are not 'alone'.

"Terrorists like Putin, or like Hamas, seek to hold free and

democratic nations as hostages and they want power over those who seek freedom," Zelensky said.

"The terrorists will not change. They just must lose."

'Winter battle'

Zelensky underscored the importance of air defence to pro-

tect Ukraine's civilian infrastructure as the country gears up for a repeat of Moscow's bombing campaign last winter.

"Dear friends, we must win the winter battle against terror," he told Kyiv's backers.

The United States has sought to reassure that the decision to step up military support for Is-

rael after the surprise assault by Hamas will not harm Washington's ability to keep arming Ukraine.

Israel's defence minister was set to brief his NATO counterparts by video-link on Thursday.

The crisis in Israel comes as the White House is scrambling to find a way to keep weapon supplies flowing to Ukraine after difficulties in the US Congress. Biden has tried to calm nerves among allies over Washington's backing for Kyiv after new assistance was dropped from a deal in the US Congress to avoid a government shutdown this month.

The United States has given as much military support to Ukraine on its own as all European NATO members and Canada combined since Moscow launched its all-out invasion last year.

Western diplomats at NATO insist there is no danger of arms supplies to Ukraine drying up in the near future.

"We must continue to step up and sustain the steady flow, of weapons and ammunition to Ukraine," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

Dutch defence minister Kajsa Ollongren insisted the 'the war in Ukraine has our attention, and Ukraine has our full support'. Ukraine is pushing to become a member of NATO in a bid to ensure its long-term security in the face of Moscow.

Alliance leaders at a summit this summer simplified Kyiv path for joining, but did not offer a clear invitation or deadline for Ukraine to become a member.

AFP

China frees Australian reporter

Sydney, Australia - Australian journalist Cheng Lei was deported from China on Wednesday after more than three years in detention on espionage charges widely seen as politically motivated.

Cheng, a former anchor for Chinese state broadcaster CGTN, had been held since August 2020. The mother of two had been a familiar face on the state broadcaster's English-language channel, conducting interviews with noted CEOs from around the world.

She was only formally arrested months after disappearing, and in an opaque case was eventually charged with 'supplying state secrets overseas'.

"Her return brings an end to a very difficult few years," Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said, hailing her return home as news that 'will be warmly welcomed, not just by her family and friends, but by all Australians'.

Cheng was detained at a time



Cheng Lei upon her arrival in Melbourne on Wednesday (AFP)

of strained relations between Beijing and Canberra, with her rough treatment souring relations further.

China has repeatedly detained foreign nationals at times of high political tension with their home nations, raising accusations of hostage diplomacy.

She was tried behind closed doors, with Australia's ambassador to China blocked from entering the court to observe proceedings.

Australia's government had long campaigned for her release, calling for China to follow 'basic

standards of justice, procedural fairness and humane treatment'.

Albanese said Cheng had been released after the 'completion of legal processes in China'.

He also said that her return home would facilitate his visit to China at a 'mutually agreed time' this year. In a statement, China's ministry of state security said the journalist had been deported 'after serving her sentence' of two years and 11 months in prison on charges of 'illegally providing state secrets overseas'.

'I miss the sun'

There had been growing fears for Cheng's wellbeing in recent months, with partner Nick Coyle saying she was suffering from a 'range of health issues'.

Born in Hunan province, Cheng emigrated to Australia as a child and became a citizen of her adoptive home.

She returned to China, joining the state broadcaster in 2012.

China does not allow citizens to hold dual nationality.

Cheng had written about her bleak prison conditions in China in a candid note dictated to Australian officials from jail and released last August.

"I miss the sun," read the message, described as a 'love letter' to Australia.

"In my cell, the sunlight shines through the window but I can stand in it for only 10 hours a year."

Cheng's case has often been compared with that of Chinese-born Australian writer Yang Jun, who has also been detained in China since 2019 on vaguely defined espionage charges.

Australia-China relations had been in deep freeze after Canberra barred Chinese tech firm Huawei from lucrative contracts and pushed back against Chinese influence campaigns in Australia.

China was also furious at Canberra's calls for an investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 outbreak.

AFP



Palm trees withstand the wind in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco State, Mexico, on Tuesday (AFP)

Lidia leaves one dead in Mexico

Puerto Vallarta, Mexico - Hurricane Lidia was downgraded to a tropical storm early on Wednesday as it weakened after making landfall on Mexico's Pacific coast, where it left at least one dead and caused flooding and blocked roads, officials said.

Hours after slamming into the coast as an 'extremely dangerous' Category 4 hurricane,

Lidia had weakened to a tropical storm as it headed northeast across the country, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said in an update.

Ahead of its arrival the government deployed around 6,000 members of the armed forces to help residents, according to President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who urged people to take shelter.

A man died when a tree fell on the car he was driving during strong winds in Bahia de Banderas in Nayarit state, authorities said.

Lidia came ashore near the popular beach resort of Puerto Vallarta, packing maximum sustained winds of around 140 miles (220km) per hour, the NHC said.

AFP

Australians poised to reject Indigenous rights in landmark vote

Sydney, Australia - Australian voters look set to reject greater rights and recognition for Aboriginal citizens on Saturday, in a bitterly fought referendum that has rekindled the country's long history of racial strife.

Almost 18mn voters will be asked to decide on a government-backed proposal to recognise Indigenous Australians in the 122-year-old constitution for the first time.

The proposal would also create an Indigenous 'Voice', a representative body that can

have a say on issues that affect First Nations peoples battling poorer health, lower incomes and higher barriers to education.

Centre-left Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has said a 'yes' vote would end '200 years of broken promises and betrayals, failures and false starts'.

He and other supporters believe the measures would help make amends for Australia's often brutal history of colonisation and race-based repression - what many consider their na-



Australian PM Anthony Albanese stands with Pat Farmer, a marathon runner who completed a 14,400km run in support of the referendum (AFP)

tion's original sin.

Europeans first landed on Australian shores in 1606, an arrival that heralded centuries of subjugation for Aboriginal and other groups that had thrived on the continent for millennia. Today, Indigenous Australians have the same rights as any other citizen, but inequality is pervasive.

The life expectancy of Indigenous Australians is about eight years less than for other citizens, according to government statistics.

Indigenous children are less likely to go to school, less likely to be literate and twice as likely to die in childhood.

The star-studded 'yes' campaign was backed by a swathe of business leaders, sports luminaries and celebrities - from Cate Blanchett to Patty Mills to Ash Barty, as well as the country's centre-left government.

But after holding a massive early lead in the polls, 'yes' has trailed heavily since the opposition conservative party, led by ex-police officer and defence

minister Peter Dutton, announced its opposition.

