



PASSENGERS AT OMAN AIRPORTS UP 71.5%

Muscat - The number of passengers travelling through airports of the sultanate in 2023 till the end of May grew 71.5% to 5,223,992 against 3,045,519 in the corresponding period of 2022.

According to the latest preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and information, the total number of passengers transiting Muscat International Airport was 4,718,497, accounting for a 79.5% increase compared to the same period in 2022. These passengers travelled on 36,315 flights, constituting an increase of 65.6% in the number of flights operating from Muscat in the first five months of 2023.

The number of passengers in Salalah Airport increased 32.7% to 470,950 passengers onboard 3,468 flights - an increase of 26.4% compared to the same period in 2022.

A total of 6,999 passengers travelled via Sohar Airport on board 110 flights, while the number flying via Duqm Airport was 27,546 on 258 flights.



Afghans on life two years under the Taliban



Indian Independence Day supplement with this edition

Oman condoles Iran on Shah Cheragh attack

Muscat – The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its condolences and sympathy to the Islamic Republic of Iran for the victims of an attack that took place in Shah Cheragh Shrine in Shiraz on Sunday. It also wished the injured speedy recovery.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman underscored its permanent stance in denouncing all forms of terrorism.

The shooting at the Shiite

shrine in Iran's south killed at least one person and wounded eight others, state media reported, revising down a previous toll of four fatalities. The attack comes less than a year after a similar one on the same site.

"One person has been killed and eight others wounded in the attack," official news agency IRNA reported, quoting deputy governor of Fars Esmail G Sofla.

The wounded 'have been transferred to medical centres

and are undergoing treatment', IRNA said. Earlier, it said four people were killed but retracted the initial report.

8 foreigners arrested

Iranian security forces arrested eight foreign suspects after detaining the gunman involved in the killing, state media reported on Monday.

"Eight people suspected of links with the terrorist attack... have been arrested," according

to the judiciary's Mizan Online website, quoting Fars province chief justice Kazem Mousavi.

"All the people arrested are foreigners," Mousavi said.

The eight are in addition to the main suspect arrested on Sunday night after the attack. Mizan identified him as Rahmatollah Nowruzof from Tajikistan.

Windows were left shattered by bullets and blood stained the ground in a courtyard of the arched and colonnaded complex

after the shooting.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but Fars provincial governor Mohammad Hadi Imanieh blamed the extremist Islamic State group.

He told state TV that the assailant sought "to take revenge for the execution of two terrorists" convicted of carrying out the similar attack last year.

On Monday, Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi told state TV during a visit to the site that the

"terrorist" was collaborating with a "network operating" outside Iran.

On October 26, a mass shooting at the shrine left 13 people dead and 30 wounded. IS later claimed the attack.

Iran hanged two men in public on July 8 over the killings after their conviction for 'corruption on earth, armed rebellion and acting against national security,' Mizan said at the time.

Agencies



Oman signs gas export deal with German company

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman LNG has announced the signing of a binding term-sheet agreement with Germany's Securing Energy for Europe (SEFE) to supply 400,000mn metric tonnes per annum of LNG starting 2026.

Germany and Oman held talks in June to look into the former getting gas from the sultanate in an effort to find an alternative to Russian gas supplies.

Monday's agreement aims to enhance the growing partnerships between Oman LNG and international energy firms; SEFE has become the latest beneficiary of Omani LNG marking the first LNG term deal with a German firm.

For Oman, the move is expected to open doors for new opportunities of gas export in European markets.

According to ONA, the term-sheet agreement includes supplying a total volume of 0.4mn metric tonnes per annum of LNG to SEFE. The agreement is a four-year contract starting in 2026.

This year, several international energy firms from countries including Japan, China, Turkey and Bangladesh have signed long-term agreements to import LNG from the sultanate.

Signing term-sheet agreements beyond 2024 emphasises

Oman LNG's role in sustaining the sultanate's reputation as a reliable and trusted LNG supplier, coupled with the effective management of business processes to produce reliable energy, and deliver it to customers around the world safely.

The agreement leverages our constant efforts to add value to Oman's economy

MAHMOUD AL BALUSHI

The agreement signing ceremony on Monday was held under the auspices of H E Salim Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals. The agreement was signed by Hamed al Naamany, CEO of Oman LNG, and Frederic Barnaud, Chief Commercial Officer of SEFE.

"The term-sheet signing with SEFE marks another milestone. Going further, the agreement leverages our constant efforts to add value to Oman's economy through growth and collaborations," said Mahmoud Abdulsatar al Balushi, Chief Commercial Officer of Oman LNG.

On his turn, Egbert Laege, CEO of SEFE, said, "We are delighted to announce the historic contract between SEFE and Oman LNG, marking a significant milestone for both entities."

TRA maps green way ahead for postal sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an effort to bolster environmental sustainability, Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA) is contemplating the adoption of electric vehicles and e-scooters for postal delivery. The move is part of a broader vision aimed at reducing emissions and integrating green practices across the postal sector.

The comprehensive plan, outlined in a public consultation document - Postal Sector Environmental Sustainability Initiatives - encompasses not just the deployment of renewable energy across offices, vehicles and touchpoints, but also promotes practices that foster environmental stewardship.

According to the authority, there is need to offset the environmental impact caused by the heightened demand for postal and delivery services spurred by the rise of e-commerce. The increased use of commercial and private vehicle fleets for postal activities has inadvertently affected the environment, necessitating a shift towards more sustainable options.

TRA informed of its intention to 'contribute to achieving the Oman Vision 2040 Environmental pillar' by implementing sustainability initiatives that focus on emission reduction, pollution control and energy conservation within postal operations.

To ensure the proposed initiatives align with practical needs and expectations of the industry, TRA has called for a public consultation. 'The authority would like to publicly consult all relevant stakeholders - postal, courier companies, green vehicle suppliers, investors, consumers and any other relevant sector -



(Supplied photo)

on the proposed initiatives in this document and the potential for investment in sustainable services," a statement said.

TRA is also seeking feedback on the feasibility of implementing these green initiatives, besides setting reasonable targets and timelines for execution.

Beyond the initiatives related to vehicles and energy use, TRA has proposed several other sus-

tainability measures. These include efficient use of packaging and recycling, utilisation of locally produced packaging materials to reduce emissions from international shipping, procuring from sustainable suppliers, reducing printing of invoices and forms, enhancing digital invoicing, promoting digital payments, and digitising customs operations to minimise paper

documents.

Additionally, to bolster awareness of these green initiatives, TRA plans to designate a 'Green Post Day' and develop staff awareness surrounding energy management.

TRA's comprehensive plan to transition the postal sector to more sustainable practices aligns with the global push for environmentally responsible operations.

Sultanate collaborates with US firm to enhance startup ecosystem

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In recent years, the startup culture in Oman has witnessed significant growth. Despite this development, the collective market value of Omani startups stands at about US\$300mn only.

To address the challenges and foster a flourishing entrepreneurial culture, Oman has partnered with the US-based research and advisory firm Startup Genome Foundation, an advisory firm focused on innovation policy.

On Monday, a delegation from Startup Genome presented its insights before officials of the Authority for Small and Medium



Enterprises Development (ASMED), chaired by Halima bint Rashid al Zaria. The meeting re-

viewed the strategic direction of ASMED and its objectives, focusing on the development of

emerging technology-based and innovation companies.

The discussion also covered

various government and private initiatives in Oman aimed at stimulating the startup ecosystem. Emphasising the importance of the sultanate's entry into the global startup ecosystem, ASMED explored opportunities to enhance the competitiveness of Omani startups and align these with global trends.

Startup Genome's expertise lies in analysing policies and programmes that maximise economic impact and growth in the startup sector. It has developed more than 145 startup ecosystems in over 50 countries.

Currently, Startup Genome is conducting an analytical study on the challenges facing startups in

Oman. This effort includes interviews and meetings with Omani startup owners, decision-makers in entrepreneurship-supporting entities, and educational institutions.

Startup Genome recently released a global report on the performance of the startup ecosystem, ranking Oman among the top ten countries in the MENA region for attracting talented entrepreneurs. Oman also ranks among the top 15 countries in MENA for development and efficiency of startup ecosystems.

These positive indicators reflect the collaborative efforts and integration between government institutions to advance the

Omani startups sector. A notable achievement is the launch of the 'Promising Omani Startups Programme,' chaired by H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said.

The national programme aims to stimulate an ecosystem for emerging startups based on advanced technology and innovation in Oman. It focuses on promoting the startup culture in educational institutions, raising community awareness of its importance, and elevating Omani startups to regional and global markets. The programme operates on three main pillars: capacity building, financing and investing, and a supportive regulatory framework.

SCREEN TIME DILEMMA

Children's long gaming sessions worrisome

Our Correspondent
Muscat

During summer school break, children's free time often leads to increased use of media, including popular video games like *Valorant*, *Call of Duty* and *Roblox*. This extended screen time has experts and parents expressing their concerns.

Ali al Shayadi, a teacher, spoke with *Muscat Daily* about the worrying amount of time many children spend on games and TV during the summer break, often exceeding six hours a day. He stressed the importance of parents encouraging a range of activities, including swimming, football and outdoor walks during the summer months.

"We as parents need to set guidelines and instil impulse control in our children. Screen usage should be restricted and prioritised based on what is important," stated Shayadi.

Sharing his personal experience, Nasser al Hosni, a parent, said, "My son becomes incredibly engrossed when he plays games. He stays up late playing



multiplayer games, often neglecting the real world. These games need parental supervision."

But not all parents view gaming negatively. Rawya al Amri, a mother and gamer herself, spoke of the potential benefits of gaming: "As a parent, I see how gaming can sharpen my children's skills. Problem-solving and improved focus are some of the benefits I have noticed."

Ibrahim al Qaryouti, a researcher at Sultan Qaboos Uni-

versity, believes screen time is largely the responsibility of parents. "Many Omani parents seem unaware of the potential health implications of their children's extended time spent gaming."

Qaryouti's research suggests 63.7% of parents observed increased laziness and weight gain in their children due to video games. Additionally, 43.5% reported a reduction in physical activity, potentially contributing to anxiety and other mental health

issues.

Dr Mahmood al Mawaali, education and supervision counselor at Sultan Qaboos University, added, "Children can learn both positive and negative behaviours from video games. For example, they might observe how individuals solve problems or interact with others. However, unsupervised, excessive screen time can lead to addiction, encourage negative behaviours and expose children to potential online exploitation."

Whispers of Serenity clinic launches in-person book club

Muscat - Mental health clinic Whispers of Serenity launched in-person book club sessions on Saturday at Momaz Café.

The initiative marks a new chapter for the clinic's book club, which was established in 2016. Earlier, these gatherings took place on the clinic's premises or virtually. The book club's objective is to enrich lives through shared reading experiences, moving beyond reading as a solitary activity.

Sahar Salmanian, who heads the relationships department at the clinic, shared insights about this new direction with *Muscat Daily*. She explained that members opted to host the book club in different locations, such as cafes or cultural spots, which offer a serene environment. "This way, we can welcome more readers to join us," Sahar said.

Elaborating further, Sahar shed light on the idea behind the club. "Reading together in a group helps us improve our reading, listening and discussion skills all at once. When we read as a



group, we broaden our horizons and find inspiration and energy in the enthusiastic group dynamics. Furthermore, we seamlessly merge mental health discussions with group reading sessions, delving into diverse perspectives on overall well-being."

Before each event, participants are provided PDFs of the selected book, allowing them to become acquainted with its concepts in advance. "When we meet, printed sections of the book are distributed, allowing each individual to read a designated portion. During this time, participants can make notes, highlight interesting sections and engage in discussions as we explore each segment. Addition-

ally, we intertwine our personal narratives with the text, sharing stories that resonate with the content." The in-person book club will be held once a month or once every two months.

The Whispers of Serenity book club represents an innovative convergence of mental health and literature. By extending the reading experience beyond the individual to a community setting, it fosters a holistic approach to mental well-being. Its decision to go public in serene settings also resonates with the broader intention of nurturing mental health through shared intellectual and emotional connections.

(Contributed by Deeba Parween)

Hefty penalty for not providing invoices

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Primary Court has delivered judgments against three commercial establishments found guilty of violating the Consumer Protection Law. It ordered the establishments to pay fines.

Complaints were lodged with the Directorate General of Consumer Protection in North Batinah against a beauty centre, a mobile phone shop and a shipping company.

In the first case, the establishment failed to furnish a proper invoice for the service - which was also found deficient - to the customer. In the second case, the mobile phone shop delayed replacement of a faulty device and rejected the customer's request for a refund. In the third, the establishment was penalised for not providing an invoice in Arabic and failing to issue a receipt.

These complaints prompted the Directorate General of Consumer Protection in North Bati-

nah to investigate. Following a thorough inquiry, the cases were referred to Public Prosecution and subsequently to the court.

The court's judgments were specific to each violation. The first and second establishments were penalised for failing to provide proper services and not handing over invoices. Both were ordered to pay a fine of RO300 each. The court found the third establishment guilty of not providing an invoice in Arabic and imposed a fine of RO100.



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ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date For Collection Of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Thursday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
3001/2023	General maintenance in Tanam health center	Thursday 31/ Aug /2023	Before 9 am on Monday 18/ Sep /2023	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board-fourth grade.	R.O 25/= Per set

Notes:-

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

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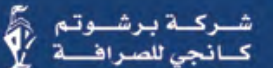
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Daymaniyat gets buoys to protect coral reefs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) has stepped up its conservation and preservation efforts with a project that saw installation of mooring buoys in the Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve.

Sponsored by Occidental Oman (OXY) and implemented by Haejoo EnC - Middle East, the project was commissioned by EA in December 2022 and completed last month following a two-week survey in February.

With the objective of protecting coral reefs and developing the nature reserve, the project was the first of its kind in the sultanate by virtue of its installation method providing mooring buoys for tourist boats that visit the Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve.

Metal anchors dropped by boats to the sea floor destroy coral reefs which take many years to grow. With 20 mooring buoys now installed around the Daymaniyat Islands - including the popular dive and snorkelling sites of Kharabah Island, Three Sisters, Turtle City, Black Tip, and Coral Garden in the southern end of Qasmah Island - tourist boats



(Supplied photo)

will not have to drop anchors.

These buoys are also expected to help monitor and control dive sites and enhance management of the reserve.

"All 20 buoy sites were determined for various considerations, through consultation with the community, the reserve's visitors, marine tourism centres, guards and reserve employees, and based on the bathymetric surveys and the hardness and roughness of the sea floor," said Mohammed al Qarni, Environmental Systems Specialist at EA.

The survey to identify the buoy sites in February was conducted using Haejoo's purpose-built 10m catamaran - Maris Stella - equipped with multi-beam scanning sonar, inertial measurement unit (IMU) motion sensor, dual GPS radar and multifunctional monitors.

The site survey involved bathymetry (for depth measurement) and backscatter scan (mapping relative hardness and roughness of the sea floor), followed by further community consultation.

The installation method required a crane barge and the heaviest duty underwater jackhammer given the hard sediment

of the sea floor in the nature reserve.

Describing project implementation, Ryan Paik, General Manager of Haejoo EnC - Middle East, said, "We've used underwater earth anchor technique to have minimal impact on the coral reefs."

He added, "Visitors should be aware of the fact that coral reefs take ages to form and are vital to marine species. These mooring buoys will help protect and conserve the coral reef ecosystem."

According to the manufacturer of the mooring buoys, these have product life expectancy of up to 12 years.

