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Mbappe's hat-trick fails to win cup

MESSI'S SWAN SONG

Lionel Messi finally won the World Cup as Argentina beat France 4-2 on penalties following a thrilling World Cup final finished 3-3 after extra time in Qatar



A historic tournament for first Arab host nation

Shaddad al Musalmey
Muscat

On Sunday, the world's biggest quadrennial sporting event concluded when 2018 winners France met Argentina. Alongside the excitement on the pitch, FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 also provided a major boost to GCC economies.

With football's premier event wooing more than 3.7mn enthusiasts who attended the matches held over five weeks, this World Cup was special for a number of reasons. Among others, the World Cup had never been played in the winter season prior to 2022, and the global showpiece had never been hosted in the Middle East.

Gianni Infantino, FIFA president, has described this the 'best World Cup ever.'

"There's unanimous praise from the FIFA council for this World Cup and for the unique, cohesive power it has shown; 3.27mn spectators attended the first 62 games. The number was 3.03mn for all the games in 2018.

"I thank Qatar, the organisers, the volunteers and everyone who made this World Cup the best ever," Infantino told world media on Friday.

This World Cup was also significant because it was the last for Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, two giants who have ruled football for the last decade. Ronaldo, 37, announced his retirement in an interview with British broadcaster Piers Morgan before the tournament started. Messi, 35, also stated that Qatar would be his last show on football's grandest stage.

Across Oman, both young and old celebrated the spirit of 'the beautiful game'.

"I never thought I would get to attend any World Cup because the tournament always felt out of reach and too expensive. But it always meant a lot to me. I am glad I made it to the last few games. I drove from Oman to Qatar, which added to the excitement. I



Spectators watch the Argentina-France game on Sunday, described as the most dramatic World Cup final, at a restaurant in Darsait (v K Shafeer)

could not have missed this because it was one-of-a-kind," said Moath al Saeedi, an Omani football enthusiast from Khabourah.

For many, football is all that gives them happiness and such a big tournament held in the 'neighbourhood in Qatar' being ranked the best ever World Cup event has meant the world to them.

"I have no words to express my gratitude to the Qatari officials for the arrangements and organisation of the biggest sporting event. Qatar has shown the world that Arabs are capable. I am so proud of Qatar for the smooth conduct of the World Cup" said Fad-

hel al Mazrui, Omani sports analyst.

Four Arab countries qualified for the tournament this year - Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and hosts Qatar - and Arab football fans did not miss the opportunity to rush to Doha to cheer the Arab teams. But not just Arabs, an overwhelming majority of the World Cup visitors to Doha vouched for the atmosphere being welcoming.

Morocco made history by bagging the fourth place. Saudi Arabia orchestrated one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history by beating Sunday's winners Argentina, while Tunisia won against France, Sunday's

other finalists, in a group stage match on November 30 before going home.

"This World Cup had a huge presence of Arab supporters that made it special. It is an honour for me to be an Arab and get an opportunity to witness the first tournament in an Arab country," said Malik Musallam, a football fan from Seeb.

In Oman, to keep up with the demand, giant screens at fan zones and eateries welcomed large numbers of football enthusiasts. All facilities showing the final play-off on Sunday were packed with cheering crowds.



FUNDING, TRAINING AND MORE

In the last few decades, Oman has made significant strides in several sectors, including education, health and business. Last year, the Ministry of Economy announced initiatives to support and develop the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector in partnership with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development. The move was aimed at accelerating the recovery of these enterprises from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and maximising their contribution to economic activities. The government as well as private companies have come together to commit to sustainable business models. But are SMEs in Oman given enough support by the government? What can be done to help them prosper? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers said -



Ruskeen S
Private sector employee

The government is paying more attention to SMEs by slashing fees and service charges. But the government alone can't do everything. Next, banks should come forward to help the SMEs by simplifying loan procedures.

Khalid al Balushi
Businessman

Government is supportive but more support is

needed, mainly in training and guidance. A relative started a food truck in Amerat, but he had no training in the business and he closed it in some time. Also we need support from banks in providing us loans and from private companies in giving us a helping hand for at least one year.

Bader al Mohammad Harthy
Private sector employee

We must understand that the success of businesses and SMEs is not dependent only on the

help from government. Other entities should also come forward to help, including private companies. Additionally, financing may not be the only help required; space and services may also be needed.

Ahmed al Musalmy
Technician

Now there are many SMEs in the country and they exist only because of the support of the government. The government has always been motivating citizens to start their own enter-

prises. The paper work and documentation for startups have been made uncomplicated to motivate entrepreneurs.

Govind Sampath
Private sector employee

SMEs in Oman need support by way of more projects and tenders being reserved exclusively for them. Tangible and focused marketing efforts will help these organisations connect with customers and also help build their brand.

**? NEXT ON
YOUR SAY**

With 2022 coming to an end, what is your best memory of the year? Are you making any New Year resolutions? If yes, what is your resolution for 2023?

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

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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DBBS calls for urgent donation of AB- blood

Muscat - The Department of Blood Bank Services (DBBS) has urged people with AB negative blood type to donate.

In a statement, DBBS said, 'Blood banks are facing difficulty in providing negative blood types. If your blood group is AB- we urge you to donate at Central Blood Bank Bausher because there is an urgent need.'

The blood bank is open from 8am to 8pm, Saturday to Thursday, and from 3pm to 8pm on Friday. Appointments can be made through WhatsApp - 94555648 - or by calling 24591255/24594255.



BAHRAIN NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS IN MUSCAT

Bahrain's Embassy in Muscat celebrated the Bahraini National Day over the weekend.

Celebrations included cutting of the ceremonial cake by H E Dr Jumaa Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of Bahrain to Oman, and chief guest H H Sayyid Harib bin Thuwaini bin Shihab al Said (Supplied photo)



Omani voters abroad vote in municipal council polls

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Omani voters abroad cast their ballot to choose members of municipal councils for the third term through the app 'Intakhib' (Vote) on Sunday.

Voting was held from 8am to 7pm.

According to the Ministry of Interior, the app was designed to be on par with global security standards, with all safeguards in place to ensure secrecy.

Intakhib operates in NFC-en-

abled smart phones for individuals with a valid identity card for voters listed in the Electoral Register.

The ministry earlier announced that the final list of candidates for the Municipal Councils for the third term was

available on the election website
<http://www.elections.om>.

A total of 727 candidates, including 28 women, are in the fray.

The date for voting for those residing in the sultanate is December 25.





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Municipality invites bids for Muttrah Square project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has invited bids for the Muttrah Square project, which proposes to revamp the iconic area in Muscat completely.

Earlier this year, the project plan won the inaugural Bilrab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design.

As per the Royal Orders of His Majesty the Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Muscat Municipality as the implementer of the project called for tenders for its construction.

A statement issued by Muscat Municipality, said ‘We wish to invite companies to compete for the tender for the construction of Muttrah Square project; which will be an innovative landmark in Muscat Governorate.’

The deadline for submission of tenders is February 15, 2023, it added.

Muttrah Square, designed by Abdulla al Bahri, Omaima al Hinai and Ahmed al Jahdhani, was declared the winner of the first edition of the Bilrab award.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Ab-



Muttrah Square will enhance the value of Muttrah with an iconic bridge in the shape of an arch looming over the middle of the square besides the sea

ABDULLA AL BAHRI

dulla al Bahri said, “Muttrah Square will enhance the value of Muttrah with an iconic bridge in the shape of an arch looming over the middle of the square besides the sea. It was inspired by the sword of Imam al Salt bin Malik al Kharusi.”

All the famous landmarks of Muttrah will be visible from the bridge. The arch bridge will be surrounded by a plaza having a dancing fountain, retail stores and cafés lit by lights blending with the waves of the sea.

In the first edition of the

award, participants were asked to propose a design for the seafront site of Muttrah.

The award aims to facilitate and create unique architectural projects in certain areas of the sultanate with distinctive architectural character that combines originality and contemporary elements and can be adopted on the ground.

The award comes in line with the future vision and aspirations of the sultanate - Oman Vision 2040 - in developing its various regions architecturally according to their geographical environment and civilisational identity.

The award seeks to utilise the environmental and terrain diversity of various governorates, where different themes would be presented in architectural designs targeting annually a specific architectural theme and a specific region or governorate.

The Office of Bilrab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design has already received 149 entries for the second edition, which involves designing the Maritime History Museum in the wilayat of Sur in the Governorate of South Sharqiyah.



Atlas of terrestrial reptiles in Oman launched

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) on Sunday launched the Atlas of Terrestrial Reptiles of Oman under the auspices of H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, the Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The atlas is a compilation of unprecedented data - comprising 5,359 records of 101 known species of Oman’s terrestrial reptiles, with 20 being endemic to the sultanate.

The study documented more than 101 species of wild reptiles in the sultanate, which represents about 60 per cent of the total reptile species in the Arabian Peninsula, including 21 species of snakes and 80 species of lizards. Twenty species of lizards have

The atlas is a compilation of 5,359 records of 101 known species of Oman’s terrestrial reptiles, with 20 being endemic to the sultanate

been registered as endemic.

The atlas provides the first map-based analysis on the spread of reptiles in nature reserves and other areas covered by field surveys in the sultanate.

EA implemented the project in cooperation with the Institute of Evolutionary Biology in Barcelona, Spain. The main goal of the project was to survey wild reptiles in Oman, in order to assess the biological diversity of wild animals and to know the types and locations of those creatures.

“The atlas is a scientific and documentary work on the types of reptiles in Oman. It is a very important scientific reference material for those interested and researchers in the field of reptiles,” said Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, chairman of EA.

The atlas is also an important basis and reference for future studies to preserve reptiles - in terms of species and numbers and an attempt to multiply them - in addition to investing in them for economical gains.

Stressing that preserving species is an important strategic objective of the authority, Dr Omari explained that the phenomenon of climate change affects various habitats.

Agreement signed for funding health centre in Muttrah



Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Health Endowment Foundation on Sunday signed a funding agreement with Sohar International Bank to purchase medical equipment worth OMR45,000 for Hay Al Mina Health Center in Muttrah.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH’s Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs; Ahmed Musalmi, CEO of Sohar International Bank; and Taqwa al Lawati, Executive Manager of Health Endowment Foundation, ATHAR.

H E Dr Fatima affirmed the significance of partnership between public sectors and other sectors in the sultanate for serving public interests, and in this reference she commended the initiative of Sohar International Bank for financing such vital projects in the country.

She added that the signing of the deal arose from the strategic partnership for achieving community welfare and promoting the public welfare services and development projects across Oman.

Commenting on this, Musalmi said, “Health and well-being have always been a key pillar of Sohar International’s social responsibility initiatives, and we

are keen to explore how we, as a socially responsible financial institution, can make a difference in our communities.”

At Sohar International, he pointed out that they complement the government’s efforts in this direction by providing support through supplying equipment and tools to specialised dental and physiotherapy centres in Muscat.

“Such support enables us to meaningfully contribute to the nation’s broad objectives of ensuring health and better living for all and also establish a closer bond with the overall society we operate in.”

Two murders, two assaults with weapons reported in Dec: ROP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has witnessed four cases of assault with weapons in the month of December, which led to the death of two women. The first murder was reported in the wilayat of Seeb and the second in Dhahirah governorate.

On Sunday, a citizen was arrested for assaulting a woman bank employee with a knife while she was performing her duty in Dhofar, according to Royal Oman Police (ROP).

A statement issued by ROP said, ‘A citizen was arrested on charges of stabbing an Omani woman with a ‘white weapon’. She is in a stable condition, while legal procedures are being completed against the accused.’

On December 17, an Omani woman was arrested in the wilayat of Shinas after she assaulted one of her relatives with a knife and harmed herself, following a family dispute.

ROP arrested the woman for causing multiple injuries to her relative. The victim was transferred to a hospital in stable condition.

On December 12, a citizen was arrested for stabbing to death an Omani woman in Dhahirah.

On December 7, another citizen was arrested on charges of assaulting a woman with a weapon in the wilayat of Seeb.

ROP said, ‘Muscat Governorate Police Command arrested a citizen on charges of committing the murder of an Omani woman with a white weapon, as

a result of a family dispute between them.’

Commenting on the incident that occurred in the wilayat of Seeb, H E Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate, said in a statement, “We are disturbed by the incident involving a man killing his ex-wife with a knife.”

According to the grand mufti, this is a crime that every sane person condemns. “This crime is evidence of the loss of faith. We call on the government and society to cooperate in consolidating the values of faith in the lives of all members of society, and for all people to see the value of human life and the danger of aggression against people and their money. We also demand tougher penalties for such crimes.”

PRAYER TIMINGS	
Fajr	5.23am
Sunrise	6.43am
Duhr	12.09pm
Asr	3.09pm
Maghrib	5.29pm
Isha	6.45pm

Tender Announcement

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders :

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
MEDC /2022/104	Vulnerability Assessment and Penetration Test – Information Technology	26/12/2022	2/1/2023	Specialized	26.250

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure , please visit MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com or call 24588600 – Ext: 8577 – 8726
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com , one week before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in clause 20.0 in Prime Document and to the supplier guideline available MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should be included in the commercial proposal only as sof copy. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - After the commercial opening , the qualified bidders will be notified to submit the original (hard copy) of bid bond to MEDC office. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - MEDC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - Muscat Electricity Distribution Company gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - For projects whose value is less than OMR 10K, the priority to award will be given to registered companies that hold a valid certificate Of Reyadah. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.