Critics of the reforms see the project as constitutional tinkering that demonises white Australians and would do little to improve the lot of Indigenous communities.

A recent Resolve poll showed the 'no' vote leading 'yes' by 56-44. Barring 'a catastrophic polling failure' the 'no' campaign is destined to win, according to pollster and analyst Kevin Bonham.

AFP

Island nations sign climate solidarity declaration in Indonesia

Nusa Dua, Indonesia - Dozens of island nations signed a declaration in Indonesia on Wednesday to boost solidarity and cooperation on fighting climate threats, including rising sea levels.

Smaller nations at risk of the effects of climate change have sounded the alarm about the threat posed to their existence, seeking a bigger voice on climate diplomacy and issues that may decide their fate.

Thirty-two island states across the world - from Saint Lucia to Vanuatu, Japan to the United Kingdom - signed the

joint declaration and took part in the two-day meeting of the Archipelagic and Island States Forum, which brings together nations at risk of common climate challenges.

The forum 'agreed to uphold the principles of solidarity, equality and inclusiveness as a common basis for cooperation', Indonesian President Joko Widodo told a press conference on the resort island of Bali.

Members agreed that 'developing countries and the archipelagic states have the same rights to be developed, have the same rights to carry out devel-



Indonesia's president Joko Widodo speaks at the plenary session during the first high-level meeting of the Archipelagic and Island States (AIS) Forum in Nusa Dua, Bali, on Wednesday (AFP)

opment', he said.

The declaration document, seen by AFP, called for all members to prioritise 'climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster management' as well as protection of the marine environment. It also called for 'good maritime governance' and 'creation of sustainable economic development' of the blue economy, a term for activity on the world's oceans, seas and coastlines.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said leaders had tasked ministers to create a road map towards formalising the 51-

member forum - which was created in 2018 - as an official charter-based bloc. Alongside tiny Pacific nations like Micronesia and the Marshall Islands were bigger developed nations including Japan, New Zealand, Ireland and the UK, who are all threatened by climate change.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says sea levels rose by 15 to 25cm between 1900 and 2018.

A two-degree Celsius warming compared to the pre-industrial era would raise the sea levels by 43cm by 2100.

AFP

Civil war: Republican rivals make pitches for US House leadership

Neither of the declared candidates has won enough support to emerge a frontrunner

Washington, US - Two Republicans vying to lead the US House of Representatives made their pitches on Tuesday, as the party struggles to end a bitter civil war that has thwarted quick action on the Israel crisis and other urgent business.

The 221-strong Republican contingent that controls the lower chamber of Congress staged a 'candidate forum' to pick a replacement for speaker Kevin McCarthy, who was ousted last week in a mutiny from the far right.

Neither of the declared candidates - Majority Leader Steve Scalise and Judiciary Committee chairman Jim Jordan - has won enough support to emerge as a clear frontrunner, raising fears of a prolonged paralysis on Capitol Hill.

But Scalise voiced confidence that he could lead his party out of crisis after he and Jordan made their case to colleagues in the private meeting for the role of Washington's top lawmaker.

"What people have really liked about my approach is that I've been a unifier. I've been somebody who has built coalitions throughout my entire career, and we've delivered big wins," he told reporters.



House Majority Leader Steve Scalise speaks to reporters in Capitol Hill, Washington, DC, on Tuesday (AFP)

"And people want to see us get back on track. We need a Congress that's working tomorrow, we need to get Congress back to work."

The leadership vacuum had prompted speculation over a possible comeback by McCarthy so that Congress can pass legislation to address the crisis in Is-

rael, which is reeling from a deadly weekend attack by Hamas fighters.

McCarthy - who became the first speaker in US history to be ousted in the middle of his term - had initially appeared open to the possibility, but ultimately ruled out a long-shot second grab for the gavel.

"I asked them in there - I know a lot of them want to nominate me - I told them, 'Please do not nominate me'," he revealed, adding that he would be supporting whichever candidate was the party's pick.

Supporting Jordan
While Scalise, McCarthy's long-

What people have really liked about my approach is that I have been a unifier. I have built coalitions throughout my entire career, and we have delivered big wins

STEVE SCALISE

time deputy, has pitched himself as the candidate who can heal the party's bitter divides, Jordan is seen as a more divisive figure - but has the coveted endorsement of former president Donald Trump, and is a darling of the right.

House Republicans heard from both candidates during intense talks that went on for two hours, with the internal party vote to select the nominee scheduled for Wednesday morning. "I will be supporting Jim Jordan tomorrow. He answered every question honestly and with energy," said Nancy Mace, one of eight Republicans who forced McCarthy towards the exit door.



A police officer stands guard next to a building where four people were killed in a fire in Vigo on Wednesday (AFP)

Spain: 3 minors among 4 dead in building fire

Vigo, Spain - Three children and an adult died when a fire ripped through a building in the north-western port city of Vigo early on Wednesday, officials said, just 10 days after another blaze claimed 13 lives at a nightclub in southern Spain.

The fire broke out around 4am (0200 GMT) on the ground floor of a building in the central As Travesas neighbourhood, Carlos Lopez, a spokesman for Vigo city hall. There were 'around 30 people inside at the time', he added. "There were four deaths: three minors and an adult."

The emergency services had

earlier said all four were minors.

Spanish press reports said it was a mother and three of her children.

"It's possible some of the victims among both the dead and the injured were brothers and sisters," said an emergency services spokesman without giving further details.

Nine people were injured in the fire, three of whom were in serious condition. One was an eight-year-old girl, officials said.

Reports said the father and a sister of the children who died were among the injured.

AFP

Poland: Villagers voice support for ruling PiS party

Godziszów, Poland - Voters in the village of Godziszow in eastern Poland voiced support - some of it grudging - for the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party ahead of Sunday's elections.

PiS scored its highest result - nearly 89 per cent - here at the last elections in 2019 and confidence in the eurosceptic party remains high despite economic woes.

"There's nothing better coming," said Eugeniusz Krzyszton, a 71-year-old farmer who owns 10 hectares (25 acres) of land.

Working on his potato field in Godziszow, Krzyszton said his revenue from corn crops fell by half in recent years, while the costs of farming have gone up.

"Fuel prices are high and fertilisers are very expensive... Cereals are difficult to sell - one can sell but at low prices, and subsidies don't always help," Krzyszton said.

But the farmer said he still planned to vote for Law and Justice - just like he did four years ago.

"The government is trying its best," he told AFP.