"It is rewarding to see that many boats are already using the buoys. They would appreciate EA's efforts and delivery of the project for both coral reef conservation and helping local businesses," Qarni noted.

After studying the results of this project, "we hope to increase the number of mooring buoys in the sultanate, especially in places with a sensitive and fragile environment. There are many places in Muscat that need mooring buoys, including Al Fahal Island and Bandar al Khairan".



(Supplied photo)

Turtle Commandos save turtles, biodiversity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Turtle Commando Programme is continuing actively with the support of local and international volunteers.

The third edition of this innovative initiative, focused on monitoring and safeguarding endangered sea turtles and preserving the country's biodiversity, will continue its efforts till the end of December.

Manar bint Abdullah al Riyami, head of the Turtle Commando Programme, expressed concern about the challenges resulting from human interference. "The idea for the programme came from the unorganised increase in visitors to turtle reserves, which caused disturbance to the turtles and a decrease in their numbers," she said.

According to Manar, the programme's main objectives include enhancing public awareness regarding the significance of sea turtles, inspiring youth to volunteer in environmental conservation, and cleaning turtle nesting beaches of plastic and fishing waste.

The programme also focuses on finding solutions to several challenges that threaten turtles, such as environmental degradation, and contribute to their reproduction and environmental preservation.

The idea for the programme came from the unorganised increase in visitors to turtle reserves, which caused disturbance to the turtles and a decrease in their numbers

MANAR AL RIYAMI

The third edition of the programme commenced in June, extending across three sites - Ras al Hadd Turtle Reserve, Masirah Island and Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve.

Manar further elaborated on the challenges faced in the turtle reserves prior to the programme. These include human disturbance at nesting sites, non-compliance with laws, use of artificial lighting affecting the geographical orientation of young turtles heading to the sea, destruction of nests by vehicles or excavation, and pollution from plastics, oil or chemicals. Additionally, she mentioned the challenges posed by encroachment and unregulated construction at nesting sites.

The Turtle Commando Programme was first launched in 2022, with the second edition concluding in March this year. Its continued success represents a concerted effort to engage communities and authorities in protecting a vital component of Oman's marine ecosystem.

Registered rent agreements in Muttrah up 92%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality's campaign to raise awareness on the need to register rent agreements has achieved significant success in the wilayat of Muttrah. The latest data reveals a 92.7% increase in both new and renewed rental contracts in the first half

of 2023.

According to the data, 3,323 new rent agreements were recorded in the wilayat, alongside 21,239 contract renewals. In comparison, in the same period of 2022, 747 new contracts were registered and 11,999 contracts renewed.

The Muscat Municipality data highlighted that residential

contracts account for the majority, followed by commercial agreements.

'This increase in registration of contracts indicates that the awareness efforts exerted to encourage the public to register rent agreements were effective. Registered agreements save the rights of the parties of the contract, and determine the fee and

the duration of the contract, which can significantly reduce the chance of disputes later between landlords, investors or tenants,' Muscat Municipality stated.

The municipality's focus on educating the public about rental agreements is based on Article 14 of Muscat Municipality Decision No 38/2015.

PAKISTAN SCHOOL CELEBRATES 77TH INDEPENDENCE DAY



The 77th Independence Day of Pakistan was celebrated with patriotic fervour at Pakistan School Muscat on Monday, marked by a special flag hoisting ceremony presided over by H E Ali Imran Chaudhry, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman. Children in traditional attire presented performances showcasing the rich cultural tapestry of the nation (V K Shafeer)

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The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources
Announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description	Tender documents price (R.O)	Class	Last date for collection of documents	Last date for Submission of documents
613/2023/MAF WR/HQ-73	Supply of Wheat Combine Harvesters	25/-	Specialized	Tuesday 22/8/2023	Tuesday 12/9/2023
614/2023/MAF WR/HQ-3	construction of flood protection and runoff control at assubakh area-wilayat sur-ashsharqiyah south governorate	98/100	Excellent	Tuesday 22/8/2023	Tuesday 12/9/2023
624/2023/MAF WR/HQ-74	Maintenance of garden, Ministry building No. (1 & 2) in Al Khuwair and its related buildings for the year 2021	25/-	Specialized	Monday 28/9/2020	Thursday 8/10/2020
481/2023/MAF WR/HQ-42	Construction Of Two Recharge Dams At Wadi Aamdah And Wadi Gubirah In Wilayat Dima Wa Tayeen North Sharqiyah Governorate	227/-	Excellent	Tuesday 25/7/2023	Tuesday 15/8/2023
576/2023/MAF WR/HQ-56	Construction Of Recharge Dam At Wadi Al Maantiya In Wilayat Al Rustaq - Al Batinah South Governorate	68/-	Excellent	Wednesday 16/8/2023	Wednesday 6/9/2023

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- Preference will be given to companies whose bid includes the largest percentage of Omanization and possible purchase of national products.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968.24402200 or etenderhd@mtct.gov.om.

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Credit Suisse shareholders to file suit over UBS merger

Hundreds of small shareholders in Credit Suisse will file a legal suit over the bank's forced rescue merger with UBS to obtain compensation for their losses, The Financial Times reported.

The complaint were to be filed Monday in Zurich, Arik Roschke of the Swiss shareholders' defence association (SASV) told the AWP news agency, confirming the report.

Around 1,000 shareholders have joined the complaint by becoming SASV members, he said.

Swiss officials, afraid that Credit Suisse could collapse with possibly catastrophic consequences for the global financial system, arranged a rushed marriage in March with UBS, the nation's largest bank.

Credit Suisse shareholders felt burned by the merger terms, which valued the bank's equity capital at roughly three billion Swiss francs (\$3.2bn).

Confidence in Oman's financial system improved in 2023: Survey

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's improved fiscal position and positive economic outlook, supported by higher oil prices, have further raised confidence in the stability of the sultanate's financial system in 2023. This is despite global economic and geopolitical uncertainties, according to the results of a survey conducted by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The CBO's annual Systemic Risk Survey (SRS) seeks to obtain feedback from a range of stakeholders on their level of confidence in the stability of the Omani macro-financial system, as well as their perception of associated risks. The results of SRS 2023 were published in the CBO's recently released Financial Stability Report.

'The SRS 2023 illustrates that the degree of confidence in the stability of Oman's macro-financial system shows improvement in 2023, despite the diminished forecast for global growth and ongoing geopolitical uncertainty,' the CBO said in the report.

According to the survey results, the majority (71%) of the respondents are fairly confident in the Omani macro-financial system. The percentage of respondents who described themselves as 'very confident,' 'fairly confident,' or 'just confident' in Oman's macro-financial system



As per CBO's Systemic Risk Survey 2023, a majority (71%) of respondents are 'fairly confident' in the Omani macro-financial system

increased to 100% in 2023 compared to 99% in 2022. Meanwhile, the responses favouring 'not at all confident' dropped to zero percent in 2023 from 1% in the preceding year.

The Systemic Risk Survey is typically completed by officials from banks, non-bank financial institutions, financial sector regulators, government institutions, professionals from the public and private sectors, and academics in

compared to 8% in 2022.

According to the SRS 2023 responses, the perceived probability of an event with a high negative impact occurring in Oman's financial system over the short term (up to one year ahead) dropped slightly.

Only 6% of the respondents judged this probability to be 'high' or 'very high' in 2023, compared to 8% in SRS 2022. Moreover, the percentage of respondents who viewed this probability as 'low' or 'very low' increased from 55% in 2022 to 60% in 2023.

The participants' expectations of such an event occurring over the medium term (1-3 years ahead) witnessed a larger

change between 2022 and 2023. The percentage of respondents who viewed this probability as 'high or very high' somewhat declined to 18% in 2023 from 20% in 2022. Meanwhile, the percentage of those who judged this probability as 'low or very low' decreased significantly to 18% in 2023 from 39% in 2022.

'The lower probabilities assigned to a high-impact event reflect the substantial improvements in Oman's fiscal and economic metrics, particularly in the short term, mainly due to higher oil prices and the continued commitment to the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP),' the CBO said.

Respondents to SRS 2023

also expressed relatively higher optimism regarding how their perception of the likelihood of an adverse event occurring in the near future has changed over the past year. This is notwithstanding risks from global spillovers, elevated uncertainty about the economic outlook, and financial market volatility.

Due to the sultanate's economic recovery led by improvement in oil prices and normalisation of other economic activities, a set of new challenges stand out most prominently in the survey results, the CBO report noted.

The 'drop in banks' profitability,' 'plunge in real estate prices,' and 'disruption in the payment and settlement systems' infrastructure' were among the top three most likely systemic risks, respectively, in terms of their perceived expected impact on the Omani financial system. These results differ from those of the 2022 survey, in which 'unfavourable oil price movements' and 'deterioration in global output and trade' were the two most significant systemic risks in terms of their perceived expected impact.

Meanwhile, 'unfavourable oil price movement' and 'deterioration in global output and trades' were perceived as the least significant systemic risks to Oman's macro-financial stability in 2023 after the recent hike in oil prices.

ADNOC advances GCC's first project to harness geothermal energy

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and the National Central Cooling Company (Tabreed) Monday announced a breakthrough in the first project in the Gulf region to harness geothermal energy following the conclusion of testing on two geothermal wells at Masdar City in Abu Dhabi.

The landmark project is set to decarbonise the cooling of buildings in Masdar City, further diversify the UAE's energy mix and support the UAE National Energy Strategy 2050, which aims to grow renewable energy capacity to 14GW by 2030.

The project is enabled by ADNOC's initial \$15bn allocation towards low carbon solutions and will support its decarbonisation plan and net zero by 2045 ambition as well as the Abu Dhabi Climate Change Strategy and UAE Net Zero by 2050



Strategic Initiative.

The wells produced hot water at temperatures exceeding 90 degrees celsius and flow rates of approximately 100 liters per second. The hot water generated by the heat from the wells will now pass through an absorption cooling system to produce chilled water, which will then be supplied to Tabreed's district cooling network at Masdar City, accounting for 10% of its cooling needs.

load electricity."

"However, until now, it has remained an untapped source of energy. By leveraging technological advances, for the first time ADNOC and Tabreed have unlocked this clean energy source to decarbonise one of the most energy intensive sectors in the country," he added.

Currently, the cooling of buildings accounts for the majority of the UAE's electricity consumption. District cooling offers a sustainable alternative to traditional cooling methods as it is around 50% more energy efficient in its standard operations.

Leveraging geothermal heat for district cooling operations has the potential to significantly reduce electricity demand for cooling from the grid, helping to decarbonise one of the most energy intensive sectors in the region.

WAM



A photo taken on Monday shows a logo of Country Garden Holdings at a housing estate in Zhengzhou, in China's central Henan province (AFP)

Chinese property giant Country Garden's shares sink on default fears

Beijing, China - Shares in Chinese property giant Country Garden plunged on Monday after it missed bond payments and warned of billions of dollars in losses, deepening fears about the country's heavily indebted real estate sector.

Like its troubled competitor Evergrande, any collapse of Country Garden would have catastrophic repercussions for the Chinese financial system and economy.

The privately owned firm estimated its debt at some 1.15tn yuan (\$159bn) at the end of 2022, and had said on the weekend that it would suspend trading of onshore bonds from Monday.

"We're facing the greatest difficulties since our establishment," Country Garden boss Yang Huiyan said in a statement on Friday.

Its shares plummeted more than 18% in Hong Kong on Monday.

Country Garden is on Forbes' list of the 500 largest companies in the world, and Yang was until recently one of the richest women in Asia.

The firm has long been deemed financially solid but was unable last Monday to make two bond payments, and after a 30-day grace period, it risks defaulting in September if it still cannot pay.

Additional liabilities mean other estimates of its overall debt are as high as 1.4tn yuan (\$193bn), according to Bloomberg.

Adding to the pressure, 31bn yuan (\$4.27bn) in the firm's bonds are set to mature in 2024, according to rating agency Moody's, which last Thursday downgraded its rating for the group to "Caa2", indicating "very high credit risk".

Country Garden said this month that it expected a net loss for the first half of this year of 45bn to 55bn yuan (about \$6.2bn to \$7.6bn).

"Due to the recent deterioration of sales and refinancing environment, the available funds in the book of the company have been continuously reduced, resulting in a phased liquidity pressure," Country Garden said in an announcement at the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

In the last month, 42% of the company's value has been wiped out.

Boom and bust
Housing reform in China during

the late 1990s unleashed a boom in the real estate sector, spurred by social norms that consider owning a property a prerequisite for marriage.

But the massive debt accrued by the industry's biggest players has in recent years been perceived by Beijing as an unacceptable risk for China's financial system and overall economic health.

To reduce the sector's indebtedness, authorities have since 2020 gradually tightened conditions for developers' access to credit, drying up sources of financing for firms already in debt.

A wave of defaults followed - notably that of Evergrande - which undermined the confidence of potential buyers and reverberated through the industry.

The downturn in the once-thriving sector has occurred against a backdrop of a general economic slowdown in China.

Country Garden is particularly susceptible to weak demand because it focuses on the lower end of the property market, launching ambitious projects in secondary cities where local buyers wield less purchasing power.

AFP

Foxconn sees potential to invest billions in India

Taipei, Taiwan - Taiwanese tech giant and key Apple supplier Foxconn said Monday it sees the potential to invest "several billion dollars" in India, with the firm looking to diversify its manufacturing away from China.

Foxconn - also known by its official name Hon Hai Precision Industry - is the world's biggest contract electronics manufacturer and assembles devices for many companies, most notably Apple's iPhones.

It operates in more than two dozen countries but the bulk of its operations is based in China - a dependence it is looking to reduce, with media reports of major investments in India.

"From the perspective of India's potential market size and



Foxconn chairman Young Liu

if we can fully implement our plans there, I think several billion dollars in investment is only a be-

ginning," Foxconn chairman Young Liu said when asked during an earnings call if the firm planned to invest \$2bn in India.

Foxconn in May announced the purchase of a huge tract of land on the outskirts of Indian tech hub Bengaluru for \$37mn.

It currently operates about nine production campuses and has more than 30 factories in India, with "turnover of business size of roughly \$10bn annually", according to Liu.

The company is planning to expand its India operations to "critical components" for consumer electronics and electric vehicles to boost its competitiveness, he said, without giving more details.

"Shipping (for critical compo-

nents) will probably have to wait till next year but this year, relevant constructions have started," Liu said, adding the operations will take place in three states in India.

Last month, Foxconn withdrew from a \$19.4bn deal with India's Vedanta to make semiconductors in Gujarat state - dealing a blow to New Delhi's plan to boost self-reliance in the tech supply chain.

Foxconn posted a one percent drop in second quarter net profits on Monday, while revenues fell 14% on-year to \$1.3tn Taiwan dollars (\$40.8bn) - an indication of a worsening market for global electronics during an economic downturn.

AFP

Ukraine claims gains along front lines

The gains came as Russia claimed its forces had progressed in the eastern Kharkiv region

Kyiv, Ukraine - The Ukrainian military on Monday said it had pushed Russian forces out of pockets of territory along front lines in the east and south of the country, building on a gruelling counter-offensive launched two months ago.

The gains - announced by Ukraine's deputy defence minister - came as Russia claimed its forces had progressed in the eastern Kharkiv region, undermining Kyiv's highly anticipated campaign.

Ukraine kicked off its counter-offensive against Russian forces in June after building up assault battalions and stockpiling Western-donated weapons.