80070008
www.medcoman.com

Higher interest rates to have limited impact on GCC economies: IMF

Our Correspondent
Muscat

GCC central banks have raised their policy rates many times this year following sharp rate hikes by US Federal Reserve which adopted an aggressive monetary policy tightening programme to tame the record high inflation.

Central bank policy rates in the GCC countries mostly follow US policy rates given the pegged exchange rate regimes, with implications for the overall economy and the banking sector.

However, an analysis conducted by the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) staff has found that the US monetary policy tightening would have a limited impact on the non-oil economy and the banking sector of the GCC including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain.

"GCC central banks raised their policy rates following the US federal funds rate and further hikes are expected in line with the US monetary policy tightening cycle. Our analysis finds that US monetary policy tightening would have a limited impact on the non-oil economy and the banking sector in an environment of high oil prices and liquidity," the IMF said in a report.

Monetary policy rates in the GCC countries tend to move in line with the US federal funds rate. Since the start of the pandemic,



most GCC central banks have moved their policy rates broadly in line with the US Federal Reserve, which is consistent with previous US tightening and easing cycles. The banks' liability and asset rates also tend to move strongly with policy rates.

"In most GCC countries, a banking structure with low wholesale funding and a large share of non-interest-bearing deposits is expected to improve banks' net interest margins, particularly as corporate sector borrowing is at variable rates reset every three to six months," the IMF said.

The IMF staff's analysis indicated that further monetary policy tightening is likely to have a limited impact on non-oil GDP growth, banks' profitability, credit growth and asset quality in the GCC in a high oil price environment that increases liquidity in the system.

Historically, non-oil GDP growth in the GCC appears to be more sensitive to US monetary tightening episodes when oil prices are low, the IMF noted.

The level of oil prices – through its effect on domestic liquidity – could potentially dampen or amplify the impact of nominal policy rate changes on non-oil GDP growth, it added.

The primary objective of monetary policy in the GCC countries is to ensure their exchange rate stability. Monetary policy is anchored by the fixed exchange rate of the national currency to the US dollar. The exchange rate pegs are maintained by managing the magnitude of short-term interest rate differentials with US interest rates.

As per the IMF, pegged exchange rate regimes remain appropriate for GCC economies despite global economic volatility and shocks.

"It is a policy that has been serving GCC countries well by providing a credible monetary anchor. However, the pegs should continue to be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain appropriate and do not hinder competitiveness," the IMF added.

The IMF said that, historically, there has been a limited impact of monetary policy tightening episodes on credit growth in the GCC in periods when oil prices were high.

Despite tightening episodes during 2004-2007, credit growth in the GCC countries remained strong as oil prices were at relatively high levels, the IMF noted.



Marine bunker fuel terminal at Port of Duqm inaugurated

Our Correspondent
Muscat

OOMCO Marine bunker fuel terminal at the Port of Duqm was officially inaugurated on Sunday under the patronage of Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, deputy chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Freezone (OPAZ).

OOMCO Marine is the bunker arm of Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO). Located in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), the OOMCO Marine bunker fuel terminal will supply the full range of bunker fuel to ships at the port and port anchorage, which promises to further position Oman as a world-class logistics and shipping hub.

Hilal al Kharusi, chairman of OOMCO said, "Inaugurating the OOMCO Marine bunker fuel terminal at the Port of Duqm further strengthens the position of

Oman as a world-class logistics and shipping hub, which is aligned with the objectives laid out in Oman's Vision 2040. Our now fully operational terminal contributes to economic growth and diversification in Oman, while capitalising on its strategic position near established global trade routes."

Tarik al Junaidi, CEO of Oman Oil Marketing Company said, "The OOMCO Marine fuel terminal and associated bunker business forms part of our long-term strategy as a company to facilitate the growth of multiple sectors in Oman including shipping, logistics and of course energy and their respective infrastructure."

The bunker terminal at the Port of Duqm meets the increasing demands for high-quality and sustainable marine fuels.

The safe bunkering services provided by OOMCO's marine fuel terminal ensure that all

bunker deliveries meet the highest international specification standards, while it operates according to the health and safety protocols of the Port of Duqm and in line with Omani COVID-19 regulations.

Vessels calling at Duqm can also take advantage of a range of other high-quality and diverse services at the port, including pilotage, freshwater supply, waste collection, tug services, crew change, de-slopping services, and ship handling, plus ship spares and dry dock services.

OOMCO's bunkering services are underpinned by the nearby Duqm Refinery. Owing to its strategic location on Oman's south-east coast and its close proximity to significant shipping traffic accessing the Suez Canal, Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean, the inaugurated quality and eco-efficient marine fuel terminal aims to serve the international shipping market.

Aramco and TotalEnergies to build giant petrochemical complex in Saudi Arabia

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia – The Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Aramco) and TotalEnergies have taken the final investment decision for the construction of a world scale petrochemical facility in Saudi Arabia.

The 'Amiral' complex will be owned, operated, and integrated with the existing SATORP refinery located in Jubail on Saudi Arabia's eastern coast, Aramco said in a press release. The investment decision is subject to customary closing conditions and approvals.

The petrochemical facility will enable SATORP to convert internally produced refinery off-gases and naphtha, as well as ethane and natural gasoline supplied by Aramco, into higher value chemicals, helping to advance Aramco's liquids to chemicals strategy.

The complex will comprise of a mixed feed cracker capable of producing 1.65mn tonnes per annum of ethylene, the first in the region to be integrated with a refinery. It will also include two state-of-the-art polyethylene units using Advanced Dual Loop technology, a butadiene extraction unit, and other associated derivatives units.

The project alone represents an investment of around US\$11bn, of which US\$4bn will be funded through equity by Aramco (62.5 per cent) and TotalEnergies (37.5 per cent). Its construction is scheduled to begin during the



Aramco president and CEO Amin Nasser

first quarter of 2023 with commercial operation targeted to start in 2027.

Aramco President and CEO, Amin Nasser, said, "Our long-standing relationship with TotalEnergies has been further strengthened by this important project, which represents an opportunity for us to showcase the potential for cutting edge liquids to chemicals technologies that support the circular economy. With this collaboration we aim to expand the value chain by producing advanced chemicals more efficiently than ever before, accelerating industrial progress in the kingdom."

TotalEnergies chairman and CEO Patrick Pouyanné, said, "We are delighted to write a new page of our joint history by launching this expansion project, building on the successful development of SATORP, our biggest and most efficient refining and petrochemicals platform in

the world. It also deepens the exemplary relationship between our two companies over many decades in Saudi Arabia. This world-class complex also fits with our strategy to expand sustainably in petrochemicals by maximizing the synergies within our major platforms."

Eventually, the complex will provide feedstock to other petrochemical and specialty chemical plants, located in the Jubail industrial area, which will be built, owned and operated by globally renowned downstream investors, entailing an estimated additional US\$4bn of investments. This will support the establishment of key manufacturing industries such as carbon fibers, lubes, drilling fluids, detergents, food additives, automotive parts and tires.

The overall complex, including adjacent facilities, is expected to create 7,000 local direct and indirect jobs.

Renaissance appoints Raashid Ali as new CFO

Muscat – Renaissance Services has appointed Raashid Ali as its new chief financial officer. Raashid, who has held leadership positions in organisations across the Middle East and in India, joined the company in December 2022.

In a career span of over three decades Raashid has successfully managed multiple brands under a single asset, implemented financial strategies that have driven capital adequacy, and enhanced shareholder value for companies by scaling up profitability, Renaissance said in a press release.

A Chartered Accountant,



Raashid Ali

Raashid has worked with leading organisations like DAMAC Group, Aljomaih Automotive (largest General Motors dealer in

the GCC), Tatweer/Jumeirah International, Yum! Brands, PepsiCo International and KPMG in the Middle East and India. He was also the founder of Henry Havaldar, one of northern India's most popular cloud kitchen concepts.

His expertise extends to supply chain management, mergers and acquisitions, commercial bids, statutory, regulatory, fiscal and performance reporting compliances.

Stephen R Thomas, CEO of Renaissance Services, said, "We are glad to welcome Raashid to Renaissance as the company aims for exponential growth with

sights on new segments and geographies. We are confident that Raashid's extensive experience will add great value to our future-focused Renaissance 2.0 objectives delivering smart sustainable service solutions."

Renaissance is the leading accommodation, services solutions and integrated facilities management (IFM) company in Oman, listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The company has invested over US\$520mn in Oman employing over 2,600 Omani nationals contributing to local growth, building potential and creating opportunities.

US to begin refilling strategic oil reserve after huge release

New York, US – The US Energy Department announced a plan to add oil back to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) after a historically large release undertaken by the Biden administration.

The policy marks a significant shift after President Biden authorized the biggest-ever release earlier this year following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which sent oil prices to US\$120 a barrel.

The plan represents "an opportunity to secure a good deal for American taxpayers by repurchasing oil at a lower price than the US\$96 per barrel average price it was sold for, as well as to strengthen energy security," the Department of Energy (DOE) said in a news release.

The agency said it will buy up to three million barrels of oil under a pilot program designed to attract sellers who can lock in



Strategic Petroleum Reserve of the US currently holds 382mn barrels of crude, down some 216mn barrels from its level before September 2021

prices.

The SPR currently holds 382mn barrels of crude, down some 216mn barrels from its level before September 2021.

A Biden official said in October that the administration planned to purchase oil to refill the reserve as soon as prices hit around US\$67-72 a barrel.

Crude prices have fallen significantly from their peak levels

earlier in the year. On Friday, US benchmark West Texas Intermediate dropped 2.4 per cent to US\$74.29 a barrel.

The DOE announcement noted that gasoline prices have dropped by more than US\$1.80 a gallon over their June 2022 apex and now stand at the cheapest level since September 2021.

AFP

EU reaches agreement on major carbon market reform

Brussels, Belgium - EU member states and parliamentarians on Sunday announced an agreement for a major reform to the bloc's carbon market, the central plank of its ambitions to reduce emissions and invest in climate-friendly technologies.

The deal aims to accelerate emissions cuts, phase out free allowances to industries with high energy demands such as steel and cement to purchase "free allowances" to cover their carbon emissions under a "polluter pays" principle.

The quotas are designed to decrease over time to encourage them to emit less and invest in greener technologies as part of the European Union's ultimate aim of achieving carbon neutrality.

Negotiators representing member states and the parliament had spent more than 24 hours in intense talks before reaching an agreement on Saturday night that widens the scope of the carbon market.

The deal means emissions in the ETS sectors are to be cut by



62 per cent by 2030 based on 2005 levels, up from a previous goal of 43 per cent. Concerned industries must cut their emissions by that amount.

The agreement also seeks to accelerate the timetable for phasing out the free allowances, with 48.5 per cent phased out by 2030 and a complete removal by 2034, a schedule at the centre of fierce debates between MEPs and member states.

The carbon market will be progressively extended to the maritime sector and intra-European flights. Waste incineration sites will be included from 2028, depending on a favourable report by the commission.

Climate Action Network, a coalition of NGOs, criticised the agreement, saying it would allow

major polluters to continue to receive billions of euros in free quotas for another decade while households would receive little.

'Ambitious carbon price'

French MEP Pascal Canfin, president of the European Parliament's environment committee, said the carbon price for industries affected by the ETS would be around 100 euros per tonne.

"No other continent has such an ambitious carbon price," he tweeted.

A "carbon border tax", which imposes environmental standards on imports into the bloc based on the carbon emissions linked to their production, will offset the reduction of free allowances and allow industries to

compete with more polluting non-EU rivals.

The agreement also aims to make households pay for emissions linked to fuel and gas heating from 2027, but the price will be capped until 2030.

The European Commission had proposed a second carbon market targeting building heating and road fuels, but the plan raised concerns as households grapple with soaring energy prices exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The second carbon market would have obliged suppliers of fuel and gas to buy quotas to cover their emissions, but MEPs argued the measure should be limited to offices and large vehicles.

If energy prices continue to

spiral, the application of this part of the agreement will be delayed by a year.

Funds from this second market will go to a "Social Climate Fund" designed to help vulnerable households and businesses weather the energy price crisis.

"This deal will provide a huge contribution towards fighting climate change at low costs," European Parliament rapporteur Peter Liese said in the statement.

"It will give breathing space for citizens and industry in difficult times and provide a clear signal to European industry that it pays off to invest in green technologies."

The conservative German MEP added the bloc would have until 2026 to invest in green sources and energy efficiency, after which it would be "the moment of truth: we must reduce our emissions by then, or pay dear".

The commission first proposed the carbon market reform in July 2021 as part of plans to reduce the bloc's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels.

The ETS was created in 2005 and applies to around 40 per cent of EU emissions.

AFP



US places Chinese chipmakers on trade blacklist

Washington, US - The US Commerce Department has blacklisted 36 Chinese companies including top producers of advanced computer chips, severely restricting their access to American technology.

The move, which included semiconductor makers Cambrian and Yangtze Memory Technologies, aimed to limit China's "efforts to obtain and leverage advanced technologies including artificial intelligence for its military modernization efforts and human rights violations," the Commerce Department said.

The companies' placement on the so-called Entity List makes it nearly impossible for them to legally acquire directly or indirectly US semiconductor manufacturing technology, designs and other intellectual property, hampering their production potential.

Of the 36 names, 21 are identified

as major firms involved in the research and design, marketing and sales of artificial intelligence chips with close ties to the Chinese defense sector.

Seven are linked to the Chinese military's efforts to develop hypersonic and ballistic missile systems. One of the companies, Tianjin Tiandi Weiye Technologies, was placed on the Entity List for its alleged role in "China's campaign of repression, mass arbitrary detention, and high-technology surveillance" against Uyghurs and other minorities in the western Xinjiang region.