'Competitive spirit'
The mayor of Godziszow, Jozef



Farmer Eugeniusz Krzyszton is seen during an interview on his field in Godziszow - a village near Lublin, eastern Poland, on October 6 (AFP)

Fuel prices are high and fertilisers are very expensive... cereals are difficult to sell... the government is trying its best

EUGENIUSZ KRZYSZTON

Zbzytniewski, himself a Law and Justice member, said he believed his village would stay faithful to the party in the upcoming election. "Every government does things that are not necessarily to everyone's liking and there are mistakes and shortcomings, but I think there is greater concern

about what a potential victory of the opposition may bring," he said.

For him, the question is not whether residents would vote PiS again but whether his municipality will have the biggest vote for the party again.

He said he was 'doing every-

thing' to achieve even better results than four years ago.

"There is a sort of mobilisation, we have this competitive spirit in us. Why would there be anyone better than us, if we were the best?" the mayor said, sitting in his office a stone's throw from the local grocery shop, post office and a brand new community centre.

The centre will serve on Sunday as a polling station, with a transparent ballot box already placed in the middle of the main conference room overlooking a fence covered with campaign banners.

One face is dominant on the banners: that of Michal Moskal.

Moskal, a secretary and right-hand man of Law and Justice leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski, visited Godziszow cultural centre ten days ahead of the election, where he met with local authorities and firemen from the volunteer brigade.

At the meeting, residents were encouraged to vote and thereby raise Godziszow's chances of winning a competition in which municipalities with the highest turnout are rewarded with government-funded gifts.

In 2020, Godziszow won a fire

truck in such a contest. In its 2023 edition, the renovation of a fire station is the main prize.

An article about the meeting with Moskal on Godziszow's official website failed to mention that the community centre had just been renovated using funds predominantly from the European Union. The EU's share in the works neared 70 per cent while the Law and Justice government only funded 10 per cent of the renovation.

'Huge concerns'
Asked about the benefits of EU membership, Mayor Zbzytniewski chose his words carefully.

"Financially speaking, I suspect we're better off," he said, 'but multiple areas should be analysed here'.

"Our prime minister is against that mandatory relocation of migrants... There are huge concerns about that," he said, in reference to an EU reform aimed at sharing responsibilities for arriving asylum seekers across all bloc countries.

But Godziszow residents, most of them making a living from farming, name cost of living as the most pressing issue.

AFP

RUWI RANGERS WIN D20 TITLE IN STYLE



Ruwi Rangers players celebrate with the trophy

Muscat - Ruwi Rangers clinched the first title of the 2023-24 Oman domestic season in style as they cruised to a seven-wicket victory over Bousher Busters in the Oman D20 final at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat on Tuesday.

The T20 tournament pitted the eight top-flight teams vying for the coveted crown over 14 days with a total of 32 matches being played.

It was the second time in the three-year D20 tournament history that Ruwi Rangers emerged as champions, having won the inaugural title in 2021. Defending

Chasing a modest target, Hannan Rizwan's 60 off 57 and a fiery knock by Khalid Kail, who smashed 35 off 20, steered Rangers to victory. Wasim Ali, Aqib Ilyas and Sufyan Mahmood picked a wicket each.

champions Darsait Titans bowed out in the Eliminator.

The final was expected to be a thriller with both the teams reaching the summit clash with the maximum number of wins in the group stage. Ruwi Rangers won six of their seven games while Bousher Busters claimed

five victories from seven.

Ruwi Rangers had an upper hand going into the final as they had defeated Bousher Busters in Qualifier 1. Bousher Busters then booked a place in the final after defeating Amerat Royals in Qualifier 2. Amerat Royals had won the Eliminator against Dar-

sait Titans. Put in to bat, Bousher Busters had a decent start as Mohammed Adeeb Usmani played a sedate innings of 69 off 61 balls. They were restricted to a paltry 133, with Rangers' pace duo of Bilal Khan and Kaleemulaah picking two wickets each and Sanju Sajeev claiming a three-wicket haul.

Chasing a modest target, Hannan Rizwan's 60 off 57 and a fiery knock by Khalid Kail, who smashed 35 off 20, steered Rangers to victory. Wasim Ali, Aqib Ilyas and Sufyan Mahmood picked a wicket each.

Rizwan was adjudged the

player of the match.

Aqib Ilyas of Bousher Busters was adjudged the player of the Tournament for his all-round performance that saw him gather 405 runs at a strike rate of 162 and claiming nine wickets in nine matches of the tournament.

Paul Sheridan, Oman Cricket (OC) vice-chairman, handed the champions trophy to Rangers' skipper Mohammed Nadeem.

Speaking after the title win, Nadeem said, "It was absolutely a great tournament for us. We displayed collective team effort in all departments."



Oman Under 19 squad

Aditya Gurumukhi to captain Oman in ACC U19 Premier Cup in Malaysia

Muscat - Aditya Gurumukhi will lead a bunch of talented Oman U19 cricketers at the forthcoming ACC U19 Premier Cup Malaysia 2023, to be played from October 13-24.

The 50-over tournament, organised by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), is a qualifying event for the ACC Men's U19 Asia Cup to be held in Pakistan in December this year.

Oman are placed in Group B in the 16-team tournament along with Qatar, China and the United Arab Emirates.

Nepal, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are in Group A; Singapore, Kuwait, Thailand, and Maldives in Group C and Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, and Indonesia in Group D. The matches will be staged at three venues.

The top teams from each group will qualify for the semi-finals.

Speaking ahead of the team's departure, Oman coach Syed Aamir Kaleem said: "The squad is balanced with a combination of experienced and newcomers.

The team has been training hard from the past two months, which included a few practice games with quality senior sides and inter-squad games to work on match situations.

"The boys are confident and positive. We are looking forward to play quality cricket in the coming few days. We certainly aim to do well and bring glory, more importantly, qualify for the Asia Cup."

The top three teams from the tournament will qualify for the ACC Men's U19 Asia Cup.

SQUAD:

Aditya Gurumukhi (c), Aryan Bisht (vc), Narayana Satish, Mustaqeem Asif, Ashish Valappil, Rahil Habibulla, Varshieth Sai, Prathiesh HR, Arafat Islam, Giriharan K, Aditya Girish, Saumya Sampat, Adharsh Srinivasan, Wajih Abbas.

Officials: Coach: Syed Aamir Kaleem, assistant coach: Amir Ali, manager: Sher Mohammed, and physio: Sarvanan T.

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EXISTENTIAL CRISIS?

New Delhi, India - Poor spectator turnout, a scheduling fiasco and a dubious outfield have cast a shadow over the Cricket World Cup in India, as the 50-over game itself faces an existential crisis.

The future of one-day internationals has been thrown into doubt by the growing popularity of the slam-bang Twenty-20 version, and the early optics from the World Cup have not been helping matters.

Less than a week since it started, empty seats have plagued the tournament.