But Kyiv has acknowledged that movement against heavily fortified Russian positions has been slow and said it had gained only a clutch of land around the war-battered city of Bakhmut last week.

"In the Bakhmut sector, three square kilometres (1.2 square miles) were liberated last week," Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malyar told state television, adding that Ukrainian



Employees look at the rescuers spraying water on the burnt out structure of a supermarket destroyed as a result of night strike in Odesa on Monday (AFP)

forces had clawed back 40sqkm there since June.

She explained that Ukrainian forces had been diverted from offensive operations around the town - captured by Russian forces in May - citing building Russian pressure in the Kharkiv region.

"It was important for the enemy to divert our forces in other directions, so we could not concentrate our forces for the offensive in the Bakhmut sector," Malyar said.

Crossing the Dnipro

Ukrainian forces have also been pressing against deeply entrenched Russian forces in the

south of the country, in two regions the Kremlin said it had annexed last year.

Malyar said Kyiv's army had made gains in two villages on the southern front but also confirmed Ukrainian troops had conducted 'certain tasks' on the left bank of the Dnipro river in the Kherson region.

The river was rendered the de facto front line between Ukrainian and Russian forces in the region after Kyiv recaptured the territory's main city, also called Kherson, in November.

Ukraine has urged its Western allies to ramp up arms deliveries, including long-range missiles and F-16 fighter jets to

speed up its offensive.

That was the message Kyiv mayor Vitaliy Klitschko said he took to his meeting with Germany's Finance Minister Christian Lindner, who arrived in Kyiv on Monday.

"I emphasised that Ukraine is in dire need of the necessary armaments. These are air defence systems and long-range weapons," Klitschko wrote on social media.

Ukraine's claims of advances in the east came after its air force said it downed several waves of Russian missiles and drones targeting Odesa, the latest in a string of attacks in the southern region on the Black Sea coast.

'Endangering' Black Sea shipping

Air defence forces repelled all the attacks but falling debris damaged a student dormitory and a supermarket in Odesa's city centre, wounding three workers, the army said. "The blast wave damaged windows and balconies in several buildings and damaged cars parked nearby," it said, adding that firefighters were battling two blazes.

Images shared by the army showed firefighters trying to extinguish flames engulfing a multi-storey supermarket, with a large plume of smoke rising into the air. Russia and Ukraine have stepped up attacks in the Black

Sea since Moscow exited a deal last month that had granted Kyiv's grain exports safe passage during the conflict.

Since withdrawing from the agreement, Moscow has pounded ports in the Odesa region that were key for Ukrainian grain exports under the deal.

The overnight missile and drone attacks come a day after Moscow said warning shots

The blast wave damaged windows and balconies in several buildings and damaged cars parked nearby

UKRAINE ARMY

were fired from a Russian warship at a cargo vessel heading towards Izmail, a city on the Danube river in Odesa.

The Russian ship spotted the Sukru Okan cargo vessel sailing under the flag of Palau and fired the shots after its captain did not respond to demands to stop.

After inspection, the cargo ship was allowed to continue its journey.

"These actions exemplified Russia's deliberate policy of endangering the freedom of navigation and safety of commercial shipping in the Black Sea," Ukraine's foreign ministry said on Monday.

AFP

King Charles III to visit France in September

Paris, France - King Charles III will travel to France for a state visit in September, a French newspaper has reported, six months after a scheduled trip was cancelled because of violent protests.

The planned journey, intended to highlight warming Franco-British relations, had been postponed in March at the last minute as angry mass protests against pension reform shook France. At the weekend the regional daily *Sud-Ouest* said that the state visit would now take place in September, and that the monarch and Queen Consort Camilla would visit Paris and Bordeaux in the southwest as originally planned.

The approximate dates are September 20 to 22, the paper said, adding that King Charles's security detail had come to Bordeaux in July to prepare the visit.

Sud-Ouest note that late September is already a very busy time for France because of a scheduled visit by Pope Francis and the Rugby World Cup being hosted by France.

It said there was a chance Prince William could accompany his father and take the opportunity to watch the Wales rugby match against Fiji in Bordeaux.

President Emmanuel Macron's office, contacted by AFP, declined to comment on the report.

AFP

Niger generals vow to prosecute ousted president for 'high treason'

Niamey, Niger - Niger's military regime vowed late on Sunday to prosecute ousted president Mohamed Bazoum for 'high treason' and slammed West African leaders for imposing sanctions on the country.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed sanctions on Niger in response to the coup and has not ruled out using force against the army officers who toppled the democratically elected Bazoum on July 26.

The West African bloc has approved the deployment of a 'standby force to restore constitutional order' in Niger as soon as possible but remains committed to finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Niger's military leaders said they would prosecute Bazoum 'for high treason and undermining the internal and external security of Niger', according to a statement read out by Colonel-Major Amadou Abdramane on national television.

Bazoum, 63, and his family have been held at the president's official Niamey residence since the coup, with international concern mounting over his conditions in detention.

A member of his entourage said he saw his doctor on Saturday. "After this visit, the doctor raised no problems regarding the state of health of the deposed president and members of his family," the military said.

They also said sanctions imposed on Niger had made it difficult for people to access medicines, food and electricity, and were 'illegal, inhumane and humiliating'.

'Open to diplomacy'

The comments came just hours



Amadou Abdramane (AFP)

Mohamed Bazoum, 63, and his family have been held at the president's official Niamey residence since the coup

after religious mediators met with coup leader General Abdourahmane Tiani, who indicated his regime was open to a diplomatic breakthrough.

Tiani 'said their doors were open to explore diplomacy and peace in resolving the matter', said Sheikh Bala Lau, a day after his Nigerian Muslim delegation held talks in the capital Niamey.

Tiani 'claimed the coup was well intended' and that the plotters 'struck to stave off an imminent threat that would have affected' Nigeria as well as Niger, according to Lau's statement.

But Tiani said it was 'painful' that ECOWAS had issued an ultimatum to restore Bazoum without hearing 'their side of the matter', the statement added.

The Muslim leaders visited Niamey with the blessing of Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, who is also head of ECOWAS.

AFP

At least 25 missing after Myanmar mine landslide

Yangon, Myanmar - At least 25 people are missing after a landslide at an unregulated jade mine in a remote region of Myanmar, rescue workers said on Monday.

The incident on Sunday outside northern Kachin's Hpakant township - near where hundreds of miners were entombed in a landslide in 2020 - comes days after much of the country was swamped by torrential rain and floods. The highly lucrative jade mining industry is mostly unregulated, with migrant workers enduring dangerous conditions and frequently deadly accidents.

"About 25 people went

missing. We haven't got a detailed list as it's difficult to get here," one rescue worker, who did not want to be named, told AFP from the scene.

He described how a massive pile of earth about 150-180 metres (500-600 feet) high left behind by mining excavations was loosened by the intense rains and collapsed.

Search and rescue missions were continuing, he said, but some workers had already returned to the scene in the hope of finding jade. "We haven't found any dead bodies yet." Another rescue worker said that attempts to recover people were ongoing.

AFP

TWO-RRIFIC BIRTHDAY!



Le le, the first giant panda born in Singapore, checks food received on the day of its 2nd birthday inside the River Wonders' giant panda forest exhibit in Singapore on Monday (AFP)

'No more water': Iraq drought claims lakeside resort

Habbaniyah, Iraq - Iraqi merchant Mohamed has never seen such a grim tourist season: years of drought have shrunk the majestic Lake Habbaniyah, keeping away the holidaymakers who once flocked there during summer.

"The last two years, there was some activity, but now there's no more water," said 35-year-old Mohamed, asking to be identified by his first name only.

He laid out inflatable water floats, nets and shirts in front of his lakeside shop, but expected few if any customers.

"This year, it's dry, dry!" Mohamed told AFP, his shirt soaked in sweat in the inhospitable heat of nearly 50 degrees Celsius (120 Fahrenheit).

Shorelines at Habbaniyah, about 70km (45 miles) west of the capital Baghdad, have receded by several dozen metres after four consecutive years of drought ravaged parts of the country.

The United Nations ranks



A dilapidated boat is grounded on a dried-up strip of the Habbaniyah lake affected by severe drought in Iraq's Anbar province, on August 11. Water levels at Habbaniyah have receded by several dozen metres (AFP)

water-stressed Iraq as one of five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change.

When full, as it last was in 2020, the lake can hold up to 3.3bn cubic metres (117tn cubic feet) of water, said Jamal Odeh Samir, director of water resources in Anbar province, where Habbaniyah is located.

But now 'the lake contains no

more than 500mn cubic metres of water", he told AFP.

Shops like Mohamed's and holiday homes by the lake now sit empty in the height of summer. On the beach, stray dogs wander between unused umbrellas. To get to the water, visitors must walk through foul-smelling mud that was once submerged under the lake sur-

face.

'Stagnant water'

The resort was created around the artificial lake in 1979, becoming a popular destination for tourists from across the Middle East in the following years.

Declining rainfall over the past four years and rising temperatures have hit Habbaniyah - alongside much of the rest of the

country - hard. Baghdad blames upstream dam construction by Turkey on a staggering low water level in the Euphrates river, which feeds the lake and also runs through Syria.

"The strategic water reserves in Iraq are at their lowest point" in nearly a century, Khaled Shamal, spokesman for the water resources ministry, has warned.

Last week during a visit to Baghdad, United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk warned that 'rising temperatures plus the drought, and the fact that the loss of diversity is a reality, is a wake-up call for Iraq and for the world'. Sada'a Saleh Mohamed, a local official overseeing finances at the Habbaniyah resort, said 'the lake has receded' and tourism has become 'really very weak'.

"The lake has become a pond of stagnant water, unsuitable for consumption or for swimming," he said.

AFP

Kim for drastic boost in missile production

The North Korean leader visited factories producing tactical missiles and armoured combat vehicles

Seoul, South Korea - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for a 'drastic boost' in missile production during visits to key weapons factories, state media said on Monday, as South Korea and the United States prepared for joint drills next week.

The tour of the plants from Friday to Saturday came after Kim called for stepping up war preparations at a key military meeting last week.

Kim's two-day inspections included visits to factories producing tactical missiles, large-calibre control multiple rocket launcher shells, as well as armoured combat vehicles, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

During the tactical missile factory visit, Kim 'expressed satisfaction' as the plant had 'perfected the scientific and



This undated photo released from KCNA on Monday shows North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un inspecting an important munitions factory at an undisclosed location in North Korea (AFP)

technological issues arising in production' and pushed ahead with the modernisation of the weapons.

'He set forth an important goal to drastically boost the existing missile production capacity' and underlined the factory's

shells' and personally drove an armoured combat vehicle, according to the report.

Photos carried by the official *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper showed a beaming Kim seated in the driver's seat of a 'newly-

Kim stressed the need to ensure boost in the production of shells and drove an armoured combat vehicle

developed utility combat armoured vehicle' as he took it out for a test drive surrounded by three officials.

Kim also inspected a factory producing transporter erector launchers - vehicles for transporting and launching tactical missiles - and stressed the importance of developing and producing the mobile platforms.

The North Korean army should have an 'overwhelming military force' and be 'fully prepared for coping with any war at any moment' against the enemy, Kim said, adding they must 'surely annihilate them if they launch an attack', KCNA reported.

The inspections come as South Korea and the United States prepare for the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS) exercise set to take place from August 21 to 31.

North Korea views such exercises as rehearsals for an invasion and has repeatedly warned

it would take 'overwhelming' action in response.

Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff on Monday described the upcoming joint drills as 'a tough and realistic exercise to strengthen the combined defence posture and alliance response capabilities'.

Leaders from South Korea, the United States, and Japan are also set to hold a trilateral summit in Washington on Friday, as they seek to bolster security cooperation in response to North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats.

Last week, Kim presided over a meeting with key military officials, calling for stepping up war preparations 'in an offensive way' including boosting weapons production and conducting more drills.

AFP

Far-right Milei comes out ahead in Argentina presidential primary

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Argentines will choose between far-right lawmaker Javier Milei, centre-right coalition candidate Patricia Bullrich and Economy Minister Sergio Massa in this year's presidential vote, according to results from Sunday's primary election.

In a format that is unique in the region, Argentines voted on Sunday for their favourite among 22 potential presidential candidates, with anti-establishment Milei taking the top spot at more than 30 per cent, with 93 per cent of votes counted.

Bullrich, 67, had about 28 per cent of the vote and 51-year-old lawyer and government minister Massa was coming in third with about 27 per cent.

Deeply unpopular President Alberto Fernandez is not seeking reelection in October as year-on-year inflation runs at 115 per cent,



Javier Milei celebrates the results of the primary elections with his sister Karina Milei at Milei's headquarters in Buenos Aires on Sunday (AFP)

poverty has soared, and the value of the peso has plummeted.

The government, battling dwindling foreign reserves, has imposed strict currency controls and slapped businesses with higher import taxes to shore up dollars.

Dissatisfaction with the current center-left government - now represented by Massa and his Union por la Patria - as well as Bullrich's right-wing opposition coalition Juntos por el Cambio (Together for Change), has opened up space for other candidates, including libertarian Milei.

The far-right lawmaker with a

soft spot for former US president Donald Trump and Brazil's ex-leader Jair Bolsonaro went into Sunday's vote as his Libertad Avanza party's only candidate.

"We have managed to build this competitive alternative that will put an end to the parasitic, thieving, useless political caste," Milei told supporters on Sunday evening.

Among other things, Milei has said that he wants to abolish the Central Bank, ban abortion, liberalise the sale of arms and open up a market for the sale of human organs.

Sales executive Facundo Cardozo, 27, thinks that his country's situation is so bad that Milei's untraditional take might be the best bet. "You have to break what's assembled to then put the pieces back together and start over," he said after voting.

AFP

Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu to visit Russia, Belarus this week: Ministry

Beijing, China - Chinese Defence Minister Li Shangfu will visit Russia and Belarus this week, his ministry said on Monday, as relations between Beijing and Moscow flourish with high-level visits and phone calls.

Ties have remained warm in recent years, with China refusing to speak out against Russia's widely condemned invasion of neighbouring Ukraine. Li has refused to hold meetings with US counterparts until Washington lifts sanctions on him, imposed for his procurement of Russian military technology.

An aide to Vladimir Putin said last month the Russian president was planning to visit China in October, and in March President Xi Jinping made a state visit to Moscow and declared relations between the

two countries were entering a new era.

China and Russia also held joint naval exercises in July as Li called for closer bilateral co-

Ties have remained warm in recent years, with China refusing to speak out against Russia's invasion of Ukraine

operation between the two navies.

Speaking from Beijing with Nikolai Yevmenov, head of the Russian navy, Li said he hoped both countries could 'strengthen communication at all levels', according to a read-

out from the Chinese defence ministry.

China and Russia are strategic allies, with both sides frequently touting their 'no limits' partnership and economic and military cooperation.

Their ties became even closer after Russia began its military campaign in Ukraine in February last year and the Western economic sanctions that ensued.

"At the invitation of Russian Defence Minister (Sergei) Shoigu and Belarusian Defence Minister (Viktor) Khrenin, from August 14 to 19, State Councillor and Defence Minister Li Shangfu will go to Russia to attend the 11th Moscow Conference on International Security and visit Belarus," a Chinese defence ministry spokesperson said.

AFP

Worry, relief, despair, pride: Afghans on life two years under the Taliban

Kabul, Afghanistan - Two years since the Taliban stormed back to power in Afghanistan after 20 years of war against the United States and its allies, life has changed dramatically for many Afghans, particularly women.