The Entity List additions Thursday further the Biden administration's efforts to deny China "access to advanced technologies for military modernization and human rights abuses," Assistant Secretary of Commerce Thea Rozman Kendler said in a statement.

AFP

Europe's biggest oil field increases production

Oslo, Norway - Europe's biggest oil field in production will sharply increase its output, providing the equivalent of seven percent of European demand, its operator, Norway's Equinor, said.

Located in the Norwegian waters of the North Sea, the Johan Sverdrup field which until now pumped some 535,000 barrels per day (bpd) on Thursday entered a new production phase where it will pump around 720,000 bpd.

The aim is to eventually bring that level to 755,000 bpd, Equinor said.

"Johan Sverdrup alone can thus meet 6-7 per cent of the daily oil demand in Europe", it said in a statement.



The field, which is believed to hold 2.7bn barrels of recoverable oil equivalent, will represent about a third of Norway's total oil production.

Norway is western Europe's biggest oil and gas producer.

Equinor owns 42.6 per cent of the Johan Sverdrup field, alongside Norway's Aker BP (31.6 per cent) and Petoro (17.4 per cent), while France's TotalEnergies owns 8.4 per cent.

AFP

UK plans first net zero transatlantic flight

London, UK - A Virgin Atlantic jet will make the world's first net-zero flight across the Atlantic Ocean next year, the UK government said.

The Boeing 787 will take off from London Heathrow bound for JFK airport in New York, powered entirely by sustainable aviation fuel (SAF).

The flight is expected to be fuelled by SAF made mainly from waste oil and fats such as used cooking oil, according to the Department for Transport.

"When fully replacing kerosene, SAF can slash lifecycle carbon emissions by over 70 per cent compared to conventional fossil jet fuel," it added.

"The use of 100 per cent SAF on the flight, combined with carbon removal through biochar credits - a material which traps



and stores carbon taken from the atmosphere - will make the flight net-zero."

Virgin Atlantic chief executive Shai Weiss said SAF had a "critical role" to play in cutting carbon emissions in the aviation industry.

"Urgent collective action" was

needed to increase the production and use of SAF across the world, he added.

Currently, a maximum of 50 per cent SAF blended with kerosene can be used in commercial jet engines.

But the consortium behind next year's flight, including en-

gine makers Rolls-Royce, Pratt & Whitney Canada and university researchers, hope it will demonstrate the potential of using only SAF. The Department for Transport said a British Royal Air Force Voyager jet last month became "the world's first sustainable-fuel military transporter flight" using 100 per cent SAF.

The production of SAF is still in its infancy and should triple this year worldwide to 300mn litres, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), an industry body.

In 2019, just 25mn litres of the 413bn litres of aviation fuel used was SAF, International Energy Agency (IEA) figures show.

The cost of SAF also needs to be addressed as it costs about four times as much as kerosene.

AFP

Germany opens LNG terminal to replace Russian gas

Wilhelmshaven, Germany - Germany on Saturday inaugurated its first liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal, built in record time, as the country scrambles to adapt to life without Russian energy.

The rig in the North Sea port of Wilhelmshaven was opened by Chancellor Olaf Scholz at a ceremony on board a specialist vessel known as an FSRU, named the Hoegh Esperanza.

"It's a good day for our country and a sign to the whole world that the German economy will be able to remain strong," Scholz said from the boat.

The Hoegh Esperanza sounded its horn as the chancellor, dressed in a high visibility jacket, approached.

The ship has already been stocked with gas from Nigeria that could supply 50,000 homes for a year, and the terminal is set to begin deliveries on December 22.

Germany plans to open four more government-funded LNG terminals over the next few

months as well as a private terminal in the port of Lubmin.

Together, the terminals could deliver 30bn cubic metres of gas a year from next year, or a third of Germany's total gas needs - if Berlin can find enough LNG to service them.

LNG terminals allow for the import by sea of natural gas which has been chilled and turned into a liquid to make it easier to transport.

The FRSU stocks the LNG, then turns it back into a ready-to-use gas.

Until now, Germany had no LNG terminals and relied on cheap gas delivered through pipelines from Russia for 55 per cent of its supply.

Supply worries

But since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, gas supplies to Germany have been throttled and Berlin has been forced to rely on LNG processed by Belgian, French and Dutch ports, paying a premium for transport costs.

The government decided to



The Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) ship 'Hoegh Esperanza' is docked during the opening ceremony of the Uniper LNG terminal at the Jade Bight in Wilhelmshaven on Sunday (AFP)

invest in building its own LNG terminals as quickly as possible and has spent billions of euros (dollars) on hiring FSRUs to service them.

However, Germany has not yet signed a single major long-term contract to begin filling the terminals from January.

"The import capacity is there. But what worries me are the deliveries," Johan Lilliestam, a researcher at the University of Potsdam, told AFP.

A contract has been signed with Qatar for LNG to supply the Wilhelmshaven terminal but deliveries are not set to begin until

2026.

Suppliers want long-term contracts, while the German government is not keen to be locked into multi-year gas deals as it wants the country to become climate-neutral by 2045.

"Companies need to know that the purchasing side in Ger-

many will eventually diminish if we want to meet climate protection targets," economy minister Robert Habeck has said.

Environmental campaigners have criticised the LNG project, with the DUH association announcing it will take legal action. A handful of protestors turned out in Wilhelmshaven with placards demanding an "End to gas".

Cold winter

Germany could initially be forced to buy LNG from the expensive spot markets, which would lead to higher prices for consumers.

The market could also be squeezed next year by renewed demand in China as it emerges from strict Covid-19 curbs, Andreas Schroeder, an expert at the ICIS energy research institute, told AFP.

"If Europe has been able to receive so much LNG in recent months, it is because Chinese demand was low," Schroeder said.

China recently signed a deal to buy gas from Qatar for 27

years - the longest such deal in history, according to Doha.

Germany has also had a cold winter so far, meaning the gas tanks have been emptying faster than expected.

"Gas consumption is increasing. This is a risk, especially if the cold spell continues," said Klaus Mueller, the head of the country's Federal Network Agency regulatory body, in a recent interview.

As a result, there is a real risk that Germany could experience temporary supply disruptions next winter, according to Schroeder.

Gas usage is currently down 13 per cent compared to last year but the government wants that figure to be closer to 20 per cent.

In Europe, the gap between supply and demand could reach 27bn cubic metres (950bn cubic feet) in 2023, according to an IEA report - equivalent to 6.5 per cent of the European Union's annual consumption.

AFP



Experts discuss challenges, future of healthcare

Forbes Middle East and Pure Health's innovation-led Healthcare Summit 2022 gathered over 300 delegates to hear from 57 thought-provoking speakers across 14 panel discussions over two days in Abu Dhabi on December 13 and 14. The first-of-its-kind event delved into the critical challenges and opportunities impacting healthcare systems across the Middle East and beyond.

Attendees celebrated the advanced state of the Middle East's healthcare ecosystem and debated the vital pioneering investments and partnerships needed to retain its world-class standards. The two-day summit offered a platform for industry disruptors, healthcare regulators, and medical science innovators to raise time-critical questions needed today to uncover what the future of healthcare will look like for the next generation in the decades to come.

Shaista Asif, Group Chief Operating Officer of PureHealth Group, said, "We owe it to our coming generations to build a healthcare system which is not only convenient and accessible but also robust and holistic, so that they could have better health spans eventually resulting in longer lifespans."

"The future of healthcare is in the cloud, and we have to play our part to ensure that we drive the bullet train towards the fourth industrial revolution."

Shaista ended the discussion with making a plea for Hayat's organ donation initiative. She said, "One organ donor can save up to 8 lives and this is the greatest gift anyone can give humanity, the gift of life!"

Mohamad Hamade, CEO of Amanat Holdings, said, "As a private investment company, Amanat recognises the public sector's accomplishments over the last two decades, as it has managed to lay down the foundation to attract private players by publishing guidelines, defining standards, and providing data on the needs and gaps in the healthcare sector."

"This has complemented the efforts of the government to further build capacity, build capability, transfer knowledge and adopt technology. Now more than ever, we require a concerted effort between the public and private sectors to replicate this experience across Life Sciences and Healthcare, building on previous successes."

Sherif Beshara, CEO of American Hospital Dubai, said, "American Hospital Dubai is pleased to have participated in the Forbes Middle East Healthcare Summit 2022, which generated a wealth of ideas and transformative insights from the region's leading thought architects. It was a rewarding experience to collaborate toward a collective vision of a healthier future for all."

"The seminal event signposted the way to a future shaped by more breakthroughs, achievements, and seamless solutions to create a healthcare ecosystem of the highest quality and purpose. It is imperative to continuously expand the boundaries of healthcare knowledge and its application to serve humanity better. Our future is how we can reimagine it, and events like this provide the momentum to reach there faster."

Delegates included representatives from the Abu Dhabi Public Health Center, Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, G42 Healthcare, Amanat Holdings, American Hospital Dubai, Viatrix, Jamjoom Pharma, Saudi Chemical Company Holding, Johns Hopkins Aramco Healthcare, SaudiVax, McKinsey Health Institute, Daman, Abu Dhabi Health Services Company - SEHA, Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence, Global Ventures, and Alma Health, among others. Conversations explored ways to improve the average lifespan and uncover new drugs and vital research, and discussed genomics, tech wearables, telehealth, cloud adoption in healthcare, public-private partnerships, and funding newer models of care.

An impressive line-up of speakers featured Dr Mariam al Mazrouei, Executive Director of Healthcare Payers Sector, and Dr Omar Najim, Director of Executive Affairs and Special Projects Office, from the Abu Dhabi Department of Health, and Dr Farida al Hosani, Executive Director of the Communicable Diseases Sector at the Abu Dhabi Public Health Center, Advisor at WHO PIP Framework, and Adjunct Associate Professor at UAEU.

The summit concluded with a glittering recognition ceremony and a gala dinner.

Bank Muscat wins award for best digital banking



Bank Muscat the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman has won the prestigious Best Corporate/Institutional Digital Bank (Oman) award from Global Finance.

The award was received on behalf of the bank by Mohammed Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, at the Middle East Digital Bank and Innovators Awards 2022 held in Dubai, said a press statement.

Winners were selected based on a number of criteria, including their strategy for attracting and servicing digital customers, success in getting clients to use digital offerings, growth of digital customers, breadth of product offerings, evidence of tangible benefits gained from digital initiatives, and site design and functionality.

Speaking on the occasion, Ilham Murtadha al Hamaid, General Manager - Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "We take this opportunity to thank Global Finance for recognising the bank's innovative digital banking services and products, which have been greatly benefitting our customers."

Bank Muscat offers the latest digital financial services and solutions to its corporate and public sector customers. With emphasis on multiple channels and new products that cater to different sectors, the bank is focused on maintaining its leadership in through innovative products and services including electronic payment and online services. We would like to thank all our customers for their continued patronage and strong confidence in Bank Muscat."

Digitalisation is in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and will further enhance financial inclusion in Oman. The bank's customers are benefitting immensely from the latest devices, solutions and technological advances made available to them through the implementation of cutting-edge technology.

ROHM to present Italy's Kataklo theatre

The Royal Opera House Muscat has announced three nights of spectacular dance in Carousel, from the international ambassadors of Italian culture, the Kataklo Athletic Dance Theatre. Following on from their performance of Play that closed the Spring 2022 season, the opera house is thrilled to offer another acrobatic extravaganza to audiences in Oman.

Carousel takes moments from our lives and transforms them into a dance, drawing out the emotional and physical connections which make them special.



Giulia Staccioli, founder and artistic director of Kataklo Athletic Dance Theatre, creates the Grand Italian Hotel on stage, where a cross section of society, from the VIP guest to the humblest hotel worker, welcomes in the new year with a big celebration. Eleven dancers flee from the gray city to reach the hotel, bringing to life the hotel's characteristic features: From the hall to the suite, from the corridors to the gym, from the restaurant to the swimming pool. With a blend of music from famous masterpieces of Italian music and some international pop hits, Kataklo dances solos, duos and choral moments. In this production, special guests are invited to join in this crazy night: Omani extras who share the stage with the dancers.

Carousel will take place on Thursday, Friday and (December 22, 23 and 24) at 4pm. For tickets one may use the ROHM app.

Khimji Ramdas Bath Solutions awarded

A brand committed to business excellence, sustainability initiatives and customer-centricity, Khimji Ramdas Bath Solutions (KRBS) has been bringing the best of global brands to Oman.

Honouring its continued efforts, the company was recently conferred the 'Luxury Bath & Sanitaryware Solutions Brand of the Year' title at the Signature Luxury 100 event, which was held at the Crowne Plaza, Qurum on December 7.

The evening welcomed H H



Sayyid Muadh bin Dheyab al Said as the esteemed Chief Guest, alongside H H Sayyida Dr Taghreed Turki Mahmoud al Said, Sayidda Basma al Said, Sheikh Issa bin Salim al Mashani and Sheikh Dr Hamdan bin Saba al Saadi as the Guests of Honour.

It also witnessed the presence of C-suite executives from leading brands, industry experts and key delegates.

Varun Khimji, Director - Khimji Ramdas said, "KRBS, which is a part of Khimji Ramdas Group, a leading conglomerate that was established as early as 1870, mirrors the same level of dedication to quality as its parent company. This award further attests to Khimji Ramdas Bath Solutions' keen focus on revolutionising the sanitaryware market."