That has been especially true of games not featuring the hosts but even Sunday's India-Australia match in Chennai, one of the biggest fixtures of this year's event, did not see a full house.

"India's first game in the World Cup and the Chennai stadium in a cricket crazy city has more than a few empty spaces," author and columnist Rajdeep Sardesai wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Around 47,000 fans showed up when defending champions England took on New Zealand in the opening game at the 132,000-seater stadium in Ahmedabad named after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

More than 100,000 people had turned out for the T20 Indian Premier League final last year at the same venue.

Poor crowds are not making for a pretty picture in a cricket-mad country which is hosting the World Cup for the first time since India's victory in 2011.

Ticket sales appear to have been hampered by the late announcement of the schedule.

The fixtures were first released around 100 days in advance, com-

Chaotic start to World Cup a fresh blow for ODIs



A view of the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad during the World Cup match between England and New Zealand last week (AFP)

pared to more than a year ahead of time for the 2019 World Cup in England.

To make matters worse, the schedule was revised and released again on August 9, less than two months before the first ball of the tournament.

A total of nine games were rescheduled, including India's mar-

Around 47,000 fans showed up when defending champions England took on New Zealand in the opening game at the 132,000-seater stadium in Ahmedabad named after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

quee match against Pakistan.

Defending champions England saw three of their nine fixtures moved.

Ticket sales for non-India games began on August 25, and for India games from August 31 onwards, complicating travel arrangements for fans.

"We may have the richest cricket association in the world, but it seems

to be the poorest when it comes to hosting a World Cup," wrote Prince Thomas, managing editor of Indian news website The Morning Context.

"The biggest sin you can commit against a cricket lover is to deny him/her a ticket but still have empty stands," he posted on X.

Organisers have also been criticised over the state of the outfield in the picturesque hillside city of Dharamsala, one of 10 tournament venues. Heavy rain in the region in the months leading up to the World Cup brought an infestation of fungus to the outfield.

Groundskeepers had to race against time to prepare the oval for the first game between Bangladesh and Afghanistan on Saturday.

Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott said bowler Mujeeb Ur Rahman had been at risk of a serious injury when his knee jarred the ground as he dived while fielding.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) inspected the surface after Saturday's game and deemed it to be "average" but playable.

But England captain Jos Buttler did not mince his words, describing the surface as "poor" ahead of their clash against Bangladesh on Tuesday.

"Fingers crossed that no one on either side picks up an unfortunate injury," said Buttler ahead of the game.

Batsman Sam Curran later said England were relieved to have escaped their fixture against Bangladesh without anyone getting hurt.

"It was pretty bad," Curran said. "We're pretty happy to get through that game without any injuries - both teams, I think. That's pretty important, and we don't have to come back here."

AFP

Dimitrov stuns top seed Alcaraz to reach Shanghai last eight

Shanghai, China - Grigor Dimitrov fought back to beat top seed Carlos Alcaraz in three sets and reach the quarter-finals on Wednesday in the latest upset at the Shanghai Masters.

The 18th seed won 5-7, 6-2, 6-4 against an out-of-sorts Alcaraz as the Bulgarian steps up his pursuit of a first ATP title since 2017.

He will next face the 22nd-seeded Nicolas Jarry after the Chilean defeated wild card Diego Schwartzman 6-3, 5-7, 6-3.

The first Shanghai Masters since the pandemic has opened up for Dimitrov after the early exits of Daniil Medvedev, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Holger Rune.

World number one Novak Djokovic is not in China.

"I'm still here, I'm not going anywhere," the 32-year-old Dimitrov said afterwards.

Spain's Alcaraz, the world number two, was chasing a sev-



Grigor Dimitrov celebrates after defeating Carlos Alcaraz

enth tour-level title of the season but he uncharacteristically crumbled after winning the first set.

The 20-year-old Alcaraz took time to find his range and Dimitrov broke for 3-2 in the first set with a vicious whipped forehand return. Dimitrov was broken back as he served for the set in a

riveting 10th game involving two thrilling rallies that both times saw Alcaraz come out on top.

Alcaraz held and then broke again to wrap the set up in just under an hour.

But rather than power on to victory, Alcaraz let the match get away from him.

Maguire grateful for Beckham support in troubled times

London, United Kingdom - Harry Maguire has thanked David Beckham after the former Manchester United star contacted the troubled England defender to offer support when he was booed by Scotland fans earlier this season.

Maguire has endured abuse from supporters across the country during his difficult spell at Old Trafford, but the penchant for picking on the centre-back reached a crescendo during England's friendly in Scotland last month.

Former England captain Beckham offered support to Maguire as he personally reached out to the former Leicester star, who has lost his place in the United defence, as well as the club captaincy, during Erik ten Hag's reign.

Few have faced more difficult times in an England shirt than Beckham, who laid bare the pain



David Beckham

he suffered after his 1998 World Cup red card against Argentina in a new Netflix documentary.

"I actually spoke with David about three weeks ago, after the Scotland game," Maguire said on Monday.

"He got in touch with me, so it was really nice of him and I really appreciated that. It meant every-

thing. I've spoken throughout my career about David Beckham being someone I looked up to and watched when I was a young boy.

"Unfortunately, I didn't end up on the right wing scoring and assisting as many goals as he has. But he was a big role model when I was growing up."



Wayne Rooney

Former Manchester United star Rooney gets new job

London, United Kingdom - Former Manchester United star Wayne Rooney was hired as the new manager of Championship club Birmingham on Wednesday.

Rooney has agreed a three-and-a-half-year contract to replace John Eustace at St Andrew's after leaving Major League Soccer side DC United last week.

Eustace, in charge for just 15 months, was sacked despite guiding Birmingham to sixth place in the Championship this season and Rooney will be expected to oversee a push for promotion to the Premier League.

"I am absolutely delighted to be joining Birmingham City at such an exciting time. It is very clear that they have a plan and are committed to realising their ambition for the club," Rooney said.

Joining Rooney on his Birmingham backroom staff are former England team-mate Ashley Cole, currently England Under-21s assistant coach, and John O'Shea, the assistant coach of the Republic of Ireland.

AFP

Women's squad seeks its share of Saudi football boom

Taif, Saudi Arabia - As Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar pack Saudi stadiums, a quieter but equally dramatic transformation is unfolding for women's professional football, which did not even exist in the kingdom five years ago.

On a recent evening in the mountain city of Taif, the Saudi women's national team ran through a one-touch passing drill ahead of a game against Pakistan, the latest in a series of friendlies intended to give the players some much-needed match experience.

The squad only formed two years ago and entered the FIFA rankings in March, at 171st place.