Ahead of the August 15 anniversary of the fall of Kabul, four Afghans - a businesswoman determined to keep her factory open, a farmer relieved by the war's end, a former Taliban fighter proud to serve the new government and a medical student forced to give up her studies - told AFP how the changes have impacted them.



Afghan woman Arezo Osmani, owner of Safe Path Prosperity Social Enterprise inspects a fabric sanitary pad in her tailor workshop in Kabul (AFP)

wake of the Taliban takeover.

But she reopened its doors two months later as it was one of the few remaining places 'where women could work'.

Under the Taliban, women have been pushed out of most NGO and government jobs. Last month, beauty parlours - another key source of income for women breadwinners - were also shut down. "We slowly adjusted to the conditions, and fortunately, as we are a company and work in the health sector, we were able to continue our work, I feel good now," she said.

But a reduction in NGO activity in the country under Taliban authorities has hit her business hard, she said. She still employs



Afghan farmer Rahatullah Azizi prepares fertilizer for cauliflower's field in Tilanchi village of Parwan province (AFP)

Kabul, he can 'move around day and night without worries, thank God'. 'There's been a lot of change' since August 2021. "Before it was war, now it's calm."

As a result of the armed conflict, around 38,000 civilians were killed and over 70,000 wounded between 2009 and 2020 alone, according to an annual report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

However, the father-of-two is still weighed down by worry.

Afghanistan's economy, already battered by decades of war, has been mired in crisis after billions of dollars in international aid were cut following the Taliban government's takeover.

children to university to get the education he never had.

The Taliban fighter, now a policeman

For 23-year-old Lal Muhammad, the return of the Taliban to power has brought more economic stability.

He joined the group four years ago when membership meant being a rebel fighter regularly away from home. Now, he is a police officer in the country's second-largest city, Kandahar, and earning a salary of around 12,000 afghanis (US\$142) per month - 'enough' for his family.

He's happy to have a regular wage, but said he 'didn't dream of having cars or making money'.

"My dream was to study and serve in the Islamic Emirate government. I'll stick with it till the end," said Muhammad, using the Taliban authorities' name for the government. "Thank God they're back." The Taliban movement, birthed in Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, controlled the country from 1996 to 2001.

"We are very happy. We don't have any problems, there is no war and no fighting," he said. "We are serving the Emirate and our people."

The ex-medical student searching for a new future

Hamasah Bawar once envisioned her future in Afghanistan in the medical field. Since the Taliban took over and barred women

from universities, she only sees hope outside the country.

"The closure of universities was devastating, not only for me but all my classmates. We are broken and it's the worst thing we could have imagined happening to us, but it happened," said the 20-year-old resident of Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan.

"If a girl is educated, her whole family will be educated, if a family is educated, the whole society will be educated... If we are not educated a whole generation will be left illiterate," said the young woman, who had won an internship at a clinic quickly closed down under the Taliban government. "Because I want a better future, for my education, I have no other choice but to leave Afghanistan."

Bawar said there was 'a big difference' between the previous US-backed government and that of the Taliban, which has not been recognised by the international community.

"There used to be a lot of freedom, today we can't even go to the Blue Mosque (a famed shrine surrounded by gardens) for enjoyment... Most activities are banned for girls and women now."

Bawar's mother is a teacher at a primary school, the level at which girls' education now stops.

"It's not only what I want, all the girls and women of Afghanistan want their freedom back."

AFP

Little-known senator Kakar sworn in as new Pakistan PM

Islamabad, Pakistan - Little-known senator Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar was sworn in on Monday as Pakistan's caretaker prime minister to see the country through to an election due in months.

Kakar, 52, takes charge of a country that has been wracked by political and economic instability for months, with Imran Khan - Pakistan's most popular politician - in jail and disqualified from elections for five years.

Kakar was sworn in by President Arif Alvi on Pakistan's Independence Day in a ceremony carried live on TV, having resigned from his post as senator on Sunday.

"I Anwaar-ul-Haq, do swear solemnly... that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Pakistan," he said.

Kakar's first task will be to choose a cabinet to run the country as it heads into an election period that could last for months.

Parliament was officially dissolved last week, with elections due within 90 days according to the constitution.

But data from the latest census was finally published earlier this month, and the outgoing government said the election commission needed time to re-draw constituency boundaries.

There has been speculation for months that a vote would be delayed as the establishment struggles to stabilise a country facing overlapping security, economic and political crises.



Pakistan's President Arif Alvi (centre) administers the oath to Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar (left) as caretaker prime minister during an oath-taking ceremony while outgoing prime minister Shehbaz Sharif (seated right) looks on at the President House in Islamabad on Monday (AFP)

Kakar's first task will be to choose a cabinet to run the country as it heads into an election period that could last for months

"I am relinquishing heavy responsibility after 16 months... We came constitutionally and leave as per the direction of the constitution," outgoing premier Shehbaz Sharif said in a farewell address to the nation on Sunday. Pakistan has been in political

turmoil since Khan was dismissed as premier by a no-confidence vote in April 2022, culminating in him being jailed last weekend for three years for graft.

He has been disqualified from standing for office for five years, but is appealing against his sentence and conviction.

Cracked down

Authorities have cracked down hard against Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in recent months, crushing his grassroots power by rounding up thousands of his supporters and officials.

Political analyst Hasan Askari

Rizvi told AFP at the weekend that Kakar 'has a limited political career and not much weight in Pakistani politics'. "This can be an advantage because he has no strong affiliation with the major political parties," he said.

"But the disadvantage is that being a lightweight politician, he may find it difficult to cope with the problems he's going to face without the active support of the military establishment."

Analyst Ayesha Siddiqi noted that Kakar had done courses at the National Defence University - formerly the military's war college - and said he would be close to the establishment.

"It seems that the establish-

ment has struck and they have found somebody who will be watching over their interests rather than that of politicians," she said.

Last month, parliament rushed through legislation that gives the caretaker government more power to negotiate with global bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, another clue it may be around for a while.

Some analysts think the delay could give time for the main coalition partners - the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) - to figure out how to address the challenge of Khan's PTI.

AFP



NDRF personnel search for victims at the site of a landslide after a temple collapsed due to heavy rains in Shimla on Monday (AFP)

At least 49 killed in north India after heavy rains

Dehradun, India - At least 49 people were killed, nine of them in a temple collapse, and dozens more were feared missing after intense rains caused floods and landslides in India, officials said on Monday.

Days of torrential downpours have washed away vehicles, demolished buildings and destroyed bridges in the northern Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Flooding and landslides are common and cause widespread devastation during India's treacherous monsoon season, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

In Himachal Pradesh, 41 people were killed in the past 24 hours, up from an earlier toll of 16, an official toll showed. That included at least nine killed in the collapse of a Hindu temple in the state capital, Shimla. At least 13 others were missing, it said.

"The local administration is diligently working to clear the debris in order to rescue individuals who may still be trapped," chief

minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said in a statement. At least eight others have been killed since Friday in neighbouring Uttarakhand state, officials said.

Images from hard-hit areas in Himachal Pradesh showed bodies being pulled out of thick piles of dark earth that had crushed buildings and smashed roofs.

Thousands of people have been stranded, with key roads, power lines and communication networks disrupted.

Railway lines were seen dangling in midair, with the ground beneath them washed away.

Sukhu, who posted on social media a 'disturbing' video of a raging torrent swamping roads, appealed to residents to stay indoors and avoid going near rivers. Schools in the state had been shut, he said.

The President of India, Droupadi Murmu, said she was 'hurt with the loss of lives in accidents because of heavy rains' and offered her condolences to the families who have suffered in Himachal Pradesh.

AFP

UK PM Rishi Sunak blames 'criminal gangs' for Channel migrant deaths

London, UK - UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak blames the 'criminal gangs' facilitating small boat Channel crossings for the 'horrific' weekend deaths of at least six migrants, his spokesman said on Monday.

Six Afghan men died and dozens more required rescuing after a small vessel bound for the southeast English coast from France sank in the Channel in the early hours of Saturday. "The blame for the tragedy we've seen in the Channel in recent days lies squarely in the hands of criminal gangs who are exploiting people's lives for profit," Sunak's spokesman told reporters.

"This is a horrific tragedy and his thoughts first and foremost are with the families and friends of those who lost their lives," he



Britain's PM Rishi Sunak (AFP)

added.

"It's a stark reminder of how dangerous these crossings are and how vitally important it is to disrupt these criminal gangs, and it is right the government acts urgently and takes all possible steps to close down this route."

Sunak's government has faced strong criticism from migrants' rights groups for its policies towards the small boats, after recently barring arrivals from claiming asylum and pursuing plans to deport them immediately to Rwanda.

Both plans are on-hold pending a court challenge to sending the migrants to east Africa.

They have also been criticised for planning to house up to 500 migrants in a barge off the coast of southwest England, and others at similar sites in future.

The first few dozen migrants were placed on the 'Bibby Stockholm' last week, but in an embarrassing setback had to be removed within days after Legionella bacteria was found in the water on board.

However, Sunak's spokesman insisted the government's policies aimed at deterring small boats was working, pointing to fewer arrivals so far this year compared to at the same stage in 2022. He said a deal struck between Britain and France in March, which sees London send Paris hundreds of millions of euros annually to step up patrols and other deterrent measures, was effective.

"Obviously we think there's more to do on both sides but it's true that since we improved and enhanced our relationship with France we have seen more people who would wish to make those crossings being intercepted and that's a positive step," the spokesman added.

AFP

ON HIGH ALERT



Indian paramilitary troopers patrol along a street in Srinagar on Monday, on the eve of India's Independence Day (AFP)

Hawaii fire death toll nears 100; anger grows against 'inaction'

Kahului, US - The death toll in Hawaii from the deadliest US wildfire in more than a century ticked towards 100 on Sunday, fueling criticism that government inaction contributed to the heavy loss of life. At least 96 people were confirmed to have died as of Sunday night, but officials warned the figure was likely to rise as recovery crews with cadaver dogs work their way through hundreds of homes and burned-out vehicles in Lahaina.

The historic coastal town on the island of Maui was almost destroyed by the fast-moving inferno early on Wednesday morning, with survivors saying there had been no warnings.

When asked on Sunday why none of the island's sirens had been activated, Hawaii Senator Mazie Hirono said she would



Volunteers prepare free meals to donate to West Maui families affected by wildfires, at the University of Hawaii Maui College in Kahului, central Maui, Hawaii on Sunday (AFP)

wait for the results of an investigation announced by the state's attorney general.

"I'm not going to make any excuses for this tragedy," Hirono, a Democrat, told CNN's 'State of

the Union'. "We are really focused, as far as I'm concerned, on the need for rescue, and, sadly, the location of more bodies."

More than 2,200 buildings were damaged or destroyed as

the fire tore through Lahaina, according to official estimates, wreaking US\$5.5bn in damage and leaving thousands homeless.

"The remains we're finding are from a fire that melted

metal," said Maui Police Chief John Pelletier. "When we pick up the remains... they fall apart."

That was making identification difficult, he added, appealing for those with missing relatives to give DNA samples that might speed up the process.

Pelletier said cadaver dogs still had a vast area to search in the hunt for what could still be hundreds of people who are unaccounted for.

"We're going as fast as we can. But just so you know, three per cent - that's what's been searched with the dogs," he said.

Questions over alert system

The wildfire is the deadliest in the United States since 1918, when 453 people died in Minnesota and Wisconsin, according to

nonprofit research group the National Fire Protection Association.

We are really focused, as far as I'm concerned, on the need for rescue, and, sadly, the location of more bodies

MAZIE HIRONO

tion. The death toll surpassed 2018's Camp Fire in California, which virtually wiped the small town of Paradise off the map and killed 86 people.

Questions are being asked about how prepared authorities

were for the catastrophe, despite the islands' exposure to natural hazards such as tsunamis, earthquakes and violent storms.

In its emergency management plan last year, the State of Hawaii described the risk wildfires posed to people as being 'low'.

Yet the layers of warning that are intended to buffer a citizenry if disaster strikes appear not to have operated.

Maui suffered numerous power outages during the crisis, preventing many residents from receiving emergency alerts on their cell phones. No emergency sirens sounded and many Lahaina residents spoke of learning about the blaze from neighbours running down the street or seeing it for themselves.

AFP

Spain ‘determined than ever’

Veteran forward Hermoso reveals Spain’s ‘goosebumps’ on eve of historic first World Cup semi-final

Auckland, New Zealand - Spain’s first Women’s World Cup semi-final in their history on Tuesday is reward for years of sacrifice, veteran forward Jennifer Hermoso says, admitting to “goosebumps” at the thought of reaching the final.

Opponents Sweden are regulars at this stage of the World Cup - without ever going on to lift the trophy - but for Spain they are into uncharted waters.

“If you don’t feel any nerves before a game like this then something is not right,” the 33-year-old Hermoso said on the eve of the semi-final in Auckland.

“It gives you goosebumps thinking about how close we are to the final, but first of all we have the game tomorrow and Spain will come out more determined than ever.”

Hermoso, who plays her club football in Mexico, has been representing her country for more than a decade and won her 100th cap earlier in the tournament.

“Tomorrow’s game is the consequence of millions of training



Spain players celebrate their quarterfinal victory against the Netherlands (AFP)

sessions, of so many moments we have been through, of spending time far from our families and loved ones, of so much sacrifice,” she said.

“We have worked so hard to get here and I just want to enjoy it. I want the whole team to enjoy it and for the whole of Spain to be

behind us.”

Spain and Sweden drew 1-1 in a friendly last October, just after 15 Spanish players told their federation they no longer wished to be considered for selection in protest at coach Jorge Vilda.

Vilda survived the rebellion and brought three of the rebels

with him to the World Cup.

“We have a (federation) president who reacted bravely, who backed me and my staff,” he said on Monday.

“Now there is unity in the squad, everyone is getting on, they are ambitious and trying to enjoy every day.”

One of the players who returned to the squad is midfielder Aitana Bonmati and she has been one of the standouts at the tournament.

Sweden coach Peter Gerhardsson believes it would be a mistake to focus too closely on trying to stop the Barcelona play-

maker. “The difficulty with Spain is that they have so many skilled players, whereas other teams might have just one or two stars, so that means making sure we mark them is very important,” he said.

Swedes bank on experience Sweden captain Kosovare

Asllani believes her team’s far greater experience of going far at major tournaments will give them the edge at Eden Park.

The Swedes have become regulars in the latter stages at recent competitions, having reached the last four at the 2019 World Cup and at last year’s European Championship.

They also made the final at the Tokyo Olympics before losing to Canada.

“We have the benefit of experience,” Asllani said.

“We have gone far in the last few tournaments but I am particularly pleased with the way we have done it this time.

“We have won our matches in different ways and it shows the strength of this team.”

Sweden reached a third semi-final in the last four World Cups by winning all three group games, ousting holders the United States on penalties and then beating Japan 2-1 in the



Kepa Arrizabalaga

Real Madrid sign Chelsea keeper Kepa on loan

Madrid, Spain - Chelsea goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga has joined Real Madrid on a season-long loan to replace the injured Thibaut Courtois, the two clubs announced on Monday.

“Real Madrid and Chelsea FC have agreed on the loan of player Kepa Arrizabalaga until June 30, 2024,” the Spanish club said in a statement.

Belgian star Courtois, 31, will miss most of the season after rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee.