Alfardan Motors launches new Grecale - a new SUV by Maserati in Oman

With a promise to make Everyday Exceptional, the Grecale - a new SUV by Maserati, made its debut In Oman through Alfardan Motors, Oman's official Importer of the legendary Italian auto manufacturer.

The Maserati Grecale made an impressive debut in Muscat to a select audience of media, influencers and VIP customers at the exclusive Alia Gallery.

Hamdy Elshantoury, General Manager, Middle East and Africa at Maserati, said, "Maserati is embarking on a new era of change with a range of new models, innovations and revolutionary new projects. With its focus now on the future, the Grecale embodies the Italian boldness that defines the Maserati



brand and its ability to make luxury and exceptional performance a natural part of everyday life.

"In addition, the new SUV will complete a veritable range within a range, the fullest ever,

with internal combustion/hybrid engines and the future full-electric motor, meeting all the expectations of our customers."

Speaking at the launch, Charly Dagher, Regional General Man-

ager of Alfardan said: "Maserati has always been committed to offering high-quality icons that combine craftsmanship and state-of-the-art technological innovation. Throughout Maserati's

true embodiment of Maserati's intrinsic values of Made in Italy and its new era."

Grecale strikes the right balance between versatility, elegance, performance and innovation, guaranteeing performance, comfort and safety, all at the same time. These features are combined with off-road capabilities and uncompromising driving pleasure. Developed at the Maserati Innovation Lab in Modena, the new SUV is produced at the Cassino plant.

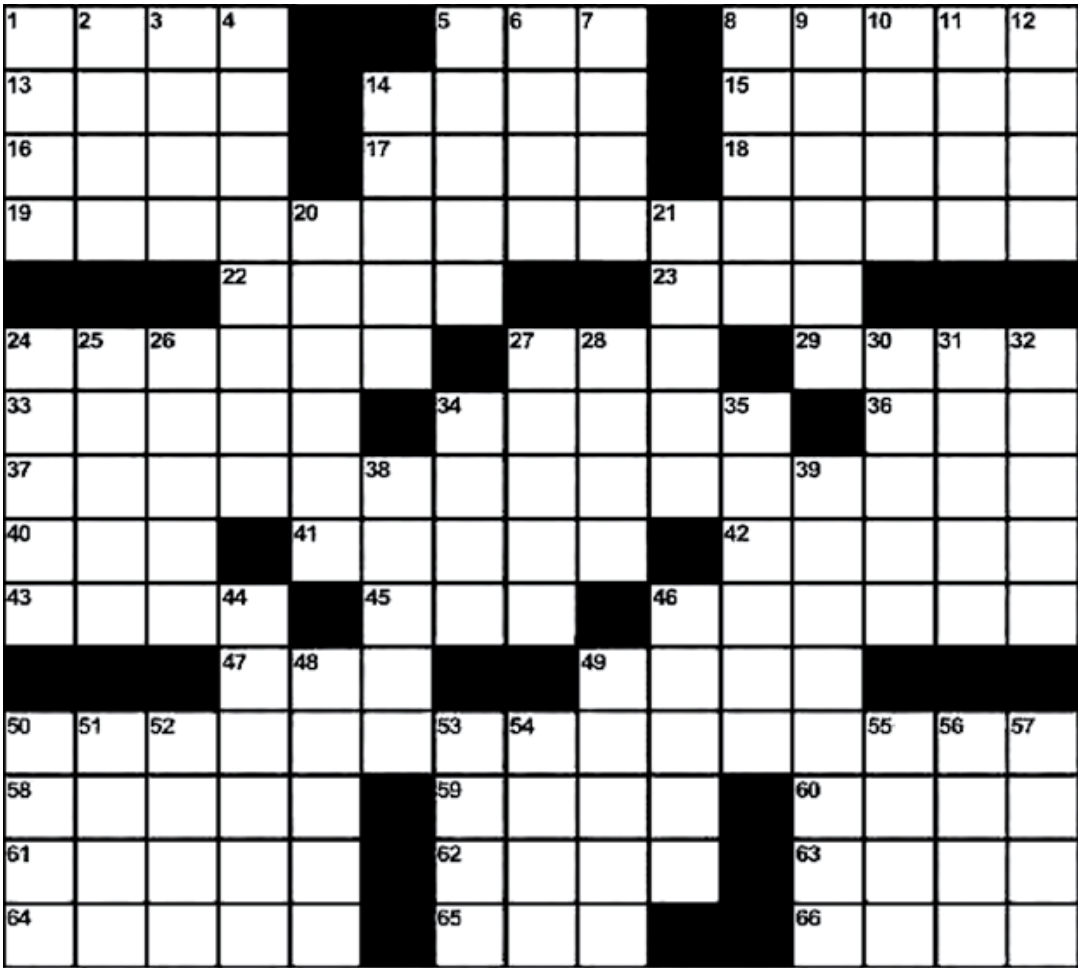
An extremely wide range of engines is available on the Grecale: conventional internal combustion, hybrid, and in the future Grecale will also be the first full-electric SUV in Maserati history.

The three versions of the Gre-

cale are: GT, powered by a four-cylinder mild hybrid engine capable of delivering 300 hp; Modena, with a four-cylinder 330-hp mild hybrid engine; and the powerful Trofeo, equipped with a high-performance 3.0L 530-hp petrol V6 based on the Nettuno engine fitted to the MC20. Completing the range will be the Grecale Folgore, the 100 per cent electric version with 400V technology.

The new SUV is best-in-class in terms of interior space, drivability, handling, acceleration (0-100km per hour in 3.8 seconds - on the Trofeo), top speed (285km per hour - again on the Trofeo), sound quality and extensive use of fine materials such as wood, carbon fibre and leather.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Sword handle
- 5) English network
- 8) "Desist" partner
- 13) Almond shade
- 14) Lip balm ingredient
- 15) Equipped like a row-boat
- 16) Emulate Pisa's tower
- 17) Fill, as a dishwasher
- 18) North Carolina fort
- 19) Wannabe wrangler
- 22) Abandon
- 23) "Aladdin" character
- 24) "Jurassic Park" predator, briefly
- 27) Make sense (with "up")
- 29) Jeweler's inventory
- 33) Less hale
- 34) "La Boheme," e.g.
- 36) Extinct flightless bird
- 37) Old Saturday morning cartoon (with "The")
- 40) Fond du_ Wisc.
- 41) Bypass
- 42) Cunning tricks
- 43) An unfledged hawk

- 45) Do something
- 46) Exclusively
- 47) Builder's acquisition
- 49) Driving-away word?
- 50) Cheerleader, typically
- 58) Raccoon cousin
- 59) Sensory input
- 60) Philandering fellow
- 61) Atlas enlargement
- 62) Captured
- 63) Barley beards
- 64) Accomplishments
- 65) Piz Bemina, e.g.
- 66) Foot pads

DOWN

- 1) Grasped
- 2) Computer brand
- 3) Bonn woman
- 4) Atomic no. 74
- 5) Bank deposit?
- 6) Big pig
- 7) Hand over
- 8) Computer-programming language
- 9) Insect with pincers
- 10) Certain Middle-East-erner
- 11) Type of lily

- 12) Tense
- 14) Take in, as trousers
- 20) Some are animated
- 21) Close-knit group
- 24) Certain gun
- 25) Put to rest, as fears
- 26) Skin fold
- 27) To the left, at sea
- 28) Job for a body shop
- 30) "South Pacific" hero
- 31) Work the runway
- 32) Smart-mouthed
- 34) Connected to your ears?
- 35) Feeling lightheaded
- 38) Use Rollerblades
- 39) 2.2 pounds
- 44) Put on the agenda
- 46) Ocean hazard
- 48) Leaves out
- 49) Inside info
- 50) Battery contents
- 51) "The_Ranger"
- 52) Beam intensely
- 53) Brit's roster
- 54) Questionable thing to worship

- 55) The Hawkeye State
- 56) Litter member
- 57) Amount to make do with, sometimes

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Lavish yourself with love and attention today! Go on, you deserve some pampering. And if your budget allows, buy yourself something you've wanted for a while. You have to take care of yourself before you can take care of anyone else, so make sure you're happy. If you're in a relationship right now, don't make your life all about this other person. You need your own identity. And if you aren't in a relationship right now, make the most of your independence.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Right now, you're probably not feeling in sync with your friends or coworkers, but that won't stop you from having a very successful day. All you need to do is give yourself some time to do whatever you need to do. Don't put any pressure on yourself, and be prepared for your mind to wander here and there. Try to (slowly) get more involved in the activities of your favorite people, or just listen to them talk

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
At this point, your friends are pretty well trained. Most of them don't bat an eyelash when you get going on one of your favorite subjects, even if it's in a public place. They've learned that resistance is futile, and besides, it's usually quite entertaining to see you in action. Today, however, even the most seasoned among them will be hard-pressed to keep a straight face. Of course, you might have an equally hard time of it. Basically, one never knows what you might say or do.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
You were absolutely certain you'd never mention this to anyone, but suddenly it's just impossible to resist talking about it. Oh, and needless to say, "it" most likely involves someone you find endlessly appealing. Go ahead and share your secret with your best friend or sibling. You need to get this off your chest. You and your confidant might even end up with a battle plan that will bring you closer to breaking the ice.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You've never been fond of blind dates. After one too many interesting experiences, to say you're less than fond of them wouldn't quite cover your sentiments. But for some darn reason a friend or family member is insisting that there's someone you've just got to meet. Who knows? They could be right this time. Just don't sign up for dinner. Suggest coffee or drinks and duck out early if you need to

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Still feeling solid, practical and responsible? Not to mention grounded? Good, because with what tumbles out of your mouth today, you're going to need to be feeling confident. Well, it's tough to say what it's going to be, but it won't be something that you or anyone around you could ever have predicted. Almost sounds like fun, doesn't it?

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Your friends are the greatest gifts you've ever given yourself. You chose them to be in your life, and they've done so much to make you grateful you did. When was the last time you showed them how much you value them? Today, reach out and just let them know how much you appreciate them. Send some silly greetings, plan your next outing. Remember your good times together and let them know that you'll never take them for granted

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Real changes are coming soon in one of your oldest relationships. Someone is finally ready to speak up and make things right between the two of you. But when this person steps up, are you ready to support them? If someone makes an effort, you need to make an equal effort. Show them that you're always fair, that you appreciate and respect the move they're making. You can't be too critical of others right now. They aren't perfect, but neither are you. This is a bonding opportunity.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Today could give you a wonderful chance to discover some new details about a person you've been trying to get to know better. They're even more interesting than you thought they were, and the two of you could find a whole new common ground. Your ability to connect with others has always been strong, but right now you have the right attitude and the right amount of energy required to really cement a growing relationship whether it's romantic or not.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
The challenges you're facing are not only adding a certain amount of stress to your life, they are causing some frustration in the lives of your loved ones too. They see how you're suffering and it's not sitting well with them. You might have to reassure them today just to keep them off your back and keep them from worrying about you. Work a little harder at separating your personal life from your work life and this kind of tension won't happen again.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
It's just your nature to wonder, but when you do too much of it, it can easily turn to obsession. Keeping that in mind, it might be time to stop worrying if there was a deeper meaning behind a comment a dear one recently made. You're a natural-born detective, but some clues just aren't worth following up. And some folks aren't clever enough to insert hidden meaning into everything they say.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
It's all about perseverance today. Whatever you're doing, just keep at it! You may be sidetracked from your initial goals by an inconsiderate person or unexpected interruption, but you can't let that stop you from trying to get back on track. Throwing your hands and giving up has never been your strategy for handling problems, and it you shouldn't even consider it today. People admire your stick-to-it attitude. It's part of the reason you're so inspiring.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which play, and then novel, explores, through the 164-year-history of one family, a social system much criticised since the 19th century?