That milestone followed a string of firsts last year, from an



Saudi women's football team players pose for a picture after a training session in Taif

inaugural international match against the Seychelles - a 2-0 win - to the establishment of a domestic women's premier league and a formal bid to host the 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup.

All told, it has been a head-spinning few years for Saudi women who weren't even allowed to attend football matches until January 2018, let alone play at the professional level.

Yet 22-year-old midfielder Layan Jouhari told AFP she and her teammates were measuring their progress "one step at a time", even as they nurture ambitious long-term goals like playing at the World Cup one day.

"I watched the previous World Cup before this just out of

curiosity and interest, but this year's World Cup was different," Jouhari said. "I watched it with a different perspective, like these are now my opponents."

The eager Saudi players are standard-bearers for broader changes afoot in Saudi Arabia, a conservative petro-state trying to open up to the world while shifting away from fossil fuels.

In recent years, key restrictions that made the kingdom a magnet for criticism from women's rights activists have been lifted, although critics argue that legal discrimination remains in place in areas like divorce and child custody, and that women are frequently ensnared in an ongoing crackdown on dissent.



HITMAN TO THE FORE

INDIA VS AFGHANISTAN

Rohit’s record ton powers India to win over Afghanistan

New Delhi, India - Captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday surpassed compatriot Sachin Tendulkar with a record seventh World Cup century to lead India to a crushing eight-wicket win over Afghanistan.

Chasing 273 for victory in New Delhi, the hosts rode on Rohit's 131 to achieve their target in 35 overs for a second straight win in the 50-over showpiece event.

He brought the nearly packed house to its feet with his century off 63 balls to go past Tendulkar's record of six tons in World Cups.

Rohit's century was also the fastest by an Indian in a World Cup, quicker than Kapil Dev's hundred in 72 balls against Zimbabwe in 1983.

Rohit hit the ball to all parts of the ground as he reached 1,000 World Cup runs and then went past Chris Gayle's record of 553 sixes across all formats.

The dashing opener hit 16 fours and five sixes in his 84-ball

knock before being bowled by leg-spinner Rashid Khan.

His opening partnership of 156 with the left-handed Ishan Kishan, who made 47, extended the team's dominance after a good bowling show on a batting-friendly pitch.

The century helped Rohit go past Tendulkar's record of six tons in World Cups. It was also the fastest by an Indian in a World Cup, quicker than Kapil Dev's hundred in 72 balls against Zimbabwe in 1983

Superstar cricketer and Delhi-born Virat Kohli soon took over to hit an unbeaten 55 and finished the match with a boundary.

Afghanistan posted 272-8 after electing to bat at the ground which witnessed a World Cup record 754 runs scored in the previous match when South Africa posted 428 and defeated



India's Rohit Sharma plays a shot during his knock of 131 against Afghanistan in New Delhi on Wednesday (AFP)

Sri Lanka. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah stood out for the home side with his best World Cup bowling figures of 4-39.

Afghanistan slipped to 63-3 before skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi (80) and Azmatullah Omarzai (62) put on 121 runs to help Afghanistan recover.

Bumrah got Ibrahim Zadran caught behind for 22 and celebrated by pointing to his temple.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz, on 21, and Rahmat Shah, on 16, fell in the space of four balls with Hardik Pandya and Shardul Thakur taking the wickets.

Shahidi, a left-hand batsman, and Omarzai then rebuilt the innings in a century stand, prompting Rohit to rotate his bowlers.

Omarzai reached his second ODI fifty and soon Shahidi smashed Pandya for four to bring up his half-century and followed it up with a six.

Omarzai, who hit two fours and four sixes in his 69-ball knock, also attacked but was bowled by Pandya.

Shahidi kept up the attack with regular boundaries but fell lbw to Kuldeep Yadav in his attempt to reverse sweep the left-arm wrist spinner.



Abdullah Shafique celebrates after scoring a century against Sri Lanka on Tuesday AFP

Pakistan’s Shafique making habit of great first impressions

Hyderabad, India - Abdullah Shafique has a habit of making great first impressions, the latest of which came on Tuesday when he became the first Pakistan batsman to make a century on his World Cup debut in an epic pursuit against Sri Lanka.

Called up to replace the out-of-form Fakhar Zaman, the 23-year-old opener clubbed 113 and with a cramping Mohammad Rizwan (131 not out) helped Pakistan reach their 345-run target, the highest successful run chase in World Cup history.

"The way Abdullah built the innings in the beginning, the kind of shots he hit, made it easy for us to chase the score," said Rizwan.

Shafique has become accustomed to making instant impacts.

He scored a hundred on his domestic Grade-II debut (non first class), notched another century on his first class debut in 2019 and a year later achieved the same feat in Twenty20 cricket.

Shafique is only the second

batsman in the world to have hit a hundred on first class and T20 debut, along with India's Shivam Bhambri.

His talents for the big stage were spotted early on by former Pakistan player Mansoor Rana, a former Pakistan team manager.

"We selected him for Under-19s as I saw enormous talent in this boy," said Rana.

"He is better than anyone technique-wise but the problem was he didn't score runs initially," explained Rana, the son of former international umpire

Shakoor.

After his T20 debut hundred, the then head coach Misbah-ul-Haq selected him in the shortest format but Shafique failed with four successive ducks.

He was backed despite his failures, making him a target for critics who accused him of receiving preferential treatment.

"I noticed that this boy had good technique and temperament. He has a repertoire of shots for every pitch," said Misbah.

AFP

Cummins sees World Cup as ‘physically taxing’ for bowlers

Lucknow, India - Australia captain Pat Cummins described the World Cup as the "most physically taxing" format for fast bowlers as batsmen pile up record scores around India.

With just six of 45 days ticked off, the 2023 tournament has already seen South Africa score the highest ever World Cup total of 428. That came against Sri Lanka in New Delhi where the two innings produced a tournament record 754 runs.

Aiden Markram clubbed the fastest World Cup century in 49 balls in that game while, on Tuesday, Pakistan chased down a record target of 345 to beat Sri Lanka.

In a further bout of misery for bowlers, 10 centuries have been scored over the first eight games.

"It's actually quite a physical format, I find it probably the most physically taxing if you're playing two or three games in a week,"



Australia's Pat Cummins

said Cummins ahead of their second World Cup match against South Africa on Thursday.

"We're doing 15kms in a 50-over match. I think in T20, if you bowl one really good over, that can be match-winning.

"In one-day cricket, that's not normally the case. And it's rare that the conditions are really in the bowler's favour, which is fine.

It's just a challenge you've got to try and deal with."

Sri Lankan bowlers have supplied a snapshot of the challenge described by Cummins.

In their loss to South Africa, seamers Kasun Rajitha and Matheesha Pathirana conceded 185 runs between them.