Kepa, 28, had been close to a transfer to Bayern Munich, but will instead return to his native Spain.

AFP

Instant ‘national hero’ Arnold stands in England’s way at World Cup

Sydney, Australia - Mackenzie Arnold wasn’t even Australia’s first-choice goalkeeper until recently, but is now being hailed as a national hero and stands in England’s way in their Women’s World Cup semi-final on Wednesday.

Arnold played a central role in the penalty drama on Saturday which sent co-hosts Australia into the last four of the World Cup for the first time.

She saved three penalty kicks - and missed one of her own - to help propel the Matildas to a thrilling 7-6 shootout win over France in the quarter-finals.

It has been a whirlwind few months for the 29-year-old.

The West Ham United stopper has been part of the Matildas set-up for more than a decade but she was third choice for much of the time, spending the 2015 and 2019 World Cups on the bench.

It is only this year that Arnold finally became coach Tony Gustavsson’s first-choice between the posts.

The past few months have been significant in another way



Australia goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold celebrates with a teammate after their quarterfinal win against France in Brisbane on Saturday (AFP)

for Arnold off the pitch.

In April she posted a video on Instagram of herself collecting some hearing aids.

“Those closest to me know how long I’ve avoided this day, but here’s a little glimpse of a life-changing day for me,” she wrote.

Arnold does not wear hearing aids during games because she would be “fiddling with them too much” and has said that not wearing them “is still quite normal for me, doesn’t affect me too much”. But she told Optus Sport ahead of the World Cup: “It’s still

a whole different world when I put my hearing aids in.

“It’s like, ‘What have I been missing out on for 25 years?’”

Cortnee Vine held her nerve to score the winning penalty in front of 50,000 in Brisbane on Saturday and set up a date with European champions England in Sydney. But it was Arnold who scooped the player of the match award and shared the headlines with Vine in Australia, where the team’s exploits are now daily front- and back-page news.

National broadcaster ABC called Arnold “a cult hero” and The Sydney Morning Herald said she was “a national hero”.

Reflecting her sudden rise to national acclaim, the newspaper ran a story headlined, “Who is Mackenzie Arnold? Meet the goalkeeper with nerves of steel who sent the Matildas to the semi-finals.”

The Australian players sang Arnold’s name in the dressing room afterwards and vice-skipper Steph Catley said: “She’s incredible. She did something so special tonight.”

AFP



Barcelona’s Robert Lewandowski (L) battles with Getafe’s Gaston Alvarez (AFP)

Getafe frustrate Barca as both sides see red in goalless draw

Getafe, Spain - Spanish champions Barcelona began their La Liga title defence with a frustrating 0-0 draw at Getafe on Sunday, with both sides reduced to 10 men in a bad-tempered clash.

Barca winger Raphinha was sent off for an elbow in the first half and Getafe’s Jaime Mata was dismissed early in the second for two yellow cards.

Xavi Hernandez earned a red card himself for touchline complaints as his Barcelona side battled to find a late winner but, like last season, they started their domestic campaign with a goalless draw.

The coach handed debuts to summer signings Ilkay Gundogan and Oriol Romeu as Barcelona began their campaign with one of the most uncomfortable away trips of the season. The Catalans had failed to score in their three previous visits to the Coliseum Alfonso Perez and Getafe got into Barcelona’s faces from the start.

Xavi complained about the length of the grass at Getafe last season, saying it ruined

the spectacle of the match, and this time it was repeated fouls which disrupted the champions’ rhythm.

“It’s normal that people don’t want to watch football, this has barely been a game,” Xavi told reporters.

“A point for us is not sufficient but this was a very difficult game for us to play.”

Damian Suarez winded former Manchester City midfielder Gundogan with a barge in the chest, among other challenges which crossed the line between fair and foul.

Raphinha was targeted on multiple occasions too and eventually he snapped, flinging an elbow into Gaston Alvarez’s head, earning a red card.

The Brazilian had been Barcelona’s brightest player, drawing two saves from Getafe goalkeeper David Soria, but left his team in the lurch.

After Ousmane Dembele’s departure this week to Paris Saint-Germain, the onus was on Raphinha to step up and show his quality on the right flank after a mixed first season.

AFP

Ben Yedder leads Monaco as Strasbourg win on Vieira bow

Paris, France - Monaco captain Wissam Ben Yedder scored twice in a 4-2 win at Clermont on Sunday after he was charged with rape this week, while Strasbourg made a winning start to life under Patrick Vieira by beating Lyon.

France international Ben Yedder on Friday was charged with rape, attempted rape and sexual assault over an alleged incident that happened on the Cote d’Azur in July.



Monaco’s Wissam Ben Yedder celebrates after scoring against Clermont on Sunday

He has been placed under judicial supervision and had to pay bail of 900,000 euros (\$987,000). But the 33-year-old forward started his team’s opening game of the season, striking in both halves as Monaco made a winning start under new Austrian coach Adi Hutter.

“I congratulate him (Ben Yedder), he had a very good reaction,” said Hutter.

“I have purely a sporting relationship with him, from coach to

player. We only speak about the pitch and my job is to put the best players out there and he’s among them.”

Mateusz Wieteska put Clermont ahead before Vanderson equalised, with Ben Yedder firing in a rebound off the post to give Monaco the lead shortly before half-time.

Muhammed Cham brought Clermont level at 2-2 but Ben Yedder netted again with 20 minutes to play.

DRAWING CONCLUSION

Liverpool stalemate shows need for Caicedo, Spurs held by Brentford

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea and Liverpool had to settle for a 1-1 draw to start their Premier League season on Sunday as Tottenham also drew 2-2 at Brentford as they began life without Harry Kane.

After a week of battling to land the signing of Brighton midfielder Moises Caicedo for a Premier League record transfer fee, both Chelsea and Liverpool's need for the Ecuadorian was exposed in an explosive encounter.

Liverpool's bright start was rewarded when Luis Diaz prodded home the opening goal, but debutant Axel Disasi earned Chelsea boss Mauricio Pochettino a point on his first game in charge.

"This result makes us believe, that is why I am positive," said Pochettino.

"That is the beginning, it is the minimum standard and from that we need to go."

The American executives of both clubs were in attendance at Stamford Bridge ahead of an intense few days of negotiations after Liverpool had a £110 million offer accepted for Caicedo, only for the player to remain keen on a move to Chelsea instead.

After his defensive midfield options were gutted by the departures of Jordan Henderson and Fabinho to Saudi Arabia, Jurgen Klopp named an offensive

front six with new signings Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai alongside Cody Gakpo in midfield.

Liverpool settled the better and Mohamed Salah was inches away from opening the scoring when he rattled the crossbar on 12 minutes.

Salah was involved when the Reds did take the lead six minutes later with a brilliant cross that Diaz prodded home at the back post.

The Egyptian's record of scoring on the opening weekend every year of his Liverpool career came to an end, but only due to a VAR review that ruled out a slick finish that would have made it 2-0. However, the momentum of the game swung after Disasi



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (C) provides the assist for Luis Diaz to score against Chelsea in their Premier League match in London on Sunday (AFP)

After a week of battling to land Brighton midfielder Moises Caicedo for a Premier League record transfer fee, both Chelsea and Liverpool's need for the Ecuadorian was exposed in an explosive encounter

bundled home Chelsea's equaliser.

"We opened up the door for Chelsea," said Klopp. "It gave the game a different direction so we were not in control of the game."

Seconds later Ben Chilwell

thought he had turned the game on its head, only for VAR to this time ride to Liverpool's rescue for offside.

Chances continued to come and go at both ends, but a seventh consecutive clash between

the sides ended in a draw.

Life after Harry Kane

Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou said his side had shown there is life after Kane despite failing to get the Australian's reign off to a winning start.

Spurs settled the better de-

spite a disruptive weekend dominated by the club's record goalscorer departing for Bayern Munich on Saturday.

Cristian Romero headed Spurs ahead on 11 minutes from James Maddison's wicked delivery.

Brentford were also without their talismanic number nine as

Ivan Toney began an eight-month ban for breaking betting on football rules.

Bryan Mbeumo took over penalty duties in his absence to slot home the equaliser after a VAR review spotted a trip by Son Heung-min on Mathias Jensen inside the box.

Moments later Yoane

Wissa's shot deflected in off Spurs new boy Micky van de Ven.

Emerson Royal was the unlikely scorer of Tottenham's equaliser four minutes into 10 added at the end of the first half when he blasted home a loose ball from outside the box.

AFP



Jannik Sinner of Italy celebrates with the trophy

Sinner storms past De Minaur for first Masters title

Toronto, Canada - Jannik Sinner came up third time lucky in a Masters 1000 final on Sunday as he won the Toronto title 6-4, 6-1 over Alex de Minaur.

The seventh seed became only the second Italian to lift a trophy in the elite series, following Fabio Fognini, champion at Monte Carlo four years ago.

Sinner lost a pair of Masters finals in Miami in 2021 and last April but could not contain his enthusiasm after storming past his Australian opponent in 90 minutes.

The player who turns 22 on Wednesday improved to 12-0 versus Australians dating to the 2021 US Open.

"I'm getting used to the difficult situations," the winner said. "Twice in the first set I was up a break up and he broke back.

"But I stayed calm mentally, I was prepared for a long battle.

"I'm happy with how I reacted. In the second set I played better and tried to be more aggressive."

Pochettino pleased with new-look Chelsea on 'unbelievable' Premier League return

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino said he was disappointed just to take a point from his opening match in charge after his side came from behind to draw 1-1 with Liverpool on Sunday.

The visitors settled into the new season quicker at Stamford Bridge and could have been out of sight inside the first 30 minutes.

Mohamed Salah hit the crossbar before teeing up Luis Diaz to open the scoring. Salah then saw a second goal ruled out after a VAR review for offside.

But the momentum swung back Chelsea's way after debutant Axel Disasi equalised eight minutes before half-time.

VAR intervened once more to deny the Blues a second when Ben Chilwell scored and the home side wasted a series of chances to secure three points after the break.

Pochettino took over a side that had finished 12th last season - Chelsea's lowest finishing position since 1994.

And the Argentine believes they will only improve as the season goes on.



Chelsea coach Mauricio Pochettino (R) and his Liverpool counterpart Jurgen Klopp during the match

"Fantastic way to start the season, unbelievable game," said Pochettino, who previously managed Southampton and Tottenham in the Premier League.

"Overall I think we deserve a little bit more. We feel pleased and at the same time disappointed.

"That is only the beginning and I am so pleased with the performance of the players."

Chelsea and Liverpool have

spent recent days battling for the signing of Brighton midfielder Moises Caicedo for a Premier League record fee.

Liverpool had a £110 million (\$140 million) offer for the Ecuadorian accepted by the Seagulls, but the player appears to be holding out for Chelsea and Brighton to agree a fee.

"If we want to be a contender we need to improve in all areas,"

added Pochettino.

"It's time to work all together, once the transfer window closes, to find the best dynamic. This result makes us believe, that is why I am positive."

Liverpool are in even more desperate need of midfield reinforcements after losing captain Jordan Henderson and Fabinho to the wave of players heading to the Saudi Pro League.



Moises Caicedo

Chelsea agree British record £115 mn fee for Caicedo: reports

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea have agreed a British record transfer fee of £115 million (\$146 million, 133 million euros) for Brighton and Hove Albion midfielder Moises Caicedo, according to media reports on Monday.

The 21-year-old Ecuador international had also been a target for Premier League rivals Liverpool, who on Friday agreed a reported record £110 million fee with Brighton.

But it became clear over the weekend that Caicedo preferred a move to Chelsea

and will join the west London club on an eight-year contract, according to the reports.

Chelsea, who drew 1-1 with Liverpool in their Premier League opener on Sunday, hope Caicedo will be available for next weekend's trip to West Ham United.

He could line up in Mauricio Pochettino's team alongside Enzo Fernandez, who cost what was then a British record £107 million.

Caicedo was left out of Brighton's squad for their season-opening 4-1 win at home.

Pegula overpowers Samsonova to clinch Montreal Open crown

Montreal, Canada - Jessica Pegula overpowered a weary Liudmila Samsonova to clinch the second WTA 1000 title of her career on Sunday with a victory in the Montreal Open.

The 29-year-old American world number three dominated her Russian opponent from start to finish to claim a whirlwind 6-1, 6-0 triumph in just 49 minutes.

Fifteenth-seed Samsonova had battled through to the final after winning a gruelling three-

set semi-final earlier Sunday against third seed Elena Rybakina in a match held over from Saturday due to torrential rain.

But the challenge of winning twice in one day ultimately proved too much for Samsonova, a rampant Pegula determined to claim her second elite WTA title after victory in Guadalajara last year.

"I know obviously physically she wasn't feeling her best, but at the same time I played a really



Jessica Pegula of the United States celebrates with the trophy

clean match," Pegula said after her win.

"I don't think I made any unforced errors or anything. I played kind of a perfect match."

Pegula admitted, however, that she would have preferred to have faced a properly rested Samsonova.

"It's not ideal... it sucks when you feel like you're not on a really fair playing ground, especially someone like her who is such a great player," Pegula said.

Samsonova, meanwhile, said the schedule had taken its toll, with little time to rest and recuperate between the semi-final and the final.

Samsonova moved up six places to a career-best 12th ranking in the latest WTA rankings released on Monday after her run to the final of the Montreal Open.

Pegula, 29, remains third behind Poland's Iga Swiatek and Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus.



Cameron Smith celebrates with the trophy (AFP)

Australia's Smith captures LIV Golf Bedminster crown

Bedminster, United States - Australia's Cameron Smith, last year's British Open champion, fired a three-under-par 68 on Sunday for a blowout victory at the LIV Golf League event at Trump National Bedminster.

The 29-year-old from Brisbane finished 54 holes at the New Jersey layout on 12-under 201 with India's Anirban Lahiri a distant second, seven strokes adrift.

"That was a good day," Smith said. "I'm looking forward to a couple weeks with the clubs down."

Smith moved atop LIV's season points list with the victory.

"That was the goal since the start of the year, to at least be up there with a shot at it with one tournament to go. Ticking the box in that department this week."

Smith, a six-time winner on the US PGA Tour before jumping last year to the Saudi-backed upstart series, captured his third career LIV Golf title, having taken last year's Chicago trophy and

last month's London crown.

There was little suspense after Phil Mickelson's challenge faded early.

Smith began the final round with a four-stroke lead over six-time major winner Mickelson but opened with a bogey.

After Smith and Mickelson made bogeys at the third hole, the Aussie saw his lead trimmed to two when Mickelson birdied the par-3 fourth.

Smith boosted his lead with a birdie at the sixth and Mickelson plunked two in the water at the par-3 seventh on his way to a quintuple-bogey 8 that dropped the 53-year-old US left-hander eight adrift - leaving Smith five ahead of the field with 11 to play. Smith reeled off three birdies in a row starting at the par-5 eighth, stretching his lead to seven strokes, and cruised from there.

Ripper GC, captained by Smith, won the team competition on 20-under, defeating Crushers and Stinger by 11 strokes.

KING SETTLES THE ISSUE

Majestic King leads West Indies to T20 series win over India

Lauderhill, United States - Brandon King's superb unbeaten 85 led West Indies to an eight-wicket win over India on Sunday to secure a 3-2 victory in their T20 series.

Set a target of 166 to win the fifth and deciding contest, in Lauderdale, Florida, West Indies reached their target with two overs to spare with Nicholas Pooran scoring 47 in a partnership of 107 with King.