- A. Three Kingdoms
- B. The Lehman Trilogy
- C. Mission Drift
- D. The James Plays

02. What do the "C"s stand for in the acronym CCUS?

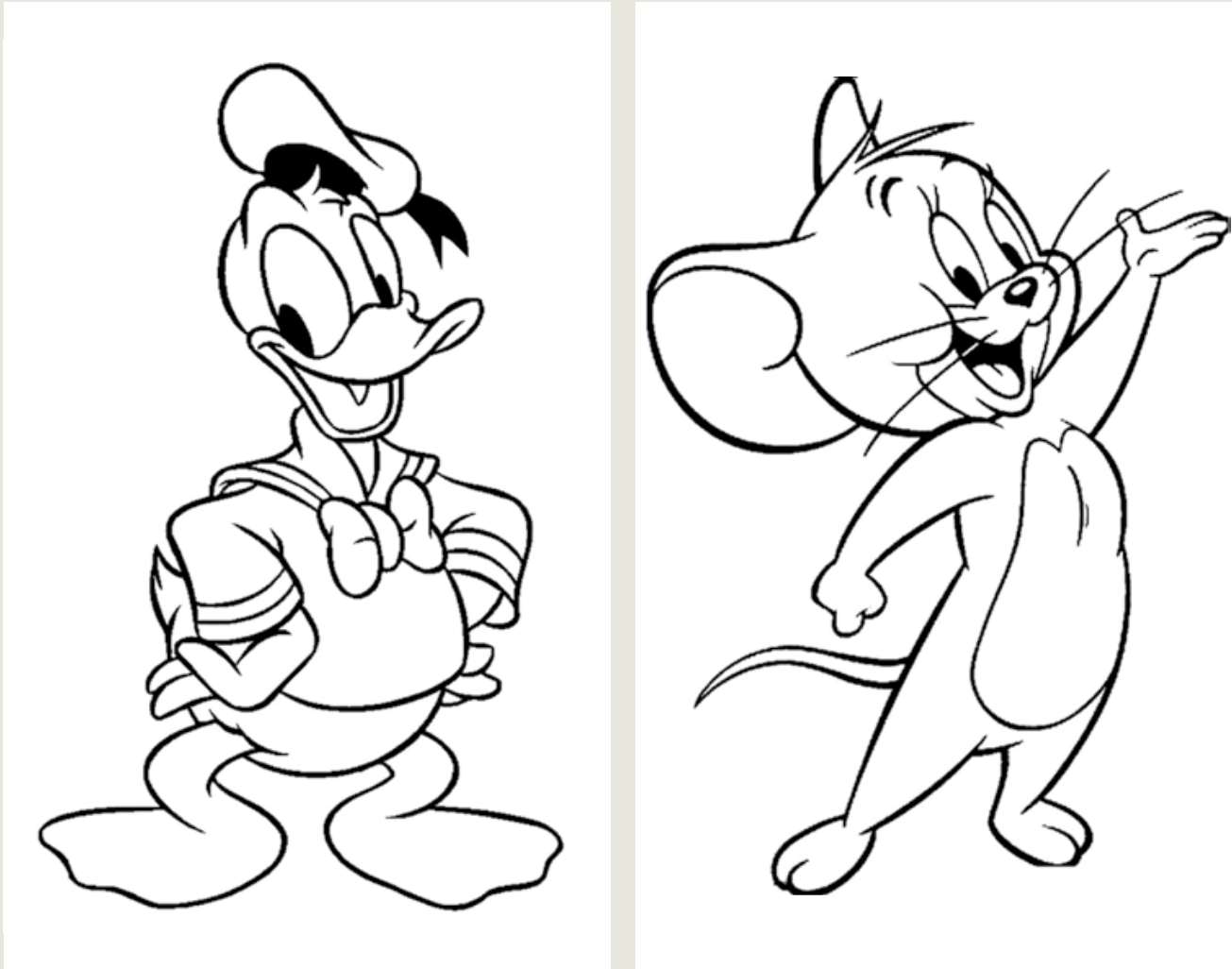
- A. Commander (in) Chief
- B. Climate change
- C. Competition (between) China
- D. Carbon capture

03. Football Golf has annual World and European Championships, as well as Open Tournaments in Germany, Denmark, Sweden and what other country?

- A. The Netherlands
- B. Finland
- C. Estonia
- D. Spain

Answers: 1.B 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	A	D	E
R	R	S	T
C	B	P	D
A	U	O	T

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Fiji poll tied, opposition eyes deal for power

PM Frank Bainimarama’s party and the opposition coalition were both projected to secure 26 seats

Suva, Fiji - Fiji’s tumultuous general election ended in a cliffhanger on Sunday, with two rival ex-coup leaders failing to win a clear majority and needing to woo a kingmaking minor party to secure power.

Incumbent Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama’s Fiji First party and an opposition coalition led by Sitiveni Rabuka were both projected to secure 26 seats in the 55-seat legislature, according to a Fijian Election Office tally. Fiji has been upended by four coups in the past 35 years, and many on the streets of its capital, Suva, had hoped in vain for a smooth election.

Instead, in a vote beset by delays and technical glitches, the opposition leader was summoned for police questioning and the threat of military intervention was never far from mind.

The prime minister and the next government will now likely be determined through party horsestrading in a negotiating process that could take up to two weeks.

The opposition - after alleging counting irregularities and ap-

pealing for the military to step in - emerged ahead in the popular vote and with their greatest opportunity yet to end Bainimarama’s 16 years in power.

Rabuka, a veteran opposition leader and ex-rugby international nicknamed ‘Rambo’, stopped short of claiming victory, but sounded like a man who had won against the odds.

“For those who follow, the generations to come, they will look back at the election and say that was the turning point in Fiji’s journey,” he told supporters.

“Together we will discover the heart of this great nation of ours.”

He expressed confidence his coalition could reach a power-securing deal with the Social Democratic party and its deeply devout leader Viliame Gavoka, who are projected to hold three vital seats.

“From all indications, I can sense that we have harmony in our policies more than they have with the Fiji First party,” Rabuka told reporters after leading a packed church service through a series of Fijian hymns.



People’s Alliance Party leader Sitiveni Rabuka (left) and Biman Prasad, leader of the National Federation Party, share a smile at a joint press conference in Fiji’s capital city Suva on Sunday (AFP)

‘Traditional partners’

The election outcome holds significance beyond Fiji - Bainimarama, 68, has been close with Beijing, while Rabuka, 74, has signalled his desire to loosen

Fiji’s ties to China.

Gavoka gave little away on Sunday, but did suggest he was not in favour of a stronger relationship with China.

“I know Solomon Islands have gone out and done this security

thing with the Chinese,” he told reporters.

“We won’t do that. We will go with our traditional partners Australia and New Zealand.”

Solomon Islands signed a security pact with Beijing this year

- a move that sparked fears over Chinese military presence in the region. Gavoka, who is staunchly religious, also ruled out changing Fiji’s constitution to make it a Christian country.

The former Fiji Rugby Union chairman was arrested in 2010 for sending tourism operators emails about a Fijian pastor falsely prophesying an impending tsunami.

From all indications, I can sense that we have harmony in our policies more than they have with the Fiji First party

SITIVENI RABUKA

Turnaround

After dominating Fijian politics for close to two decades, Bainimarama has not spoken publicly since election day.

Flanked by his granddaughter, he cut off a reporter’s question

about respecting the outcome of the poll, before saying he would.

For Rabuka it has been a rollercoaster week.

Fiji’s polls ran into trouble early on Thursday morning when what election officials called a technical ‘anomaly’ knocked results offline for four hours.

Rabuka called for counting to be stopped and said the ‘anomalies’ left him with no faith in the process.

He wrote to the commander of the Fijian armed forces, Major General Jone Kalouniwa, asking him to step in.

That request was rejected, and Rabuka was then hauled in for questioning by detectives.

International observers said they had witnessed no significant irregularities on election day.

On his release, Rabuka told AFP it was part of a government effort to intimidate him. “The way this government has operated, we’ve been talking about a climate of fear. This is how they instil that fear,” he said.

AFP

North Korea fires 2 ballistic missiles, says Seoul’s military

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired two medium-range ballistic missiles on Sunday, Seoul’s military said, days after Pyongyang announced a successful test of a solid-fuel motor for a new weapons system.

Military tensions on the Korean peninsula have risen sharply this year as Pyongyang has carried out an unprecedented blitz of weapons tests, including the launch of its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile ever last month.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected two medium-range ballistic missiles that had been fired from the Tongchang-ri area in North Pyongan province.

The missiles were fired from 11:13am (0213 GMT) to 12:05pm into the East Sea, it said, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan. They were fired on a ‘lofted’ trajectory and flew around 500km (311 miles), JCS said in a statement, adding South Korean and US intelligence were analysing the launch ‘in consideration of recent trends related to North Korea’s missile development’.

Tongchang-ri is home to a major rocket launch site, where the North tested a ‘high-thrust solid-fuel motor’ on Thursday, with state media describing it as an important test ‘for the development of another new-type strategic weapon system’.

“Given that the missiles launched today are medium-range ballistic missiles, it is assessed to be test-firings of a new ballistic missile equipped with the solid-fuel engine tested on December 15,” said Cheong Seong-chang, a researcher at the Sejong Institute.

The South’s military ‘strongly’ condemned Sunday’s launch, calling it a ‘serious provocation’ and a ‘clear violation’ of UN Security Council resolutions.

“Our military will maintain a

firm readiness posture based on the ability to carry out an overwhelming response to any provocations by North Korea,” it added.

Kim’s wishlist

Despite heavy international sanctions over its weapons programmes, Pyongyang has built up an arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

All its known ICBMs are liquid-fuelled, however, and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has placed strategic priority on developing solid-fuel engines for more advanced missiles.

Liquid-fuel rockets are notoriously difficult to operate and take a long time to prepare for launch, making them slower and easier for the enemy to spot and destroy.

The more mobile solid-fuel missiles have a much shorter prep time, and are harder to detect before launch.

A wishlist Kim revealed last year included solid-fuel ICBMs that could be launched from land or submarines.

The latest motor test was a step towards that goal, but it is not clear how far North Korea has come in the development of such a missile, analysts said.

The isolated country’s policy direction for next year will be laid out at a key party meeting later this month, and the official Korean Central News Agency earlier reported Kim saying that 2023 would be a ‘historic year’.

AFP

Our military will maintain a firm readiness posture to carry out an overwhelming response

SOUTH KOREA

Pope signed resignation letter a decade ago

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis revealed for the first time in an interview on Sunday that he had signed a resignation letter nearly a decade ago should poor health prevent him from carrying out his duties.

Francis - who turned 86 on Saturday - has said in the past that he would step down from the papacy should health problems keep him from his duties.

In Spanish newspaper ABC, the pontiff said he signed his resignation letter and handed it over to the Vatican’s secretary of state, Tarcisio Bertone, before that cardinal’s retirement in 2013.

“I signed the resignation and I told him, ‘In case of medical impediment or whatever, here’s my resignation. You have it,’” the pope said.

Asked by the interviewer whether he wanted that fact to be known, Francis replied: “That’s why I’m telling you.”



Pope Francis greets children and staff of the Santa Marta Dispensary, which is dedicated to helping infants in need, during a private audience at Paul-VI hall in the Vatican on Sunday (AFP)

He added that he didn’t know what Bertone subsequently did with the letter.

Francis has been limited in his ability to walk by an inoperable knee condition which has forced him to rely on a wheelchair in recent months. The pope has had

to cancel or curtail activities several times over the past year because of pain and in an interview in July he acknowledged that he needed to slow down.

“I think that at my age and with this limitation, I have to save myself a little bit to be able to

serve the Church. Or, alternatively, to think about the possibility of stepping aside,” he said.

Francis’s predecessor, Benedict XVI, quit over failing health in 2013. He now lives quietly in Vatican City.

AFP

Beloved ‘Hollywood Cat’ mountain lion euthanised in Los Angeles, say officials

Los Angeles, US - The Los Angeles area’s most famous mountain lion, an aged wild male feline sighted around the city’s Griffith Park, was euthanised on Saturday, wildlife officials said.

For years, it was known to prowl around the hillside ‘Hollywood’ sign visible around much of Los Angeles, a fitting setting for a celebrity cat.

It earned the nickname Hollywood Cat, but the mountain lion - estimated to be around 11 years old - is officially called P-22. State and federal wildlife officers decided earlier this month to capture it due to its erratic behaviour, perhaps associated with being struck by a vehicle.

Veterinarians found ‘significant trauma’ to its head, right eye and internal organs, California’s Department of Fish and Wildlife said in a statement.

The experts also found underlying health issues, including ‘irreversible kidney disease, chronic weight loss, extensive parasitic skin infection over his entire body and localised arthritis’.

“The most difficult, but



This handout photo courtesy of the National Park Service shows Los Angeles mountain lion P-22 when he was captured in 2019 (AFP)

compassionate choice was to respectfully minimise his suffering and stress by humanely ending his journey,” the statement said.

“Mountain lion P-22 has had an extraordinary life and captured the hearts of the people of Los Angeles and beyond.”

Euthanising the cougar was a punch to the gut for game ex-

pers who had grown to love the animal.

“This really hurts,” said Chuck Bonham, director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife, when he announced P-22’s death, according to USA Today.

“It’s been an incredibly difficult several days.”

‘Our favourite celebrity’

Congressman Adam Schiff, who represents part of Los Angeles County, said he was ‘heartbroken’ at P-22’s passing.

“He was our favourite celebrity neighbour, occasional troublemaker, and beloved L.A. mascot,” Schiff tweeted.

“But most of all he was a magnificent, wild creature, who reminded us that we are part of a natural world much bigger than ourselves.”

California Governor Gavin Newsom praised P-22’s ‘incredible journey’ in a statement.

“P-22’s survival on an island of wilderness in the heart of Los Angeles captivated people around the world,” Newsom said.

Griffith Park, where P-22 lived for perhaps a decade, is hemmed in by freeways and urban sprawl. It is a nine-square-mile (23-square-kilometre) isolated patch of nature.

Experts marveled at how the wild cat got across either of two major Los Angeles freeways -

Uganda lifts lockdown in Ebola epicentre

Kampala, Uganda - Uganda on Saturday lifted a two-month lockdown on two districts at the epicentre of the country’s Ebola epidemic, amid cautious hope that the outbreak could end soon.

Since authorities declared an Ebola outbreak on September 20, the East African nation has registered 142 confirmed cases and 56 deaths, with the disease spreading to the capital Kampala.

The two central districts at the heart of the outbreak, Mubende and Kassanda, were placed under lockdown by President Yoweri Museveni on October 15.

But on Saturday, Vice President Jessica Alupo announced that the government was ‘lifting all movement restrictions and curfew in Mubende and Kassanda districts with immediate effect’.

AFP

7 Iraqi cops killed in suspected IS attack

Kirkuk, Iraq - At least seven members of Iraq's federal police were killed on Sunday during an attack near Kirkuk in the country's north, where remnants of Islamic State group militants are active, police and government sources told AFP. A bomb blast initially targeted a truck transporting the men. It was followed by 'a direct attack with small arms', near the village of Chahal al-Matar, a federal police officer who attributed the assault to IS, told AFP on condition of anonymity.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. "An assailant has been killed and we are looking for the others," the officer said, adding that two policemen were also wounded in the attack.