Pathirana suffered again as Pakistan ran riot in Hyderabad on

Tuesday, giving away another 90 runs in his 10 overs.

Five-time champions Australia suffered a six-wicket loss to India in their tournament opener, ironically in a rare low-scoring encounter at Chennai.

After bowling the Aussies out for just 199, India reached their target inside 42 overs with Virat Kohli surviving a dropped chance on 12 to make a match-winning 85. Cummins went wicketless in that match and took just two wickets in two ODIs Australia played against India in the run-up to the tournament.

"I'm really happy where it is," he said of his form in ODI cricket where he has 126 wickets at an average of just over 28.

"I feel like it's in as good a place as it ever has been. I think early in my career, I found it a hard balance between Test cricket and T20, like getting too funky.

Rizwan dedicates epic victory to ‘brothers and sisters in Gaza’

Hyderabad, India - Pakistan batsman Mohammad Rizwan on Wednesday dedicated his team's epic Cricket World Cup victory against Sri Lanka to "our brothers and sisters in Gaza", potentially putting him at odds with support for Israel expressed by the government of host nation India.

"This was for our brothers and sisters in Gaza. Happy to contribute in the win," Rizwan, 31, said on X, formerly known as Twitter. "Credits to the whole team and especially Abdullah Shafique and Hassan Ali for making it easier," added the batsman, who has 1.6 million followers on the social media platform.

His post had garnered 5.7 million views by Wednesday.

Rizwan scored 131 not out and in the company of opener Abdullah Shafique (113) set the platform for Pakistan's record



Mohammad Rizwan celebrates after steering Pakistan to victory in their World Cup match against Sri Lanka on Tuesday AFP

winning chase of a daunting 345-run target to defeat Sri Lanka at Hyderabad on Tuesday. India's government has joined ranks with Western nations to condemn the attacks launched by Gaza militants, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying the country stands "in solidarity with Israel at this

difficult hour".

However, Rizwan drew criticism for his views. "Shouldn't @iMRizwanPak have dedicated his match winning innings to ALL non combatants who have died in Gaza AND Israel? Humanity first and above else," wrote Indian author and columnist Rajdeep Sardesai.



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FIERY FOOD

If 'bland' is not your cup of tea, just turn on the heat and revel in spice



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FTA Update evening hosted by BBF and ISC Malabar Wing Onam



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ENTERTAINMENT

A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood



ESG U16 GIRLS

TEEN TRIUMPH

ESG FOOTBALL ACADEMY U16 GIRLS FROM OMAN PARTICIPATED IN THE JPL GCC CUP FOR THE FIRST TIME AND RETURNED RUNNERS UP

It is the first time that an academy from Muscat has taken a girls team to participate in an international soccer tournament that turned out to be a fantastic experience for the team members – all under-16 footballers with big dreams set before themselves. Competing against seven other teams from across the GCC, the Enhance Global Sports (ESG) Football Academy U16 girls team played a total of 16 games, which proved to be a great spectacle for girl's football in the Arabian Gulf. After battling their way through the

group stages, the ESG team eventually had to settle for the runners-up position in the final of the Cup against strong competitors from Saudi Arabia who won every game over the weekend, apart from drawing with ESG in the group stages. ESG coach, Georgina said, "It has been a gruelling weekend but such a fantastic experience for the girls. The bond and team spirit they displayed throughout was definitely a big factor in them progressing through the tournament. "Along with the quality football they played, at times, they showed immense

character and determination. The girls exceeded everyone's expectations and I'm absolutely delighted for all of them. They learned so much over the weekend and I'm confident that they will definitely improve as a team. They're on a high right now and already looking forward to the next tournament in Abu Dhabi." Preparation for the tournament had begun in early September with the team members attending two sessions per week. Training sessions were both, technical and tactical, in order to get them in the best possible shape for the tournament.

We have a very good team bond which helped us through this tough tournament. All are excited and can't wait for the next challenge

MAYA SULTAN CAPTAIN



The ESG Football Academy Elite Girls U16 team included Maya Sultan (Captain), Aisha al Yafaey, Vibha Ramchandrappa, Shahla al Zadjali, Lehini Nair, Bayda Macki, Laila al Jaadi, Heidi Smith, Tia Sampat, Rita Malakhova, Betsy Simpson, and Tessneme al Huthaili. Captain Maya Sultan said, "It was tough but a great experience which all of the girls enjoyed and learned so much from. We have a very good team bond which helped us through this tough tournament. All are excited and can't wait for the next challenge. Thanks to ESG Football Academy

for giving us these opportunities, we are really grateful for the support they give us and to 'Girls football, in genera, in the sultanate." The impressive performance in Bahrain has given the young team a lot of confidence and they are already looking forward to their next big tournament which will be in Abu Dhabi, in February 2024. They now have a few weeks off before they get back to the grind, preparing for the Abu Dhabi meet, organised by Manchester City, with teams coming from all over the world.

cook-up



Ginger Szechuan Beef

Ingredients
600g beef steaks
1tbsp soy sauce
1tbsp mirin
3tbsp cornstarch
3tbsp sesame oil
2 - 3 celery stalks - julienned
½ cup shredded carrots
3 inch green onions - sliced thinly

For the sauce
1tsp crushed red pepper flakes
¼ tsp Chinese 5 spice
2 cloves garlic - minced
2tbsp packed brown sugar
1 inch of fresh ginger – grated
4tbsp reduced sodium soy sauce
2tbsp water
1tbsp Sriracha
1tbsp rice vinegar
2tsp hoisin sauce
1 green onion - thinly sliced

Method
Slice the steaks, across the grain, into strips and place in a large plastic bag. Add mirin and soy sauce and massage into the meat. Add cornstarch, seal the bag and toss/massage to coat the meat.
Let the meat marinate for about 10 minutes or so. In a

medium mixing bowl, whisk together sauce ingredients and set aside. Slice vegetables and set aside.
Add sesame oil to wok and heat over medium heat. Add beef to hot pan - just enough to cover the bottom of the pan - you can do in two batches - and saute about 2-3 minutes. Remove beef to a plate and cook remaining batches.
Add sliced vegetables to the hot pan and cook about 1-3 minutes, stirring often. Pour in Szechuan sauce and cook about a minute, until slightly thickened. Add cooked beef and turn to coat in the sauce. Serve over steamed rice.