The win was a morale-booster for West Indies cricket after the one-day team failed, last month, to qualify for the World Cup for the first time in their history.

"Adjectives are inadequate for our feelings. It's a big series. It's a very big series for us to beat India at home with everything going on," said West Indies captain Rovman Powell.

"After we got defeated badly (on Saturday) we sat down and talked. We are not just playing to put smiles on our faces but for the people," he added.

King's highest T20 international score came from 55 balls with six sixes and five fours and he kept his focus despite a delay to the game following a lightning warning.

Shai Hope, who steadied the ship after Pooran was removed by Tilak Varma, with the spinners second ever ball in international cricket, clinched the victory with a straight six off Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Suryakumar Yadav struck 61 as India made 165 for nine while Romario Shepherd took 4-31 in his four overs as West Indies' bowling attack delivered a much better performance than in their emphatic defeat on Saturday which left the five-match series



Brandon King, of West Indies hits a six during the final T20I match against India on Sunday (AFP)

Adjectives are inadequate for our feelings. It's a big series. After we got defeated badly (on Saturday) we sat down and talked. We are not just playing to put smiles on our faces

ROVMAN POWELL

at 2-2. West Indies made two changes with off-spinner Roston Chase and pace bowler Alzarri Joseph coming in for Odean Smith and Obed McCoy and

there was a better balance and performance from that line-up.

Opening pair Jaiswal and Shubman Gill, who put on a match-winning 165 run partner-

ship on Saturday, were both dismissed cheaply by left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein.

Tilak Varma looked dangerous before he went for 27 off 18, caught and bowled by Chase but Yadav's innings kept India's hopes alive.

Medium pacer Shepherd took care of the lower middle order as West Indies were set a target of 166 to win the series.

West Indies had led the series 2-0 before India fought back to set up Sunday's clincher and

captain Hardik Pandya said they had time to get things right before the T20 World Cup next June in the Caribbean and the United States.

"It's a long way. We have the ODI WC coming up and sometimes losing is good. You get to learn a lot," Pandya said. "And special mention for all the boys. They showed great character. Winning and losing is a part of the process and we are going to make sure we learn from that," he said. AFP

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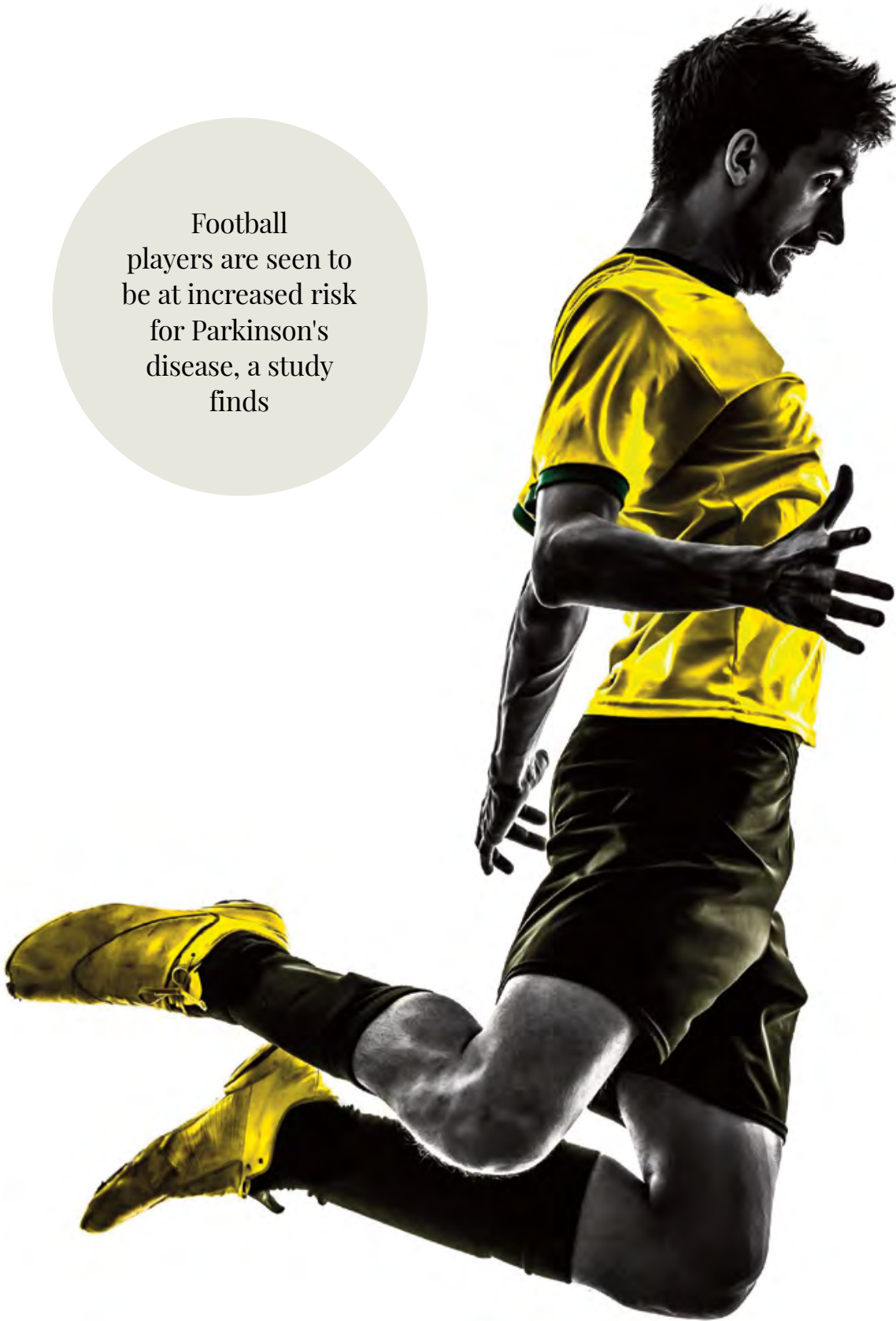
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TACKLE TREMORS

PARKINSONISM

Football players are seen to be at increased risk for Parkinson's disease, a study finds



Identification of risk factors for Parkinson's disease (PD) is essential for early diagnosis. And it can even stem from one's love and passion for playing football. Dating back to the 1920s, Parkinson's disease and parkinsonism - an umbrella term that refers to motor symptoms found in Parkinson's disease and also other conditions - have long been described in boxers. However, repetitive head impacts from tackle football can also have long-term neurological consequences like chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). But research on the association between participation in tackle football and PD is currently limited, a recent article in News Medical said.

In the largest study to describe the association between participation in football and the odds for having a reported diagnosis of PD, researchers from the BU CTE Center used a large online data set of people concerned for having PD and found participants with a history of playing organised tackle football had a 61% increased odds of having a reported parkinsonism or PD diagnosis.

In this study, the researchers evaluated 1,875 sport participants - 729 men who played football, predominantly at the amateur level, and 1,146 men who played non-football sports who served as the control group. Participants were enrolled in Fox Insight, a longitudinal online study of people with and without PD sponsored by The Michael J Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research.

Notably, researchers found a link between playing football and increased odds for having a parkinsonism or PD diagnosis even after accounting for known risk factors for PD.

Additionally, the data revealed that players who had longer careers and played at higher levels of competition experienced increased odds for having a reported diagnosis of

parkinsonism or PD.

Football players who played at the college or professional level were at 2.93 increased odds for having a PD diagnosis compared with those who just played at the youth or high school level. Age of first exposure to football was not associated with odds for having a reported parkinsonism or PD diagnosis.

Playing tackle football could be a contributing risk factor to PD, particularly among people already at risk due to other factors (e.g., family history). However, the reasons for this relationship are not clear and we also know that not everyone who plays tackle football will develop later-life neurological conditions, meaning many other risk factors are at play."

The researchers also emphasised that they compared the football players to another group of athletes, a noteworthy strength of the study. Furthermore, most of the participants played tackle football only at the amateur level, which is contrast to most of the research to date that has focused on professional athletes.

"Previous research has focused on the association between American football and risk for CTE. However, similar to what has historically been seen in boxers, American football might also affect risk for other neurodegenerative conditions such as PD," says Hannah Bruce, MSc, first author and research specialist at Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine.

The researchers acknowledge several limitations to their findings and caution that the work is still preliminary. It was a convenience sample of people enriched for having PD who were mostly white, thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings.

Diagnosis of PD was also self-reported by participants through online assessments and objective in-person evaluations were not conducted.

MEDITERRANEAN DIET



NUTRITION & YOU

Mediterranean diet is not a 'diet' as such but a way of life. People living around the Mediterranean region, Italy, Spain, Lebanon, Greece, Egypt, and many other countries have been consuming this diet for centuries. Looking at the health benefits coming from this lifestyle, like lowering cholesterol and reducing risks associated with heart disease, Mediterranean diet became quite popular.

What is a Mediterranean diet?

This diet does not focus primarily on weight-loss but a change in lifestyle, which brings in leaner and healthier weight. The diet is based on traditional cuisines followed by people in the Mediterranean region.

Plant-based foods, like whole grains, vegetables, beans, fruits, nuts, seeds, herbs and spices, are the foundation of this diet. Olive oil is the main source of added fat while seafood, dairy, and poultry are included in moderation. Red meat and sweets are eaten only occasionally.

In the Mediterranean way, meals are more plant-based and although there is no one diet that is followed, there is a common theme. The traditional diet includes fewer meats, less

carbs, more of monounsaturated or healthy fats - olive oil - along with loads of fresh veggies, fruits, legumes, nuts, and seeds, contributing to lean proteins and healthy carbs.

Seafood further contributes to healthy fats and lean proteins. Most of the foods are prepared simply, with minimal sauces and seasonings and the best part is that fresh fruits and veggies become part of salad or desserts on most of the days. The diet as such does not speak of avoiding any food.

Let's understand the benefits:

Diet is flavourful and well-balanced. The diet does not exclude any food group. It includes variety, focuses more on nutrient-dense foods, and hence fulfills all the criteria for a healthy, well-balanced diet.

It is heart-friendly. Many studies have indicated a strong link between Mediterranean diet and its impact on better heart health. Continuing with this diet results in attacking directly on the risk factors, like obesity, blood sugar and cholesterol levels. These are the root cause for many non-communicable diseases, like, diabetes.

It supports diabetes management. Owing to the inclusion of healthy carbs, this diet has been shown to not only prevent Type 2 diabetes but also, support in its management.

Good for weight management. By including healthy fats coming from olive oil, nuts, seeds, this diet also makes use of high fibre veggies, fruits, and whole grains. This helps to keep one full and satiated for a longer time. There is no gain in weight, but by following this eating pattern for a long-time, it results in shedding off



Mediterranean diet does not focus primarily on weight-loss but a change in lifestyle, which brings in leaner and healthier weight. The diet is based on traditional cuisines followed by people in the Mediterranean region

unwanted pounds.

Finally, this diet is not only eco-friendly but also contributes to mental well-being.

Risks

This diet when adopted for a specific reason, like better heart health or managing diabetes or maintaining a healthy weight can result in switching over to less meat and less added sugar. This may be difficult for some to cope up with and therefore, long-term adherence may be difficult.

Excess intake of olive oil or nuts to suppress hunger or food cravings can also pose problems. Also, iron and calcium levels intake may fall because of low meat or dairy intake respectively.

This diet does not feel that you are on a diet. The health benefits may not be instant as promised by other diets, but when this diet is used in conjunction with calorie restriction, it will support healthy weight-loss.

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

YANG SHENG

Art of Chinese self-healing

Yang Sheng has been around for 2,500 years, but just as yoga has been gaining momentum globally over the past few decades, the potency of this Eastern wisdom has begun gaining popularity of late.

The direct translation of Yang Sheng is 'nourish life' and it is all about consciously nurturing our wellbeing on a day-to-day basis, rather than waiting till we get ill to prioritise our health. As an ancient Chinese proverb explains so perfectly - Waiting to treat illnesses after they manifest is like waiting to dig a well after one is thirsty. In the West, it is simply referred to a 'preventive medicine'.

In her book *Yang Sheng: The Art of Chinese Self-Healing*, practitioner of Chinese medicine Katie Brindle describes Yang Sheng as 'proactive health maintenance'. She writes, "Regular Yang Sheng will do for your wellbeing what tooth brushing does for your mouth. You wouldn't dream of not brushing your teeth each day - and once you see and feel the benefits of Yang Sheng, you will want to continue doing it every day, too. It is daily maintenance for your body, mind and spirit."

Living by Yang Sheng principles is said to improve the way you feel in many ways, from better quality of sleep and digestion to increased energy levels, enhanced mood and better skin health. One of the many reasons it is so fantastic is that, being a self-healing system, you can achieve all this by doing the treatments yourself, mostly for free.

Equally as appealing is that one of Chinese medicine's fundamental tenets is balance - meaning that there are no strict regimes, punishing workouts or joyless eliminations of your favourite

foods. It is about making a habit of simple techniques that do you good - such as eating mindfully, breathing practices, tapping, shaking, gentle exercise such as Qigong, great sleep hygiene, sex, dance, music, being in nature and cultivation of spirit.

The philosophy is that disease starts with a disruption of qi (energy) flow. Many of the practices are about achieving harmony and balance by getting qi flowing healthily around the body and to all the organs. Let's explore some of the fundamentals:

BREATH

In Chinese wisdom, breathing is thought of as the most powerful and immediate self-healing cure we have. The approach is to make breathing deep into the belly the norm, rather than the shallow breaths we find ourselves taking when we are stressed. The idea is to help relax the body and move stagnant qi (energy) around the body.

Yang Sheng breathing techniques have lots of similarities with Yogic-breathing, but some practices are unique, such as The Chinese Smiling Breath which involves sending an inner smile to each of your organs in turn as you exhale - liver, kidneys, lungs, heart and stomach. For each organ you take three rounds of long, slow breaths, imagining it being filled with warmth and happiness.

DIGESTION

Where the Chinese attitude to food differs from the West is that the focus is on digestion and on how you're eating, rather than purely on what you are eating. For thousands of years Chinese practitioners have stressed that gut health is vital for body and mind - something that we in the West are only just catching on to. Science research now proves that a healthy microbiome (the good bacteria that live in the gut) is integral to our overall health, physically and mentally.

In Chinese wisdom stress is seen as bad for digestion, so eating suggestions have one main aim - to give your body the time and space it needs to digest food properly. This includes cultivating gratitude for your food and looking at it carefully before you eat, making sure you are sitting down at a table to enable your body to be in that calm 'rest and digest' mode.

SLEEP

If you visit a Chinese medicine practitioner one of the first things they will ask you about is sleep. If you are struggling to sleep well, the assumption will be that you have a yin/yang imbalance. Yang is the hot energy that keeps you powered up all day, and yin is the cooling, nourishing, restoring energy that takes over at night.

Suggestions to improve your ability

to switch into the yin state that we need for sleep include taking a nap during the day, limiting high-intensity exercise after 6pm, and using calming breathing exercises throughout the day. Other techniques include having a very hot bath, followed by exfoliation and then a cold shower.

EXERCISE

Chinese medicine teaches that exercise doesn't have to be vigorous to be effective. In fact, it suggests you are better off resting or sleeping than doing strenuous exercise when you're already exhausted by other things in your life. Brindle refers to 'the miracle of internal exercise' or meditative movement, like tai chi or qigong, a Chinese method of manipulating energy around the body.