In Baghdad, an official from the Ministry of Interior confirmed the attack, saying seven police, including one officer, were killed.

IS seized large swathes of Iraqi and Syrian territory from 2014, declaring a 'caliphate' where they ruled with brutality before the militants' defeat in late 2017 by Iraqi forces backed by a US-led military coalition.

IS lost its last Syrian bastion, near the Iraqi border, in 2019.

AFP

France slams Israel's expulsion of French-Palestinian lawyer

Roissy- Charles De Gaulle Airport, France - French-Palestinian human rights lawyer Salah Hamouri, held without charge in Israeli prisons since March accused of security offences, arrived in Paris on Sunday following his expulsion from Israel condemned by Paris.

Hamouri, 37, had been held in Israel under a controversial practice known as administrative detention, which allows suspects to be detained for renewable periods of up to six months.

He arrived at the French capital's Charles de Gaulle airport on Sunday morning, an AFP correspondent saw, the culmination of a lengthy judicial saga after his deportation.

"I have changed location but the fight continues," an emotional Hamouri said at the airport, where he was welcomed by his wife Elsa, politicians, NGO representatives and supporters of the Palestinian cause.

"I have an enormous responsibility to my cause and people. We can't abandon Palestine. Resistance is our right."

Israel's interior ministry earlier on Sunday announced the deportation following Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked's decision to withdraw his residency status.

"We condemn today the Israeli authorities' decision, against the law, to expel Salah Hamouri to France," the French foreign ministry said in a statement.

An Israeli military court sentenced



French-Palestinian lawyer Salah Hamouri (centre) arrives at the Parisian airport of Roissy, after he was expelled from Israel, on Sunday (AFP)

I have changed location but the fight continues. I have an enormous responsibility to my cause and people. We can't abandon Palestine. Resistance is our right

SAHAL HAMOURI

tenced Hamouri, who holds French citizenship, to administrative detention in March, accusing him of being a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and said he 'endangers security in the region'.

Israel, the United States and the European Union consider the

PFLP a 'terrorist group'. It has been implicated in several deadly attacks on Israelis.

Hamouri denies links to the PFLP.

'Illegal' deportation

The French foreign ministry said Paris had been 'fully mobilised, including at the highest level of

the state', to enable Hamouri to defend his rights, benefit from all possible assistance and lead a normal life in his native east Jerusalem. "France also took several steps to communicate to the Israeli authorities in the clearest way its opposition to this expulsion of a Palestinian resident of east Jerusalem, an occupied territory under the Fourth Geneva Convention," it added.

"It's a happy day for a family reunited but for the Palestinian people, it's a sad day," Amnesty International's France chief, Jean-Claude Samouiller, told AFP.

He described the expulsion as

a 'crime of apartheid'.

Supporters said Hamouri's deportation from his birthplace by an 'occupying power' was illegal. Amnesty International and French NGOs said Hamouri's deportation aimed to hinder his human rights work and was part of Israel's 'long-term political objective to diminish the Palestinian population' of annexed east Jerusalem, which Palestinians want as the capital of a future state. Hamouri has been arrested and jailed by Israeli authorities on several occasions, including in 2005.

Following that arrest he was tried and convicted by an Israeli court on charges of plotting to assassinate Ovadia Yosef, a prominent rabbi and spiritual leader of the ultra-Orthodox Shas political party.

Hamouri was released in December 2011 as part of a prisoner swap. He has always maintained his innocence.

Born in east Jerusalem, Hamouri does not have Israeli nationality, but he held a residency permit that Israeli authorities revoked.

"We didn't think it was possible to deport somebody from his birthplace," Hamouri's mother Denise said earlier.

Israel has occupied the West Bank and east Jerusalem since the 1967 Six-Day War.

Last month, he was informed he would be deported, but the expulsion was delayed as his

lawyers contested the case.

'A great achievement'

Earlier this month, Israeli authorities confirmed the revocation of his residency, paving the way for Hamouri's imminent expulsion despite a new administrative detention hearing scheduled for January 1. "It is a great achievement to have been able to cause, just before the end of my term, his expulsion," Interior Minister Shaked said on Sunday.

Benjamin Netanyahu, winner of the November 1 legislative elections, is expected to form a new Israeli government with allies from ultra-Orthodox and far-right parties.

Hamouri worked for the prisoner support group Addameer. In November 2021 it was among six Palestinian civil society groups that Israel's army said could no longer operate legally in the West Bank, after Defence Minister Benny Gantz said they were collaborating with the PFLP.

In April Hamouri, along with rights groups, filed a complaint in France against Israeli surveillance firm NSO Group for having 'illegally infiltrated' his mobile phone with the spyware Pegasus. He is one of several Palestinian activists whose phones were hacked using the Pegasus malware, according to a report in November by human rights groups.

AFP

Tunisia opposition calls for president to resign

Tunis, Tunisia - The leader of Tunisia's main opposition alliance said on Sunday that President Kais Saied should 'leave immediately', a day after voters overwhelmingly snubbed elections for a neutered parliament.

The electoral board said 8.8 per cent of the nine-million-strong electorate had turned out for Saturday's polls, the culmination of a power grab by Saied in the only democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring.

An abstention rate of more than 91 per cent 'shows that very, very few Tunisians support Kais Saied's approach', Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, president of the National Salvation Front, told AFP by telephone. He said the result showed 'great popular disavowal' of the



An ISIE agent begins counting ballots at a polling station in Tunis on Saturday during the parliamentary election (AFP)

process that began when Saied, elected in 2019, seized executive powers last year.

The president in July 2021 sacked the government, froze parliament and surrounded it

with military vehicles, following months of political deadlock and economic crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Saied, a former law professor, followed up by seizing control of

the judiciary and pushing through a constitution that consolidates his near-absolute power in a widely boycotted referendum in July.

His moves, a decade after the ouster of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, have sparked fears of a return to autocracy.

The National Salvation Front, which includes Saied's nemesis the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, boycotted Saturday's election, saying it was part of a 'coup' against Tunisia's democracy.

The ballot for the new 161-seat assembly followed three weeks of barely noticeable campaigning, with few posters in the streets and no serious debate among a public preoccupied with day-to-day economic survival.

Saied's moves were initially supported by some Tunisians tired of the messy and sometimes corrupt democratic system installed after the revolution.

But almost a year and half on, the country's economic woes have gone from bad to worse and inflation is higher than Saturday's voter turnout. The previous legislature, dominated by Ennahdha, had far-reaching powers in the mixed presidential-parliamentary system enshrined in Tunisia's post-revolution constitution.

But the new chamber 'won't be able to appoint a government or censure it, except under draconian conditions that are almost impossible to meet,' according to political scientist Hamadi Redissi.

AFP



This file photo shows Qatar Labour Minister Ali bin Samikh al-Marri with European Parliament vice president Eva Kaili in Doha on October 31 (AFP)

EU corruption clampdown a threat to relations: Qatari diplomat

Doha, Qatar - Qatar on Sunday condemned a corruption investigation by Belgium and the suspension of its access to the EU parliament, saying it could 'negatively' impact relations and natural gas supplies.

A statement issued by a Qatari diplomat singled out Belgian authorities for criticism and insisted that 'inaccurate' information had been used.

Eva Kaili, a Greek MEP, is one of six people arrested after raids that uncovered at least €1.5mn (US\$1.6mn) in cash.

The money was allegedly linked to a Gulf state, and the EU parliament last week suspended Qatar's access to the institution.

"The decision to impose such a discriminatory restriction that limits dialogue and cooperation on Qatar before the legal process has ended, will negatively effect regional and global security cooperation, as well as ongoing discussions around global energy poverty and security," said the diplomat.

"We firmly reject the allegations associating our government with misconduct," the statement added.

"Qatar was not the only party named in the investigation, yet our country has been exclusively criticised and attacked."

"We have observed this week's selective condemnation of our country with great alarm," the statement said.

Belgian prosecutors said they had been investigating EU parliament corruption for more than a year before the raids and arrests of the past 10 days.

"It is deeply disappointing that the Belgian government made no effort to engage with our government to establish the facts once they became aware of the allegations," said the diplomat.

The statement highlighted the 'close' relationship with Belgium. "Our nations cooperated during the COVID-19 pandemic and Qatar is an important supplier of LNG to Belgium," it emphasised.

AFP

Iran urged to free top actor who backed protests

Paris, France - Celebrities and rights groups called on Iran on Sunday to free the actor Taraneh Alidoosti, one of the most prominent figures yet arrested in its three-month crackdown on protests.

Alidoosti, 38, was arrested on Saturday, official media said, after a string of social media posts supporting the protest movement including removing her headscarf and condemning the execution of protesters.

The unrest was sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22, whom the morality police accused of violating the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

Iran blames the United States and other 'enemies' for trying to destabilise the country by fuelling the demonstrations.

Other Iranian actors and prominent figures including footballers have been detained in connection with the protests, but Alidoosti has considerable inter-



Taraneh Alidoosti (AFP)

national renown. She performed in award-winning films by director Asghar Farhadi, including the Oscar-winning 2016 film *The Salesman*.

She attended this year's Cannes Film Festival to promote the movie *Leila's Brothers* in which she starred.

"The brave actress of Iran got arrested," fellow actor Golshifteh Farahani wrote on Instagram.

Farahani now lives in exile after falling out with the authorities. Her post included a photo of her and Alidoosti, with the Persian hashtag 'free Taraneh

Alidoosti, 38, was arrested on Saturday, official media said, after a string of social media posts supporting the protest movement including removing her headscarf and condemning the execution of protesters

Alidoosti'.

Cameron Bailey, head of the Toronto International Film Festival, tweeted that 'Taraneh Alidoosti is one of Iran's most talented and acclaimed actors... I hope she's free to keep representing the strength of Iranian cinema soon'.

Prominent British actor of Iranian origin Nazanin Boniadi also took to social media in support of Alidoosti, saying she had been arrested for 'posting a photo of herself without compulsory hijab in solidarity with the protestors.'

'Power of women's voices'

Authorities in Tehran on Sunday summoned another celebrity, pop singer Amir Maghare, 'to provide explanations', Tasnim news agency reported. It said the 26-year-old 'is currently in detention'.

Iran last month arrested two other prominent actors, Hengameh Ghaziani and Katayoun Riahi, who expressed solidarity with the protest movement and removed their headscarves in public. Both have now been released on bail.

Ghaziani was among a group of cinema figures who gathered outside Evin prison in support of

Alidoosti, the reformist newspaper *Shargh* reported on Twitter.

The group also included Mitra Hajjar, whose arrest *Shargh* had reported on December 3.

The New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran said 'women are being arrested and jailed in Iran for refusing to wear forced hijabs, including prominent actress Taraneh Alidoosti. The power of women's voices terrify the Islamic Republic's rulers'.

During the street protests, banners of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have been set alight, women have openly walked down streets without headscarves, and demonstrators have at times sought to challenge the security forces.

Alidoosti's most recent social media post was on December 8, the same day Mohsen Shekari, 23, became the first person executed by authorities over the protests.

AFP

China nursing homes struggle to keep residents safe from COVID-19 wave

Beijing, China - China's nursing homes are fighting an uphill battle to keep their elderly residents safe as a wave of COVID-19 infections sweeps the country following a relaxation of the government's zero-tolerance virus policy.

Facilities are locking themselves off from the outside world with staff sleeping on site, while struggling to get their hands on drugs. Authorities have warned of rapidly growing caseloads, and industry ministry official Zhou Jian said on Wednesday that the country was 'making all-out efforts to ramp up the production of key medicines'.

Experts fear the country is ill-equipped to manage the 'exit wave' of infections as it presses ahead with reopening, with millions of vulnerable elderly people still not fully vaccinated.

And eldercare facilities have now been left to fend for themselves as society reopens, the manager of one privately run Beijing home said.

"We are fully sealed off," the



A health worker wearing PPE stands at the entrance of a fever clinic of a hospital in Shanghai on Sunday (AFP)

manager, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP. Only food and supplies are allowed in - no one is allowed to enter or leave.

He said the home had ordered medical supplies 'at a high price', but they had not arrived yet after

a week, with the city's logistics network battered by infections among delivery workers.

He warned it would be impossible to keep the virus out forever.

"Couriers and delivery personnel are almost all COVID posi-

tive," he said. "Even if you disinfect or throw away all the outer packaging, plus the plastic packaging, you can't spray disinfectant on all the food that comes in."

Many Chinese eldercare facilities

have already been locked down for weeks following local government directives, with Yuecheng Senior Home in Beijing saying last week it had already been sealed off for nearly 60 days. In Shanghai, the Xiangfu Nursing Home said this week it would continue 'closed management', forcing all employees to sleep on site and giving staff nucleic acid tests every day.

"As society optimises prevention and control policies, our home should in particular maintain high vigilance," the home said in its statement.

Hospitals under pressure

Visits to hospital fever clinics surged in the days following China's lifting of restrictions last week, though the World Health Organization said the virus was already spreading widely in the country as 'the control measures in themselves were not stopping the disease'.

The toll of the abrupt shift away from zero-COVID is still

unfolding, with multiple funeral homes in the capital telling AFP they experienced a recent surge in demand.

Health authorities have reported no deaths from COVID-19 in the past week, but have admitted that official figures no longer capture the full picture of domestic infections now that mass testing requirements have been dropped. "We've had hundreds of patients, with a number of patients coming from nursing homes and in their 90s," though there appeared to be few severe cases, one nurse at a Beijing hospital, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP.