Spicy Shrimp & Crabs

Ingredients
600g crab
250g shrimp
1 whole corn
50g butter
3 cups water
Cooking oil
1 bulb garlic - minced
1 onion - minced
1tsp chilli powder
1tbsp sugar
1/3 cup catsup
Salt and black pepper, to taste
1 spring onion - chopped

Method
In a saucepan, pour in water, add salt and crabs. Arrange the crabs so that all of them are soaked in the water. Bring to a boil. Continue boiling the crabs for 15 minutes and remove the foamy bubbles formed during boiling. Add corn and boil for 15 minutes more while stirring occasionally. Remove crabs and set aside. Let

the corn boil until it's soft and cooked. Once the corn is cooked, remove it and set aside.
In another pan, drizzle an ample amount of cooking oil for sauteing. Add butter and stir the butter until it melts completely. Add garlic and stir. Once the garlic is golden brown, add in the onion. Add catsup and mix well.
Bring the sauce into a boil. Add sugar and chilli powder, stir. Add the shrimp while continuously stirring. Simmer on low heat until shrimp is cooked. Add salt and black pepper to taste. Let it simmer for yet another minute.
In a bowl, place half of the crabs and pour in half of the shrimp and sauce. Mix well so that the crabs are covered in sauce. Add the remaining crabs, shrimp and sauce and mix well. Toss in the corn. Plate and sprinkle with chopped spring onion on top.

FIERY FOODS

When you want to turn on the heat for dinner, turn to Asian delights wherein peppers and spice are a mainstay

Turn on the Heat

Firecracker Chicken

Ingredients
600g skinless chicken breasts - cut into chunks
Salt and pepper, to taste
1/3 cup cornstarch
2 eggs beaten
3tbsp vegetable oil
1/3 cup buffalo hot sauce
1/2 cup brown sugar
1tbsp rice vinegar
¼tsp red pepper flakes or more to taste
¼ cup sliced green onions
Cooking spray

Method
Preheat the oven to 220° C. Coat a pan with cooking spray. Place the chicken pieces on a plate and season with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle the cornstarch over the chicken and toss to coat evenly. Dip each piece of chicken into the beaten eggs. Heat the oil over high heat in a large pan. Place the chicken in a single layer and cook for 3-4 minutes on each side or until golden brown. You may have to work in batches. Place the chicken pieces in a single layer in pan. In a small bowl, whisk together the buffalo sauce, brown sugar, rice vinegar and red pepper flakes. Pour the sauce over the chicken. Bake for 35 minutes, stirring once. Serve hot.







عالي البروتين
و قليل السكر



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take a break

IN TOWN

FTA UPDATE EVENING



British Business Forum organised FTA Update Evening at Bait Muzna Gallery on October 1



Photos: V K Shafeer



ISC Malabar Oman



Indian Social Club, Malabar Wing, held its Onam celebrations last week.



Photos: V K Shafeer

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If managing your finances is tricky, today you're in luck. A friend has some good advice that you should listen to. You might not like the sound of it at first, but once they show you the impact that they've made on their money situation, you'll be a true believer! If you want things to change, you have to be willing to put in a little more effort on your part.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Don't fret about any small complication or drama today. It won't mess up your day as much as you fear. Unexpected stuff happens, so just roll with it. There will be too many fun things going on to worry too much about it anyway. You're feeling the need for a bit of self-indulgence right now - buy yourself a few treats.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You need to be honest and understand what your true limitations are today, especially in terms of your job. If you aren't confident about your abilities in a certain area, the worst possible thing you can do is to say you're a master of it. That kind of bluster and bravado might seem impressive, but it will only get you into deep water.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You should buck up on your networking skills. Start using them in many more areas of your life than you currently do. Whether you want a recommendation for a car mechanic, a great hotel in Paris, or maybe just the best burger, you need to ask around. It's up to you to make the connections you need, so reach out and don't be shy.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Avoid doing anything big or ostentatious today. This isn't the right time to finalise expensive travel plans, make a major purchase, or commit to anything in legal terms. Even though everything looks bright and cheerful right now, there are some darker shadows lurking that you aren't able to see yet. Wait a little while longer until everything has been clarified and put in writing.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Let your curiosity guide you today. Be open-minded and follow wherever that curiosity leads you. Wondering if that person is already romantically attached? Step up and ask them! Wondering what it would be like to try a new look? Search online for styles and looks you'd usually pass right by.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You're eager for your future to begin, but when is that starting point? There's no telling, but a glimpse might come today if you step back and give yourself space to see it. Move away from the people who are demanding so much of your time right now. They're distracting you from putting yourself first and seeing what you need to do next. To get some clarity, you need to get some quiet time. Then things will fall into place beautifully.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You'll be dealing with a lot of different requests and invitations today, which could be confusing or even overwhelming for you. Just take your time and think about your priorities. Once you do, it will be obvious what you should do first and what you shouldn't do at all. If you get frustrated, turn to a good friend for some guidance.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If you're trying not to eat too much, you can make the task a lot easier by distracting yourself, or even better, distracting yourself by being active. When your blood is pumping endorphins all around your body, the last thing on your mind is a cookie or ice cream. Staying healthy is all about achieving a balance.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

In your conversations today, try to avoid misunderstandings, because they can grow into dangerous assumptions. Therefore, aim for clarity. Make sure all your actions and comments are honest, and that people completely understand what you mean. Double-check and confirm just to make sure. Put things in writing.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone you usually find fascinating could leave you a bit bored today, but don't worry about it. It doesn't mean that you no longer like this person. It just means you need to take a break from them. It's a good idea to embark on a new solo project right now. Whether you choose to go off on a trip by yourself or just take the afternoon to contemplate your next move doesn't matter much.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Try to communicate your feelings clearly to the person you're worried about now. Being brutally honest is tough sometimes, but it's more valuable than softening the truth with little white lies. You might think you're protecting their feelings, but you're only keeping them from knowing what they need to know to move forward. And keep in mind that while you're speaking honestly with them, they'll be encouraged to speak honestly right back.

BOGGLER

T	A	Y	T
X	L	B	A
E	I	E	C
O	E	D	Z

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY:

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. What is the name of the wizard in 'The Lord of the Rings'?

- A. Rodolf
- B. Gandalf
- C. Galadriel
- D. Bilbo

2. Q. When was the microwave invented?

- A. 1922
- B. 2006
- C. 1946
- D. 1956



3. In which country would you find the Great Barrier Reef?

- A. Austria
- B. Tanzania
- C. Thailand
- D. Australia

Answer: (in reverse)
3. D
2. C
1. B

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

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

entertainment

‘The Eras Tour’ heads for record global opening



Taylor Swift: *The Eras Tour* is headed for a record global opening for a concert film of US\$150mn to US\$200mn, including US\$100mn to US\$125mn in North America and US\$50mn to US\$75mn overseas. AMC Theatres, which is distributing the con-

cert pic on behalf of the superstar pop singer, is sticking to the more conservative estimate of US\$150mn globally, including US\$100mn domestically. Swift's film will begin screening on Friday in more than 8,500 cinemas in roughly 100 coun-

tries, including in every AMC location in the United States. Generally, a movie holds pre-views Thursday night before officially opening on Friday morning. *Eras Tour's* truncated re-release makes it more difficult to predict its opening.