Practices might include shaking, gentle swinging twists at the waist, balancing on your tip toes with your knees bent and arms outstretched in front of you, and steadily walking in a circle, first to the right and then to the left.

EMOTIONS

Until very recently Western medicine treated the mind and body separately. It's only recently that we've started to take a more physical approach to mental health with the rise of Body Psychotherapists and Yoga Therapists who understand that trauma and our emotions are held in the body. Chinese medicine has always rooted our emotional state in the body, linking different emotions to specific organs.

Anger is in the liver, fear in the kidneys, grief in the lungs, joy and anxiety in the heart, and worry in the stomach and spleen.

"Recognising that you are, for example, an anxious person by nature means you've won half the battle," writes Brindle. "You can then focus on supporting your stomach, the organ associated with anxiety."

Fitness enthusiasts worldwide are hearing a lot about Yang Sheng – the art of Chinese self-healing – in 2023. It refers to 'proactive health maintenance'



77th INDEPENDENCE DAY OF INDIA



TUESDAY, AUGUST 15, 2023 | MUSCAT DAILY | 01

AMBASSADOR H E AMIT NARANG'S MESSAGE

India's G-20 Presidency – A moment of national pride and global solidarity

On the joyous occasion of 77th Independence Day of India, I am proud to convey my greetings and best wishes to all Indian nationals in the Sultanate of Oman.

As India marks the culmination of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, commemorating 75 years of independence of our beloved nation, it is fitting that it is leading the global effort towards peace, sustainability, and progress under its Presidency of the G-20. A millennia old civilisation and a proud young nation is today at the global crossroads, helping craft a global consensus on the defining issues of our time.

The vision of India's G20 Presidency of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' exemplifies its ideals of the essential unity of humankind, its age-old testament to the protection and preservation of nature and the innate belief of its people towards global peace and amity.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has noted, 'Housing one-sixth of humanity, and with its immense diversity of languages, religions, customs and beliefs, India is a microcosm of the world'. Today as the G-20 President, India is acting as an 'agent of change' purposefully helping craft consensus to address critical developmental issues such as climate financing, debt vulnerabilities, ensuring progress on sustainable development goals, and evolving a framework for digital public infrastructure.

The agenda of India's Presidency of the G-20 is inclusive, ambitious, action-oriented,



and decisive, and we are determined to make ours a presidency of healing, harmony and hope, fostering with our friends and partners from all over the world, a new paradigm of human-centric globalisation.

Friends, on this joyous occasion, it is also fitting to recall the remarkable progress India has achieved since its independence. Over the past seven decades, India has transformed itself into the fastest-growing major economy in the world, an IT and digital inclusion powerhouse, a global food basket, the pharmacy of the world, and a major space power. India's journey from a developing nation to a global player is a testament to the resilience, innovation, and determination of our people.

As we celebrate this historic occasion, I am delighted to reflect upon the strong and enduring relationship between India and Oman. India and Oman have forged a robust partnership, built on the foundation of mutual respect, trust, and shared aspirations. Our bilateral relations encompass a wide array of sectors, including trade and investment, defence and security, energy, education, tourism, space, and cultural exchanges. These multifaceted ties have flourished, contributing to the prosperity and progress of our people.

Trade between our nations has more than doubled in two years, reaching a record US\$ 12.4bn in the fiscal year 2022-2023. Investment ties between India and Oman have also

witnessed substantial growth. There are more than 6000 India-Oman joint ventures in Oman with an estimated investment of over US\$ 7.5bn, with new sectors of green hydrogen, mining, and green steel as the pathways to the future. These impressive trade and investment figures highlight the strength and potential of our economic engagement, fostering win-win collaborations and creating new avenues for growth.

Education has also played a vital role in fostering strong people-to-people ties between our nations. Indian educational institutions and universities have attracted Omani students seeking quality education and specialised skills. These educational exchanges enhance our understanding of each other's cultures, strengthen the ties between our youth, and create a bridge of knowledge and friendship.

As we celebrate the Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, it is imperative to recognise the contribution of the Indian diaspora in Oman. They have played a vital role in promoting goodwill, fostering cultural understanding, and strengthening the bonds between our nations. With an estimated population of nearly 700,000 Indian nationals in Oman, they continue to be an integral part of Oman's social fabric, contributing to its development and progress.

Let me conclude by remembering the sacrifices of our freedom fighters, whose indomitable courage and determination paved the way for our independence. Today, we stand united as proud Indians, cherishing

HM GREETES INDIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of greetings to President Droupadi Murmu of the Republic of India on her country's Independence anniversary.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished President Droupadi good health and happiness and the people of India further progress and prosperity.

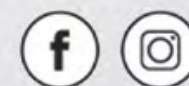
the values of democracy, diversity, and inclusivity that define our great nation.

Let us reaffirm our commitment to further strengthen the bonds between India and Oman, to deepen our cooperation, and to work together towards shared progress and prosperity.

I also take this opportunity to wish, on behalf of the government and people of India, greetings and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the government and kind people of Oman for continued peace, progress and prosperity.

Jai Hind!

GREETINGS TO THE GOVERNMENT & PEOPLE OF INDIA ON THE OCCASION OF 77TH INDEPENDENCE DAY



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This year's Independence Day will culminate the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations

ANI



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Congratulations!

& Best Wishes
to the People of India
on the Occasion of
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GREETINGS

TO THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF INDIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE

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INDIA’S TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION - A JOURNEY TOWARDS GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

India’s technology and innovation have already impressed the world. But the future will be much bigger than our present because India has innovative youth and increasing tech access.

The power of India’s youth is known across the world. They have ensured tech globalisation and talent globalisation. Healthcare, management, finance – you will find young Indians leading many domains. We are using our talent for global good. Even in India, their impact is being seen. India jumped to the 40th rank in the Global Innovation Index this year. In 2015, we were ranked 81. The number of unicorn start-ups in India has doubled since 2021. We are now the 3rd largest start-up hub in the world. We have over 81,000 recognised startups. There are hundreds of international companies that have R&D centres in India. This is due to India’s talent pool.

Indian youth are being empowered by increasing tech access. A mobile and data revolution is happening in the country. In the last 8 years, broadband connections rose from 60 million to 810 million and smartphone users went from 150 million to 750 million. The growth of the internet is faster in rural areas than in urban areas. A new demographic is being connected to the information superhighway.

For a long time, technology was seen as an exclusive domain. It was said to be only for the high and mighty. But India has shown how to democratise technology. India has also shown how to give tech a human touch. In India, technology is a force of equality and empowerment. The world’s largest health insurance scheme Ayushman Bharat provides a safety net for nearly 200 million families. It covers about 600 million people. This programme is run based on a tech platform. India ran the world’s largest COVID-19 vaccine drive. It was run through a tech-based platform called COWIN.

Let us go from the health sector to education.



As the mother of democracy, India’s national consensus is forged not by diktat but by blending millions of free voices into one harmonious melody

and boosted transparency. It has also hit a procurement value of Rs1tn last year.

Innovation is important. But when backed by integration, it becomes a force. Technology is being used to end silos, enable synergy and ensure service. On a shared platform, there are no silos. Take, for example, the PM Gati Shakti National Masterplan. India is investing over Rs 100tn in infrastructure over the next few years. The number of stakeholders in any infra project is huge. Traditionally, in India, big projects were often delayed. Exceeding expenses, and extending timelines used to be common. But now, we have the Gati Shakti shared platform. The central government, state governments, district administrations, different departments can coordinate. Each of these knows what the other is doing. Information relating to projects, land use and institutions are available at a single place. So, each stakeholder sees the same data. This improves coordination and solves problems even before they occur. It helps in accelerating approvals and clearances.

India is no more a place known for red tape. It is known for red carpet for investors, whether it is FDI reforms, or liberalisation of drone rules, steps in the semiconductor sector, production incentive schemes in various sectors or the rise of ease of doing business,

India has many excellent factors coming together. I invite you all to work with us as we lead the world in solving its problems.

(Source: PM Narendra Modi’s address at the Bengaluru Tech Summit)

75th
आज़ादी का अमृत महोत्सव

CONGRATULATIONS!

& Best Wishes to the Government & People of India on the Occasion of their
77th INDEPENDENCE DAY

On this Day, Let's Honour the Past, Celebrate the Present and Light up the Future.

Greetings & best wishes from President, Management Committee & Stakeholders of Indian Social Club, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman

النادي الاجتماعي الهندي
Indian Social Club, Salalah

Rakesh Jha
President

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An integrated approach that focuses on renewable energy along with exploration of traditional fuels is the key to energy security in the next 25 years.

As the world's fastest-growing major economy with rising energy needs, India will account for approximately 25% of the global energy demand growth between 2020-2040, as per BP energy outlook and IEA estimates. Ensuring energy access, availability and affordability for our large population is imperative. This makes our case sui generis and has driven our energy strategy, now acknowledged the world over as pragmatic and balanced.

How has India managed to do this?

When petrol and diesel prices went up by 35-40% in the US, Canada, Spain, and the UK, and despite importing over 85% of its crude oil requirements and 55% of its natural gas requirements, prices of diesel in India have actually gone down in the last one year. When several countries in our neighbourhood have had dry outs and power cuts to manage demand, there has been no shortage of fuel anywhere in India, even during floods and natural calamities.

This was made possible due to the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for ensuring energy justice. The Centre and many BJP-ruled states announced massive cuts in excise duty and VAT rates, twice. Oil PSUs, being good corporate citizens, absorbed huge losses to ensure that the massive hikes in the prices of crude oil and natural gas in the international market were not passed on to Indian consumers. Subsidised APM gas for the city gas distribution sector was drastically increased even at the cost of cutting down the captive use of domestic gas by our own PSUs. We even imposed an export cess on petrol, diesel and ATF, and a windfall tax on domestically produced petroleum products to prevent refiners and producers from profiteering at the cost of domestic consumers.

Over the years, India has expanded its network of crude oil suppliers from 27 nations to 39 nations. India has also further strengthened ties with countries like the US (energy trade has gone up 13 times in the last four years) and Russia to ensure a reliable supply of crude oil. This strategic market card, as the world's third-largest importer, not only ensured affordable en-



Ambitiously powering India for next 25 years

ergy for Indian consumers but also had a calming effect on global petroleum markets.

What is inescapable is that India's purchase of petroleum products from certain nations has actually kept the global demand and supply of around 98-100 million barrels/day balanced, thereby keeping oil prices in check for the global value chain. Had this not been done, global prices would have shot up to US\$300/barrel.

We are working on both traditional fuel exploration as well as energy transition. Our reforms in making India an attractive energy and power destination are reflected in the consulting firm Wood Mackenzie noting that India could

What is inescapable is that India's purchase of petroleum products from certain nations has actually kept the global demand and supply of around 98-100 million barrels/day balanced

be the licencing wildcard of 2023. By 2025, India wants to boost its net geographic area under exploration from 8% (0.25 million sq km) to 15% (0.5 million sq km). It has reduced the prohibited/no-go areas in our exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by 99%, releasing nearly 1 million sq km for exploration.

However, as demonstrated by PM Modi at Glasgow, we remain steadfast in our climate change commitments – becoming net-zero in emissions by 2070 and cutting down emissions by 1 billion tonnes by the end of 2030.

We are also rapidly expanding our petrochemical production, in line with the massive in-

crease in living standards and rapid urbanisation. India is a global exporter of petroleum products and its refining capacity is the fourth-largest in the world after the US, China, and Russia. Efforts are underway to further enhance this capacity to 450 MMT by 2040. The refining capacity expansion was also one of the major factors in ensuring fuel price stability during the international oil price volatilities last year.

India is also accelerating its efforts to move towards a gas-based economy by increasing the share of gas from the current 6.3% to 15% by 2030. India has connected more than 90.5 million families with clean cooking fuel in the past nine years. PNG connections have increased from 2.28 million in 2014 to over 10 million in 2023. The number of CNG stations in India has gone up from 938 in 2014 to 4,900 in 2023. Since 2014, India has increased the length of its gas pipeline network from 14,700 km to 22,000 km in 2023.

At the recently-concluded India Energy Week 2023, India took a giant stride in its bio-fuel revolution by launching E20 – 20% ethanol-blended gasoline, which will be rolled out in 15 cities across the country in the next two years. India's ethanol blending gasoline has grown from just 1.53% in 2013-14 to 10.17% in 2023, and now India is also setting up five second-generation ethanol plants that can convert agricultural waste into biofuel, further reducing pollution due to stubble burning, and generating income for farmers.

The National Green Hydrogen Mission has been launched with an outlay of Rs19,74.4mn to develop the country's green hydrogen ecosystem in the country and accelerate India's efforts towards 4 MT of annual green hydrogen production. It will save Rs1tn in cumulative fossil fuel import savings by 2030. India is poised to realise its full potential to create a green hydrogen ecosystem by 2030.

Just like our energy strategy, we are also taking an integrated path for transitioning India's future mobility pathways. Therefore, along with green hydrogen and biofuels, India is also supporting electric vehicles through a production-linked incentive scheme to make advanced fuel cells of 50 gigawatt hours.

(By Hardeep S Puri, Union Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas and Housing & Urban Affairs)

Congratulations!

& Best Wishes

to the Government & People of India on the Occasion of their

77th INDEPENDENCE DAY





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India’s Foreign Minister argues, that not only is India’s diplomacy far more influential, its handling of a volatile world is also much more sophisticated



Dr S Jaishankar,
External Affairs Minister

As the Modi government completes nine years in office, foreign policy would certainly be among the domains where it has made an impact. This is increasingly recognised by the world and in India itself. It is visible in its new approaches like Neighbourhood First and SAGAR, mechanisms like Quad and I2U2 and initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance. India is perceived as a responsible development partner, a First Responder, and a voice of the Global South. Each of these aspects reflects a quest towards becoming a leading power.

India’s rise takes place in a volatile and uncertain world. The turbulence of our era will not only have to be managed, but where possible even leveraged. Ongoing conflicts and big power competition determine the larger landscape. Indian diplomacy has responded through optimal positioning vis-a-vis the major power centres, less by hedging and more through active pursuit of interests and values. Our independence of policy and action has been a defining characteristic. In these nine years,



many key partners have also witnessed radically different administrations. Yet India has ensured the trajectory of partnerships that remains consistently positive.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the transformational event of our times. It highlighted the economic concentration and its ensuing vulnerabilities that characterise globalisation. Forging reliable and resilient supply chains is therefore, a key to de-risking. India seeks to participate in that endeavour through Make in India, PLI schemes and Gati Shakti. PM Modi’s foreign policy focuses on exploring global opportunities, building deep strengths, absorbing technology and best practices, and expanding employment.

Our growing digital existence has brought to the fore concerns of trust and transparency. Critical and emerging technologies are gaining salience by the day. This is particularly so in regard to communication, mobility, energy and health. New domains of competition are also visible, enabled by radical breakthroughs in diverse fields. As the knowledge economy encounters demographic constraints, Indian talent is a powerful card. Fostering trusted collaboration and making technology choices are consequently of utmost importance.

Envisaging a global workplace, the Modi government has concluded numerous mobility agreements, ensured fair-play for our profes-

sionals and students abroad, while securing them in times of distress. The Vande Bharat Mission and Operations Ganga and Kaveri are recent reminders.

India is today the most populous nation - the fifth largest economy and growing. But its greater influence comes from the power of ideas and initiatives. Whether it is climate action or counter-terrorism, connectivity or maritime security, financial inclusion or food security, India has actively shaped discussions and outcomes.