The nurse, who had recently caught COVID himself and returned to work after just three days, said more than half of his colleagues had been infected over the past few days.

"We can only force ourselves to work to keep the hospital running," he said. "Those who have no fever and only mild symptoms are returning to work."

AFP

12 killed as oil tanker catches fire in Afghan

Charikar, Afghanistan - An oil tanker overturned and caught fire in Afghanistan's high-altitude Salang pass, killing 12 people and injuring dozens, officials said on Sunday.

The incident happened late on Saturday in the province of Parwan, north of Kabul, leaving travellers on both sides of the mountainous pass stranded.

At least 12 people were killed and 37 others were injured in the incident, said Hamidullah Misbah, spokesman for the Ministry of Public Works, adding the toll was expected to rise.

"An oil tanker overturned and caught fire in the Salang tunnel, which then set several other vehicles on fire," Misbah told AFP. Abdullah Afghan Mal, a senior health official in Parwan, said many of the dead included women and children who were badly burned.

AFP

Great loss for Brazilian literature: Writer Nelida Pinon dies at 85

Rio De Janeiro, Brazil - Brazilian writer Nelida Pinon, whose work has been translated into more than 30 languages, died on Saturday at the age of 85, her publishing house announced.

"Nelida Pinon died today in a hospital in Lisbon. The cause of death has not yet been confirmed," the publishing house Record said in a statement.

Her body will be repatriated to Brazil and she will be buried in the mausoleum of the Brazilian Academy of Letters (ABL), in a cemetery in Rio de Janeiro.

"It's a great loss for Brazilian literature. She was probably the greatest living Brazilian writer," ABL president Merval Pereira told Globonews, where he is a



Brazilian author Nelida Pinon (AFP)

columnist.

Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1937, in 2005 Pinon received the Prince of Asturias Prize for Literature, considered Spain's equivalent of a Nobel, for all of her work.

Pinon, whose first name, Nelida, is the anagram of that of her grandfather, Daniel, has pub-

lished around twenty books, including the novels *The House of Passion* (1972) and *The Republic of Dreams* (1984), inspired by the story of her family which emigrated to Brazil from Galicia, Spain.

She also wrote collections of short stories. A pioneer in several respects, the Brazilian writer became in 1998 the first woman doctor honoris causa of the University of Santiago de Compostela. Pinon joined the Brazilian Academy of Letters, the Brazilian equivalent of the French Academy, in 1989, and seven years later became the first woman to chair it since its founding a century earlier.

AFP

Spielberg regrets 'Jaws' impact on shark population

London, UK - Film-maker Steven Spielberg has said he truly regrets the 'decimation of the shark population' following the success of his 1975 film *Jaws*.

Spielberg's Oscar-winning thriller told the story of a man-eating great white shark that attacked a US seaside town, prompting a rise in sports fishing across America.

"I truly and to this day regret the decimation of the shark population because of the book and the film. I really, truly regret that," Spielberg, 75, told BBC Radio's Desert Island Discs programme.

According to a study in *Nature* last year, the world's population of oceanic sharks has fallen by 71 per cent since the 1970s due to overfishing.

The Shark Conservation Fund,



US director Steven Spielberg (AFP)

meanwhile, says 36 per cent of the world's 1,250 shark and ray species are currently threatened with extinction.

Researchers have blamed films such as 'Jaws' for playing a role in the public's perception of

sharks, driving support for killing them.

Others, however, argue that this attributes too much significance to the influence of Hollywood. Spielberg, who is also known for Hollywood blockbusters including *ET*, *Indiana Jones* and *Jurassic Park*, chose the 10 records he would take if he was stranded on a desert island in the Sunday broadcast.

'It was a tightrope'

Asked by presenter Lauren Laverne how he felt about having real sharks circling his desert island, he said: "That's one of the things I still fear."

"Not to get eaten by a shark, but that sharks are somehow mad at me for the feeding frenzy of crazy sports fishermen that

happened after 1975."

Spielberg also discussed his successful directing career, including his latest project - semi-autobiographical film *The Fabelmans*. Spielberg's latest film tells the mostly true story of his own childhood and introduction to film-making in post-war America.

The film, starring Paul Dano and Michelle Williams, has already received wide critical acclaim, picking up top nods at both the 2023 Golden Globes and Critics Choice Awards.

Discussing the making of the film, Spielberg admitted he had initially thought the project would be the 'most self indulgent thing I've ever asked people to accompany me through'.

AFP

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SWOT

ANALYSIS

A satellite lifted off Friday from California on a mission to survey nearly all bodies of water on Earth, offering key insights on how they influence or are impacted by climate change.

The Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) satellite, a billion-dollar project jointly developed by NASA and France's space agency CNES, took off at 1146 GMT atop a SpaceX rocket from the Vandenberg Space Force Base.

According to a statement from NASA, it will start collecting scientific data in about six months after undergoing checks and calibrations.

"SWOT will bring us a revolutionary advance in our understanding of how water moves around our planet," said Karen St Germain, NASA's Earth Science Division director, ahead of the launch. "We will be able to see detail in eddies and currents and circulation in the oceans that we have never been able to see before."

She said this would help predict floods in areas with too much water, and manage water in regions prone to drought.

Selma Cherchali, of the French space agency CNES, told a press conference on Tuesday that the satellite represents "a revolution in hydrology. We are aiming to provide fine-scale observations ten times better than the current technology."

From a height of 890km, SWOT will have the clearest view yet of the world's oceans, allowing it to track the rise in sea levels, as well as rivers and lakes.

The satellite will measure the height of water in freshwater bodies and the ocean on more than 90 per cent of Earth's surface - which it will track in its entirety at least once every 21 days.

Researchers will be able to get data on millions of lakes, rather than the few thousands currently visible from space. NASA is currently operating

some 25 space missions observing Earth, and SWOT will be like putting on glasses. We will have a crisp picture, said St Germain.

Understanding climate change

The satellite will help scientists better understand climate change, and factors such as how much more heat and carbon dioxide oceans can absorb.

"We know with climate change that Earth's water cycle is accelerating. What this means is that some locations have too much water, others don't have enough," said Benjamin Hamlington, a NASA research scientist.

"We're seeing more extreme droughts, more extreme floods, precipitation patterns are changing, becoming more volatile. So it's really important that we try to understand exactly what is happening."

The mission is meant to last for three and a half years, but could be extended until five years, or even more, said SWOT's project head at CNES, Thierry Lafon.

The breakthrough technology at the heart of the satellite mission is called KaRin, a Ka-band radar interferometer, which Lafon described as 'the flagship for a new generation of altimeters in space.'

The radar sends down a signal which is reflected back by the water surface. This echo is received by two antennas, resulting in two sets of data providing high accuracy for water detection and resolution.

The US and French space agencies have worked together in the field for more than 30 years. A previous satellite developed by the partners, TOPEX/Poseidon, improved understanding of ocean circulation and its effect on global climate. It also aided the forecast of the 1997-1998 El Nino weather phenomenon.

AFP

NASA LAUNCHES SATELLITE FOR LANDMARK STUDY OF EARTH'S WATER



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket stands on a launch pad with the Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) satellite



In this image released by NASA, a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with NASA's Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) satellite lifts off from Vandenberg Air Force Base, in Santa Barbara, California, on December 16

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BIRD HAVEN



Migratory birds flock near the freshwater Poyang Lake, in Juijiang

Spooked by a historic drought, local authorities in China have renewed controversial plans to dam the country's biggest freshwater lake.

But environmentalists warn damming Poyang Lake, a winter stopover for over half a million birds, would threaten the fragile ecosystem and the endangered birds and other wildlife it supports.

China is currently chairing UN biodiversity talks in Montreal, billed as the 'last best chance' to save the planet's species and their habitats from irreversible human destruction.

The Poyang dam, which is slowly recovering after shrinking to less than a third of its usual size, shows how fraught such efforts are in China.

Conservationist Zhang Daqian said that if realised, the 3,000m long sluice gate across one of the lake's channels would cut it off from the river Yangtze, leaving Poyang a dead lake.

China has built more than 50,000 dams in the Yangtze basin in the past 70 years - including the Three Gorges, which came in the face of widespread opposition from environmentalists. Over the same period, at least 70 per

cent of the river's wetlands have vanished, according to data from the environment ministry.

When the project was initially proposed, complaints from ecologists succeeded in shelving it. But the looming spectre of droughts - which are becoming ever more frequent and severe in the area thanks to climate change - has altered the calculus.

Poyang supplies water to Jiangxi province's 4.8 million residents, and the local government says damming it will conserve water, irrigate more farmland, and improve navigation.

An environmental impact assessment (EIA) published in May gave experts just two weeks to review 1,200 pages of documents and lodge complaints.

Winter visitors

In a normal wet season, Poyang can be

Dam plans threaten China's migratory bird haven

three times the size of Los Angeles.

Its mud flats are the primary winter feeding grounds for hundreds of thousands of birds flying south to escape the chill every autumn. They include the critically endangered Siberian crane, the population of which has shrunk to about 4,000.

This year's drought was the worst in 70 years, with the region entering the dry season three months sooner than usual. Still, hundreds of birds were gathering at small pools of water left on the cracked riverbed when AFP visited a reserve in Yongxiu County in early November.

"Migratory birds are still coming to Poyang, because it's their habitual winter home," said an employee surnamed Chen, looking across the dry expanse littered with empty mussel shells and fish skeletons.

"But there are no fish or shrimp for them to eat. Many birds flock to nearby fields and farmers have been told to leave a bit of their paddy unharvested for the birds," Chen said.

Officials have pumped water from nearby reservoirs to form small butterfly-shaped watering holes for the birds.

"There are no conflicts (between

residents and birds), because migratory birds are nationally-protected animals, and people will not harm them," He Fangjin, an employee at another wetland park, told AFP.

At nearby Zhupao Hill, a popular bird-watching spot, about 90,000 migratory birds were spotted from October to early December, up from about 62,000 birds in the same period last year.

Damage to ecosystem

It's not clear what stage of development the dam is currently in, and neither local authorities nor the environment ministry responded to questions put to them by AFP.

Were they to go ahead, however, the sluice gate would disrupt the lake's natural ebb and flow with the Yangtze, potentially threatening the tidal flats the birds feed on, said Lu Xixi, a geog-

raphy professor at the National University of Singapore.

Losing its natural water circulation could also hurt Poyang's ability to flush out nutrients, risking an algae build-up that could disrupt the food chain, Lu added.

The dam could also affect another critically endangered species that calls the lake its home - the Yangtze finless porpoise. There are just over 1,000 left in the wild.

During the drought, the porpoises took refuge in the same channel the dam would cut off, a ranger from the Beijing Environmental Protection Prairie League, who has patrolled the lake for over a month, told AFP.

Beijing-based *Friends of Nature* said the dam EIA failed to do a comprehensive evaluation of whether the porpoises' migration would be blocked.

"Without comprehensive scientific evidence and before eliminating the environmental risks, the project should not be pushed forward," the group said in a statement.

AFP

Without comprehensive scientific evidence and before eliminating the environmental risks, the project should not be pushed forward

FRIENDS OF NATURE



A fisherman at the fast drying up freshwater Poyang Lake in Juijiang, China's central Jiangxi province

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FIFA WORLD CUP

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SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST

Lionel Messi scores two goals in his World Cup swansong as Argentina beat France to become World Champions



Lionel Messi celebrates with Leandro Paredes and Marcos Acuna after Argentina's victory against France in the World Cup final at the Lusail Stadium on Sunday

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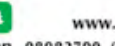
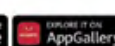


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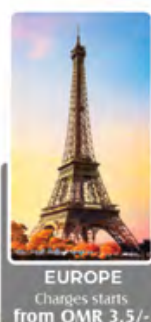
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1958
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1962
BRAZIL



1966
ENGLAND



1970
BRAZIL



1974
WEST
GERMANY



1978
ARGENTINA



1982
ITALY



1986
ARGENTINA



1990
WEST
GERMANY



1994
BRAZIL



1998
FRANCE



2002
BRAZIL



2006
ITALY



2010
SPAIN



2014
GERMANY



2018
FRANCE



2022
ARGENTINA



FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar 2022



Lionel Messi celebrates scoring Argentina's third goal against France on Sunday



in the World Cup final in Lusail on Sunday Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez makes a superb save to deny France's Randal Kolo Muani in the extra-time



Lionel Messi (L) celebrates an Argentinian goal in shoot-out as France players look dejected (AFP)



Lionel Messi (2nd R) celebrates with teammates after Argentina defeated France in penalties to win the World Cup on Sunday (AFP)

THE GRIP

Lionel Messi produces a masterclass display in
France on penalties despite Kylian Mbappé's hat-trick

Doha, Qatar - Lionel Messi crowned his glittering career with victory in the World Cup on Sunday as Argentina beat France on penalties in a final for the ages, triumphing 4-2 after Kylian Mbappé's hat-trick ensured the game ended level following extra time.

Gonzalo Montiel rolled in the deciding penalty to give Argentina their third World Cup and prevent France becoming the first team in 60 years to retain the trophy.

But a truly remarkable game saw Messi and Mbappé both live up to their billing, with Messi scoring twice and Mbappé becoming the first player since England's Geoff Hurst in 1966 to net a World Cup final hat-trick in a game that ended 3-3 after extra time.

Messi had opened the scoring from the penalty spot midway through the first half before Angel Di Maria doubled Argentina's lead at the end of a

brilliant counter-attack in the 36th minute.

But the astonishing Mbappé breathed life into the holders as he pulled one back from the penalty spot with 10 minutes to go before equalising in stunning fashion just 60 seconds later to force extra time.