BROOKE BURKE WAS TEMPTED TO HAVE AN AFFAIR

The ballroom is heating up, thanks to Brooke Burke's latest confession. The 52-year-old got candid on the relationship she formed with her partner Derek Hough while competing on *Dancing With the Stars* in 2008. "I just thought [Derek] was so young and green and safe," Brooke said on the October 8 episode of a popular podcast. "Had I not been married, I would have actually hoped we would have had a love affair," admitted the television host, who was married to actor David Charvet at the time.



VANNA WHITE SEEKS HER REPLACEMENT

Vanna White is not retiring from *Wheel of Fortune* soon having just extended her time on the syndicated game show. However, retiring is not out of the question and it's something White has thought about now that host Pat Sajak is leaving. Continuing the legacy of the Sajaks, White thinks that Maggie Sajak would be a good replacement for her once she decides to part ways with the show. "I think she's a good replacement if I can't be there for some reason," White disclosed in an interview. "She's been around it her whole life, so, I think, she can fill in for me for sure."

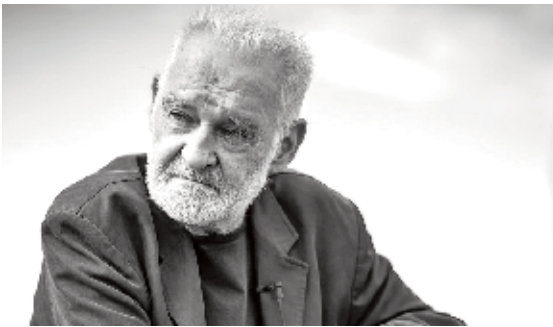
ASHA PAREKH SLAMS MAKERS OF 'THE KASHMIR FILES'

Veteran actress Asha Parekh has slammed the makers of 2022 hit film *The Kashmir Files*, which has been directed and produced by Vivek Agnihotri. The actress lashed out at the makers and questioned them for not donating a part of their earnings to help Hindus living 'without water and electricity' in Jammu and Kashmir. During an interview with *CNBC Awaaz*, Asha was asked if she had watched 'controversial' films such as *The Kashmir Files* and *The Kerala Story* (2023), both of which did well at the box office. The actress asked what had people gained from such films. "How much money did the makers give for the welfare of the Hindus living in Jammu without access to water and electricity. Suppose the producers earned Rs200 crore out of the film's Rs400 crore collection, they could have donated Rs50 crore to help Kashmiri Hindus, right?"



HOLLYWOOD WRITERS SIGN OFF ON NEW DEAL

Hollywood writers overwhelmingly voted to approve a hard-fought new deal with studios, their union said Monday, officially ending one of the industry's longest ever strikes. "Around 99% of WGA members have voted in favour of ratifying" the contract, allowing them to return to work on improved terms, said the Writers Guild of America on social media. Approval by the union's 11,500-odd members had been widely seen as a near-certainty. Last month, after 148 days on strike, WGA negotiators reached a deal with the likes of Netflix and Disney, achieving better pay, greater protections from artificial intelligence, minimum staffing levels and more.



BELA TARR TO RECEIVE HONORARY AWARD

Hungarian director Bela Tarr will receive the Honorary Award of the European Film Academy president and board at the 36th European Film Awards in Berlin, on December 9. "With this award, the European Film Academy (EFA) wishes to pay special tribute to an outstanding director and a personality with a strong political voice, who is not only deeply respected by his colleagues but also celebrated by audiences worldwide," EFA said on Wednesday. Tarr is the sixth filmmaker to receive the award - earlier recipients were Manoel de Oliveira, Michel Piccoli, Sir Michael Caine.

RELEASING TODAY



Genre: **AHorror**
Starring: **JEllen Burstyn, Leslie Odom Jr., Ann Dowd, Jennifer Nettles, Norbert Leo Butz, Lidya Jewett,**
Language: **English**
Since the death of his pregnant wife in a Haitian earthquake 12 years ago, Victor Fielding has raised their daughter, Angela (Lidya Jewett, Good Girls) on his own. But she and her friend Katherine disappear in the woods, only to return three days later.



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:

SAW X
Genre: Horror, thriller **Starring:** Tobin Bell, Shawnee Smith, Synnove Macody Lund, Steven Brand

Saw X is an American horror film and the tenth installment in the *Saw* film series, that serves as both a direct sequel to *Saw* (2004) and a prequel to *Saw II* (2005). It is directed and edited by Kevin Greutert and written by Peter Goldfinger and Josh Stolberg. The film stars Tobin Bell and Shawnee Smith reprising their roles from the previous films, with Synnove Macody Lund, Steven Brand, Renata Vaca, and Michael Beach. Set between the events of the first two films, John

Kramer (Bell) travels to Mexico in hopes an experimental procedure may cure him, later discovering a scam within the operation. As retribution, he kidnaps those responsible and subject them to his trademark death traps. Considered the most chilling installment of the *Saw* franchise, this film explores the untold chapter of Jigsaw's most personal game. Set between the events of *Saw I* and *II*, a sick and desperate John travels to Mexico for a risky medical procedure in hopes of a miracle cure for his cancer - only to dis-

Torture traps



cover the entire operation was intended to defraud the most vulnerable. John is driven to the clinic by taxi driver Diego, and meets Cecilia and her team - Mateo, Valentina, and Dr Cortez - as well as a woman named Gabriela who claims to have been cured by Cecilia, and another patient, Parker Sears, who just underwent surgery. John also meets Carlos, a young boy who lives nearby, and the two bond when John fixes his bike. He goes under for surgery, and wakes up to Cecilia telling him that he is now cancer-free. Finding a new lease on life, John purchases a gift for Gabriela. However, upon returning to the clinic, he finds it abandoned and realises that the whole operation was a scam. The *Saw* franchise began almost 20

years ago, in 2004, when then little-known filmmakers James Wan and Leigh Whannell made a fascinating, gruesome horror mystery that got pigeonholed for its violence but was really much more. *Saw X* isn't just a straight-on horror mystery - it's a horror revenge story where the audience sympathises with the killer. That itself isn't all that unique, but what makes it stand out in *Saw* is that it comes as the 10th installment of the franchise. Over the last nine films and 20 years, fans have come to love John Kramer, aka Jigsaw. If you enjoy letting your pulse race, go watch this horror flick that'll leave you spellbound for a good two hours. Rating ★★☆☆☆



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