The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, International Year of Millets and Lifestyle for Environment (LIFE) are notable ex-

pressions. Much of how India influences the world is through its own policies and delivery. When we ensure digital public goods and plug leakages, promote renewables and encourage energy efficiency or produce vaccines on scale and create a massive safety net, these are examples for others.

A willingness to share has also gained deep global appreciation. Vaccine Maitri, which made us the source for almost 100 nations, created abiding goodwill. On a more recurring basis, 600 development projects spanning 78 nations testify to our internationalism. And not least, India’s emergence as a First Responder in disaster situations like Türkiye recently underlines its capabilities.

India’s expanding diplomatic footprint reflects its growing interests. Vital partners need to be engaged continuously and intensively, but others too deserve attention. The frequency and expanse of high-level interactions has been widely welcomed by our partners. This is as true of immediate neighbours like Sri Lanka and Nepal as in the Gulf, or indeed in Africa, Europe or Latin America. Creating collective formats such as with the Pacific Islands, Caribbean community, Nordic nations or Africa has imparted a sustainable efficiency to the process.

Foreign policy begins on our borders, and understandably, that has seen the greatest transformation. A generous and non-reciprocal approach to immediate neighbours has been backed by vastly improved project delivery. As a result, regionalism in South Asia is making rapid strides, reflected in new road, rail and waterway connectivity, power grids, fuel pipelines and border crossing facilities. Improvements in the hard infrastructure have been matched by arrangements to facilitate flow of goods and services. A shared response to the COVID-19 challenge has also strengthened a sense of solidarity. India’s support for Sri Lanka during its economic crisis had a strong resonance, as well.

While development has been the main focus, challenges that emerged to our national security have been countered firmly. This includes the robust military deployment in our border areas to ensure that the status quo is not unilaterally altered by China.

An India that is more Bharat takes greater pride in its heritage and traditions. Their expression at the international stage is essential to multipolarity and indeed, to India’s rise.

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The tale of New India via Mann Ki Baat @ 100

PM Modi has sought to educate, guide, mentor and motivate fellow Indians to work for social change and national development, beginning with their communities

The airing of the 100th episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s unique monthly radio outreach, Mann Ki Baat, is a milestone. ‘Mann Ki Baat’ is central to the PM’s deep connection with the masses, who regard him as a caring, compassionate, and decisive leader who is transforming the country to improve their lives.

Since the first episode of Mann Ki Baat on October 3, 2014, the PM has struck a rare chord with our countrymen, who have responded enthusiastically and reached out to him month after month to share their accomplishments, joys, concerns and their valuable suggestions for New India.

This regular outreach to countrymen has no parallel in terms of reach and popularity – a fact that has been globally applauded. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni recently described PM Modi as the world’s ‘most loved’ leader, while the US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo observed that the Indian Prime Minister was an ‘unbelievable visionary’ and the world’s most popular leader with the commitment to move India forward as a global power.

Mann Ki Baat captures the pulse of the nation in its progress towards becoming a developed country, in ‘Amrit Kaal’. Mann Ki Baat has attracted and inspired crores of Indians. The number of listeners has risen with each episode. PM Modi has sought to educate, guide, mentor, and motivate fellow Indians to work for social change and national development, beginning with their communities. Importantly, as Union Home Minister Amit Shah pointed out, Mann Ki Baat has been completely apolitical in nature.

The PM’s Modi regular communication evokes a powerful sense of pride in the motherland. He has highlighted local art and artisans, giving them much-needed recognition and brand value to help them reach out to buyers in India and abroad. It has also promoted khadi, which boosts the rural economy. The impact of the programme can be comprehended from the fact that since Modi’s mention of domestic toy-making and support for the local toy industry in Mann Ki Baat, the import of toys fell sharply by 70% from US\$371mn in 2018-19 to US\$110mn in 2021. Exports grew to US\$326mn from US\$202mn.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted lives and economies across the world, the monthly address lifted the spirit of the nation and infused a sense of positivity and cheer. PM Modi reached out to truck drivers and pilots through this programme and boosted their morale. He also had a word of appreciation for all ‘Covid warriors’.

Another important dimension of Mann Ki Baat is that it gave a huge impetus to several flagship initiatives of the government and transformed them into mass movements. These include Swachh Bharat (Clean India) and Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao (Save & Educate the girl child). Another eloquent example is the resounding success of ‘Selfie with Daughter’. Domestic tourism has got a huge boost. Apart from widespread social awareness of cleanliness thanks to the Swachhta Abhiyaan, the message of water conservation was disseminated nationally with a sense of urgency. Similarly, the protection of the environment has now evolved into a movement.

Mann Ki Baat acknowledges the strength and power of 1.4 billion people and motivates them to give their best in the mission of nation-building

Mann Ki Baat acknowledges the strength and power of 1.4 billion people and motivates them to give their best in the mission of nation-building. It is now being broadcast in 23 Indian and 11 foreign languages recording the nation’s developmental journey under the PM’s extraordinary leadership. In these 100 broadcasts, he has covered and highlighted a wide array of topics, including weather, environment, cleanliness, social issues, indigenous crafts, examinations, clean India, fit India, saving and educating the girl child, water conservation, being vocal for local products, self-reliant India, and celebrating the cultural diversity of our great nation.

Mann Ki Baat episodes feature inspirational stories about unsung heroes, grassroots champions and changemakers across India.

While drawing our attention to a host of burning topics, change-makers and grass roots heroes, the PM’s monthly dialogue also outlines the roadmap for the future. The spirit of Jan Bhagidari (people’s participation) with which this journey of development is suffused, harnesses the creative energies of the entire nation, notably its youth.

To mark 75 years of Independence, PM Modi hoisted the national flag for the ninth time from the ramparts of the Red Fort and spelt out his vision for the future, predicated on ‘Panch Pran’. In line with this futuristic view, he took a pledge along with 1.4 billion fellow countrymen to rid the country of the colonial mindset in ‘Amrit Kaal’. As he observed with great clarity, “Today, our pathways are our own, our symbols are our own.”

In the course of these 100 episodes, PM Modi touched upon several patriotic, social and cultural causes which people have embraced wholeheartedly and adopted. This includes the call for the celebration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, commemorating 75 years of independence and his popular campaign to hoist the national flag in every home.

(By Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce & Industry)



On the joyous occasion of Indian Independence Day, we extend our gratitude to the visionary leaders who played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of friendship, unity, and prosperity among us.

LONG LIVE INDO-OMAN FRIENDSHIP



India is regarded as one of the leading destinations for bio innovation and bio-manufacturing. India is ranked third in Asia and is one of the top 12 biotech destinations in the world. In the last eight years, India's bioeconomy industry has expanded eightfold, from US\$10bn in 2014 to more than US\$80bn in 2022 and is expected to surpass US\$150bn by 2025 and over US\$300bn by 2030. India is well-positioned to take part in a new global wave of industrial revolution arising from recent advancements in biotechnology to build more sustainable manufacturing practices due to its fast-expanding bioeconomy and growing scientific and innovation temper.

Biotechnology Industry in India
India's bioeconomy industry accounts for approximately 3% share of the global Biotechnology industry. India has the second-highest number of USFDA-approved manufacturing plants outside of the United States. India is the world's top supplier of DPT, BCG, and measles vaccines. In 2021-22, the Indian Bioeconomy sector contributed nearly 2.6% share in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
Due to the expanding enabling ecosystem, the number of biotech start-ups in the nation has surged from 50 to over 5,300 in the last ten years. Biotech start-ups emerging from a robust talent pool are predicted to further double, exceeding more than 10,000 by 2025. In 2021, BT cotton, biopesticides, biostimulants, and biofertilisers contributed around US\$10.48bn to the country's bioeconomy.

Market Size
According to current projections, the industry is estimated at US\$80.12bn in 2021-22 and is projected to grow to US\$150bn by FY25. India's bioeconomy surpassed US\$80.12bn in FY22, registering a rise of 14.1% over US\$70.2bn in FY21. The Indian biotechnology industry has the potential to reach US\$300bn by the year 2030.

Segments
In the Indian bio-economy market, biopharmaceuticals and the medical devices industry are the two largest segments, accounting for nearly 62% of the total contribution. India's Biotechnology sector is categorized into 5 segments:

India on the path to becoming a bio-manufacturing hub



Biopharmaceuticals
India is one of the world's largest suppliers of affordable medications and vaccinations. India is a global leader in biosimilars, with the most biosimilars approved in the domestic market. It accounts for the largest share, contributing 49%, amounting US\$39.4bn of the total Indian Bioeconomy industry in CY21. The vaccination market was estimated at US\$8.7bn, excluding COVID-19 vaccines. While therapeutics had a market value of US\$10.3bn and diagnostics had a value of US\$20.4bn in FY22.

Bio Agriculture
India is one of the world's top producers of BT-Cotton and has the fifth-largest area of land used for organic agriculture, with over 55% of the

country's land covered by agriculture and related activities. The bio-agri segment is estimated to be US\$10.48bn. The biopesticides, biostimulants, biofertilisers, and BT cotton constitute the bio-agriculture segment.

Bio industrial
The integration of biotechnology into industrial processes is revolutionising manufacturing and waste management across India. The bio Industrial market was valued at US\$10.3bn in 2021, with a robust CAGR of 101.3%. Biofuels/bioenergy and Industrial Enzymes are the two verticals that make up the bio industrial segment.
In FY21, the enzymes industry experienced a strong growth of 65.7%, while the biofuels sub-segment experienced a phenomenal growth of

138.8%.
Bio Services
They are aids and services offered to clinical trials, healthcare sectors, biotech firms, and educational initiatives to increase support and research so that these entities can channel and strengthen their research progress. India has the most US FDA-approved facilities worldwide, outside of the US and has a strong competence in contract manufacturing, research, and clinical trials.

Bioinformatics/IT
It is the use of computer technology to comprehend and utilise biological and biomedical data effectively. It gathers big data from clinical or life

sciences investigations and stores, analyses, and interprets it.

Startup landscape
The rise of India's biotech start-up base (the total number of companies filed since 2010) is expected to continue in 2021. The overall number of biotech start-ups increased to 5,365 in 2021, up from 4,237 in 2020. In 2021, the total number of startups increased by 26.6%. For the first time ever, in FY22, the biotech sector in India had more than 1,000 new start-up registrations in a single calendar year.

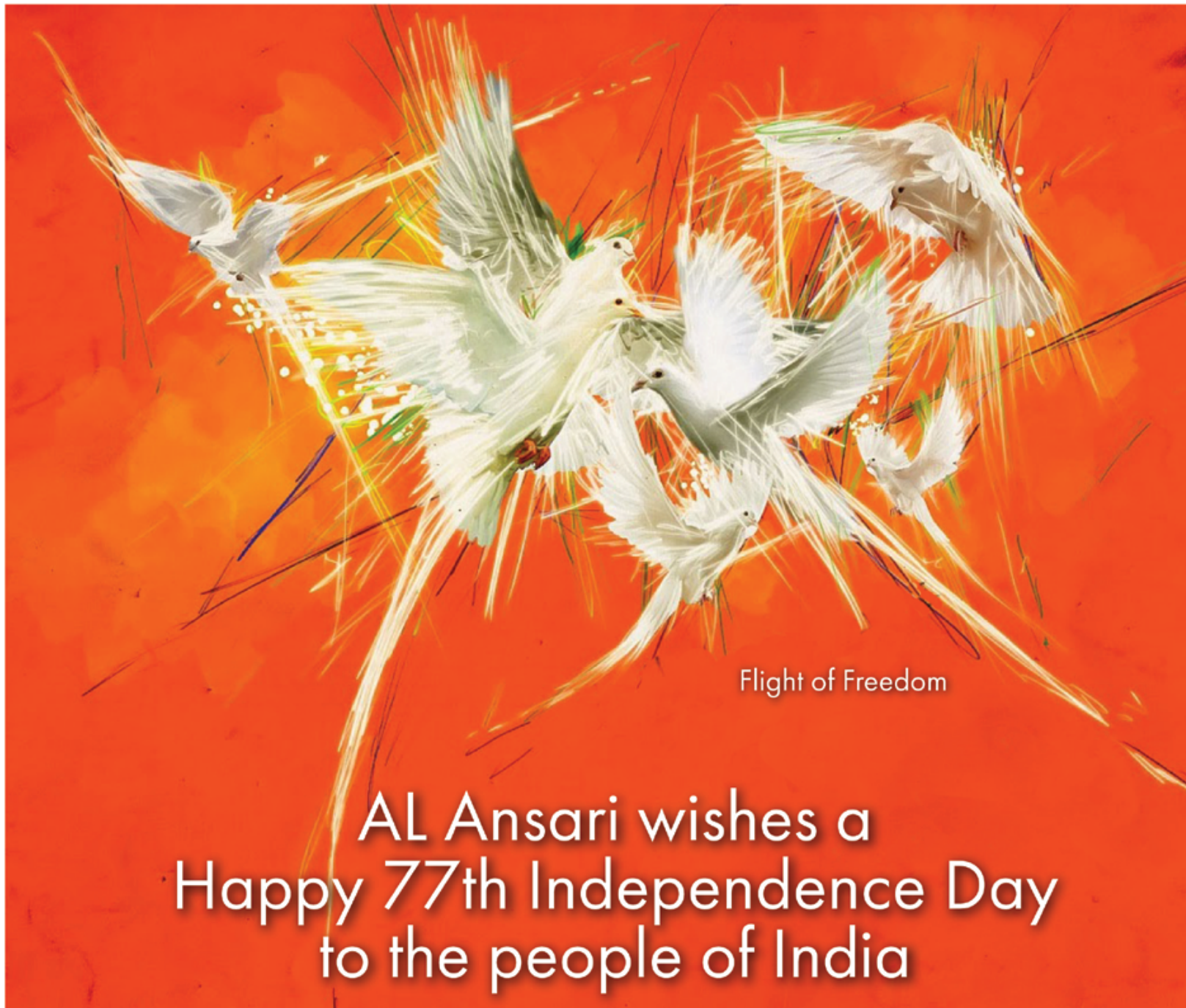
Government Initiative on Biomanufacturing
A national initiative 'Fostering High Performance Biomanufacturing: An integrated approach towards promoting Circular Economy for Green, Clean and Prosperous India' has been proposed by the Department of Biotechnology. This initiative's foundation is made up of advanced biotechnology tools such as synthetic biology, gene editing, metabolic engineering, and so on. It is believed that building a biomanufacturing programme's capacity for synthetic biology requires a robust national infrastructure platform.
The 'Lifestyle for the Environment (LIFE)' initiative launched on October 20, 2022 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi encourages us to use green and friendly environmental solutions in all aspects of life in order to effectively meet climate and energy goals.
As a result, a pan-India biomanufacturing programme based on biomass/waste resources can assist meet rising consumer demand, increase the country's economy, and put the country on pace to achieve net-zero carbon emissions.

(India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF))



Congratulations!

to the Government & People of India
on the Occasion of their
77th INDEPENDENCE DAY



Flight of Freedom

AL Ansari wishes a
Happy 77th Independence Day
to the people of India



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Wishing the people of India joy, pride, and progress on
77th INDEPENDENCE DAY
MAY INDIA CONTINUE TO PROGRESS IN ALL FIELDS



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P.O.Box: 2916, P.C:112, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate Of Oman Tel: 24701347 Fax: 24797921
E-mail: indiansc@omantel.net.om, indianscmuscat@gmail.com, Website: ismuscat.com



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