Messi then seemed to have decided the contest in Argentina's favour once and for all when he converted a rebound in the 109th minute, only for Mbappé to net from another spot-kick, bringing the game level at 3-3 and forcing a shoot-out.

The third World Cup final penalty shoot-out started with Messi and Mbappé both scoring, but Kingsley Coman's next kick for France was saved and Aurelien Tchouameni then crucially missed the target.

It is the second time in five World Cups that France have lost the final on

penalties after they were beaten by Italy in 2006, and it is Argentina who are champions for the first time since 1986.

The win allows Messi, at 35, to complete his glorious career by emulating Diego Maradona, and this will be remembered as his tournament despite the best efforts of Mbappé, who finished as the tournament's top scorer on eight goals, one more than his Paris Saint-Germain teammate Messi.

Mbappe hat-trick

France's quest for history had been threatened by a virus in the days leading up to the final and they appeared sluggish before Argentina went ahead.

France conceded a penalty for the fourth time this tournament when Di Maria was clipped by Ousmane Dembele, and Messi stepped up to score

BREAKOUT STARS OF WORLD CUP

Doha, Qatar - The 2022 World Cup may have been the last hurrah for Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, but the tournament also witnessed the arrival of a new crop of talented young players.

Here are some of rising stars who shone at the finals in Qatar.



JUDE BELLINGHAM (England)

England teenager Jude Bellingham arrived in Qatar tipped as a potential World Cup star and left as one of the hottest properties in global football.

The Borussia Dortmund player - a modern box-to-box midfielder - opened England's account at the tournament with a fine header in the team's 6-2 romp against Iran.

The 19-year-old also shone in the 3-0 quarter-final win against Senegal, crossing for Jordan Henderson to stroke home the first and driving through the midfield to launch the attack that led to the second.



CODY GAKPO (Netherlands)

The 23-year-old Dutch forward was the only player to score in all three group games as he carried over his red-hot form for PSV Eindhoven onto the biggest stage.

Gakpo's header in the Netherlands' opening match against Senegal broke the deadlock late on in a 2-0 victory. He drilled the Dutch ahead with a fierce left-footed drive against Ecuador in a 1-1 draw and again set the Oranje on their way with another tidy finish as they beat Qatar 2-0. Gakpo played his part as Louis van Gaal's side lost on penalties to Argentina in the quarter-finals.





It was a very complicated match, they came back to equalise in the game but it was our destiny to suffer. All that I have dreamed of has been achieved. I have no words for it. I was calm during the penalty shoot-out, and everything went as we wanted

EMILIANO MARTINEZ, Argentina goalkeeper



Angel Di Maria celebrates after scoring Argentina's second goal against France in the World Cup final on Sunday



Argentina's Lionel Messi (2ndL), who won the Golden Ball, with Golden Boot winner France's Kylian Mbappe (R), Best Young Player Enzo Fernandez (L) and Gloden Glove winner Emiliano Martinez

EATEST

y in his final World Cup game as Argentina beat Mbappe's hat-trick to win World Cup

from the spot for the fourth time in Qatar, his 12th World Cup goal allowing him to equal Pele's tally.

The expected response from the defending champions was not forthcoming and Argentina increased their lead in the 36th minute.

Messi and Julian Alvarez combined to release Alexis Mac Allister bursting through the middle, and he played a first-time ball to the back post for Di Maria to finish.

Having hardly featured in the knockout rounds due to injury, Di Maria had returned here and appeared tearful as he celebrated his goal, which was a World Cup final classic.

France had not even mustered a shot and Deschamps moved before the interval to replace Olivier Giroud and the struggling Dembele.

On came Randal Kolo Muani and

Marcus Thuram, as Mbappe moved into the middle of the attack.

Argentina blow two-goal lead

Argentina had famously blown a two-goal lead before eventually emerging victorious in their last World Cup final triumph 36 years ago, but there appeared little prospect of a repeat of that scenario.

However, the French were suddenly given hope when they won a penalty 10 minutes from time as Kolo Muani was brought down by Nicolas Otamendi.

Mbappe smashed the spot-kick into the net and the watching French President Emmanuel Macron rose to his feet. France had hope, and within another minute they were level.

Messi was robbed of possession by Coman in the lead-up, before Mbappe

found Thuram and then met his partner's knockdown with a stunning volley.

It will go down as one of the most dramatic moments in World Cup history, and the French players on the bench raced across the pitch to celebrate with their teammate.

Argentina, who lost the 2014 final in extra time, looked shattered, and yet it seemed again that they had won it when Messi followed up to score early in the second extra period after Lautaro Martinez's shot was saved.

But France were again saved by Mbappe as he converted another penalty following a Montiel handball.

It was end to end, and Argentina needed a brilliant Martinez save from Kolo Muani to take it to penalties and Montiel's kick proved decisive to spark wild Argentinians celebrations.

AFP



France's Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring his team's third goal from the penalty spot



GONCALO RAMOS (Portugal)

The forward showed he has the potential to be the successor to Cristiano Ronaldo, seizing his opportunity in sensational style when he was selected ahead of Portugal's captain for the 6-1 demolition of Switzerland in the last 16. Known as "Pistoleiro" for his gun-toting celebration, Ramos shot his way into world football's consciousness with a hat-trick on his full debut. The 21-year-old took just 17 minutes to open the scoring and achieve something Ronaldo never has -- net in a World Cup knockout game.



JULIAN ALVAREZ (Argentina)

The 22-year-old striker is the latest to roll off Argentina's conveyor belt of attacking talent. A year that began with a high-profile transfer from River Plate to Premier League champions Manchester City ended with the forward being acclaimed as one of the brightest talents in world football after a dazzling World Cup.

Left on the bench for Argentina's opening two group games, Alvarez started and scored in a 2-0 win over Poland and then netted a crucial second goal in the 2-1 last-16 win over Australia.



JOSKO GVARDIOL (Croatia)

The 20-year-old defender rose to prominence on the biggest stage with a series of excellent displays during Croatia's run to the semi-finals.

Gvardiol's World Cup was nearly over before it started after he fractured his nose and suffered severe swelling around his right eye while playing for RB Leipzig last month, forcing him to wear a protective mask in Qatar.

Not only was the centre-back easy to spot, but he stood out for his unforgiving defending and comfort on the ball.

INDIA-BANGLADESH FIRST TEST

INDIA, INEVITABLY

India beat Bangladesh in Chittagong to take 1-0 lead in the series, go second in Test championship

Chittagong, Bangladesh - Shakib Al Hasan provided brief entertainment for Bangladesh but India kept their cool to win the first Test by 188 runs and take a 1-0 lead in the two-match series in Chittagong on Sunday.

The result and first-placed Australia's convincing win over South Africa in Brisbane on Sunday took India up to second in the ICC Test Championship rankings.

The top two sides will lock horns when Australia tour India in early 2023.

Set an enormous 513 to win, Bangladesh put up dogged resistance with Zakir Hasan scoring a century on debut on Saturday in a record opening partnership for the hosts against India with Najmul Hossain who made 67.

Skipper Shakib made a marauding 84 that included six sixes but he was bowled by Kuldeep Yadav on day five and the hosts quickly folded for 324 all out after an hour's play.

Needing an academic 241 runs with four wickets remaining for the win on day five, Mehidy Hasan signalled an attacking intent for Bangladesh, hitting Mohammed Siraj for four through cover in the first over.

Siraj came back in the next over to force Mehidy to give a catch to Umesh Yadav at backward point, leaving the onus on Shakib to take the game forward.

Kuldeep dismissed Shakib and



Kuldeep Singh and Axar Patel (R), who took seven wickets between them in Bangladesh's second innings, celebrate after the victory

Ebadot Hossain in successive overs, finishing with figures of 3-73 while Axar Patel claimed the final wicket of Taijul Islam to return with 4-77.

Kuldeep, who also claimed 5-40 in the first innings, was named player of the match.

"Getting runs was hard on the first three days. The way their openers batted, we had to work hard. Our intensity was really high," said India captain KL Rahul.

"The pitch wasn't really assisting the bowlers, but they found something... We've built this attack over the years. They are showing what quality they have," he added.

Bangladesh captain Shakib blamed their poor batting for the loss after being skittled for just 150 in the first innings.

"It was a really good wicket to bat on but we didn't bat well (in the first innings). Playing after five to six months, it wasn't ideal but there should be no excuses. Lot of credit to India the way they bowled," he said.

India, who have never lost a Test to Bangladesh, put on 404 in the first innings thanks to 90 from Cheteshwar Pujara and 86 by Shreyas Iyer.

In the second innings Pujara was again India's rock, reaching 102 not out alongside Shubman Gill who made 110, allowing the visitors to declare on 258-2.

The second Test will begin at Dhaka on December 22.

AFP

Australia down South Africa inside two days

Brisbane, Australia - Australia captain Pat Cummins spearheaded a pace barrage that tore through South Africa before his side chased down a target of 34 runs Sunday to claim a six-wicket win inside two days on a hostile Gabba pitch.

After finishing their first innings 66 runs in front midway through the first session Sunday, Australia dismissed the visitors for just 99 despite a fighting 36 not out from Khaya Zondo.

But the Australians then lost four cheap wickets in the chase as paceman Kagiso Rabada ran amok, with Usman Khawaja, David Warner, Steve Smith and Travis Head all falling to catches behind the wicket.

However, Marnus Labuschagne and Cameron Green - aided by 15 extras - guided Australia home to give them a 1-0 lead in the three-match series on a day when 19 wickets fell.

"Tricky wicket. I thought the way Head and Smith batted (in the first innings) got us to this winning position," said Australia captain Pat Cummins.

Man of the match Head added: "Very difficult wicket, plenty for the bowlers. We saw



Australia's Pat Cummins celebrates after taking the wicket of South Africa's Dean Elgar on the second day of the first at the Gabba in Brisbane on Sunday (AFP)

that the whole game. Nice to be able to contribute and get a win."

Despite the victory, Australian selectors will be concerned with Warner's form after yet another failure.

Warner is due to play his 100th Test in Melbourne on Boxing Day without scoring a century in almost three years, as calls for him to be dropped grow louder.

The two teams went into the series both boasting high-quality

bowling attacks, but Australia's batting always looked stronger.

And on a green Gabba wicket, South Africa's frailties at the top of the order were brutally exposed.

"Another 60 runs and we would have been in the game. Pretty spicy wicket, bowlers were licking their lips," said South Africa skipper Dean Elgar.

"I don't think we could prepare any better. Conditions weren't in

favour for the batters."

South Africa slumped to 27-4 in the first innings and 5-3 in the second, positions from which they never recovered.

While the Australians also struggled at times, Head's superb 92 from 96 balls proved the difference between the two teams.

Australia started the day at 145-7 and South Africa did well to restrict them to 218, a lead of 66.

AFP

Brook's ton gives England the edge in third Pakistan Test

Karachi, Pakistan - Harry Brook continued his remarkable series to rebuild England's innings with a third century in as many Tests after Pakistan had the visitors pinned down on the second day of the final match in Karachi on Sunday.

England took an improbable 50-run lead on the back of Brook's innings before they were bowled out for 354 and Pakistan cut the deficit to 29 at the close of play. Pakistan's openers Abdullah Shafique and Shan Masood were batting on 14 and three respectively as the home side ended the day on 21 for no loss.

Brook's 111 revived England's chances of becoming the first team ever to clinch a 3-0 series sweep in Pakistan after the visitors were teetering at 145-5.

England lead the three-match series 2-0 after a 74-run win in Rawalpindi and a close-fought 26-run victory in Multan.

After Pakistan's spinners knocked over the English top order, Brook and wicketkeeper Ben Foakes amassed 117 for the sixth wicket, and brought England within touching distance of Pakistan's first innings 304.



England's Harry Brook plays a shot en route to his century on the second day of the third Test against Pakistan in Karachi on Sunday (AFP)

Brook drove spinner Abrar Ahmed for his eighth boundary to reach his third career hundred following up his 153 in the first Test and 108 in the next.

After the close of play, the 23-year-old Brook revealed he had

set a goal of scoring two centuries during the tour. "I said to one of my mates I'd like to get two before I got here, so it feels very nice to go one better," said Brook.

AFP

Gareth Southgate to stay on as England manager

London, United Kingdom - Gareth Southgate will remain as England manager despite the crushing disappointment of their quarter-final exit at the World Cup, the English Football Association confirmed on Sunday.

The 52-year-old said after last week's defeat to defending champions France in Qatar that he would take his time before making a decision over his future.

But he is now set to stay at the

helm until after the 2024 European Championship.

"We are delighted to confirm that Gareth Southgate is continuing as England manager and will lead our Euro 2024 campaign," said FA chief executive Mark Bullingham.

"Gareth and (assistant coach) Steve Holland have always had our full support and our planning for the Euros starts now."

England have not won a major trophy since their World Cup vic-

We are delighted to confirm that Gareth Southgate is continuing as England manager and will lead our Euro 2024 campaign

MARK BULLINGHAM



tory in 1966 but under Southgate they reached the semi-finals of the 2018 tournament and the final of last year's European Championship.

His current deal runs until December 2024.

England's latest bid to end their long wait for a major trophy ended in last Saturday's 2-1

defeat to France, who went on to reach the final against Argentina.

Harry Kane blazed over from the penalty spot when handed a chance to equalise late in the game, having earlier scored from the spot.

England's first Euro 2024 qualifier is against Italy on March 23. Ukraine, North Macedonia and Malta are also in the same group.

AFP



Gareth Southgate