



SAF DAY CELEBRATED

His Majesty hosts dinner to mark day

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, hosted a dinner at Al Alam Palace on Sunday on the occasion of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Day.

The ceremony is a felicitation by His Majesty, the Supreme Commander, to all military formations and units of the valiant armed forces on this glorious day. It symbolises his Royal recognition of their dedication to perform the sacred duty to defend the homeland, protect its security and ensure its stability and safety.

It is a manifestation of SAF's role in safeguarding the national achievements to retain Oman's status as an oasis of security, harmony and peace under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan.

ONA



H M CONFERS AL NUOMAN ORDER ON UAE AMBASSADOR



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred the Al Nuoman Order, First Class, on Mohammed Sultan al Suwaidi, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Oman, in appreciation of his efforts to boost bilateral relations. The order was handed over by Sayyid Khalid Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, when he received the envoy at his office on Sunday (ONA)

NEWS BRIEF

DEFENCE MINISTRY, SAF ISSUE POSTAGE STAMPS
Muscat - To mark Sultan's Armed Forces Day, a ceremony was held on Sunday to issue postage stamps by the Ministry of Defence and Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) in cooperation with Oman Post.

The ceremony included a presentation on Oman Post, highlighting its role and the evolution of postage stamps in Oman.

On behalf of the Ministry of Defence, the postage stamps issue was signed by Dr Mohammad Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence, Vice Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of SAF, and Nasser Ahmed al Sharji, CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express.



COVID 'spreading rapidly' after rules ease: China expert



Airport arrivals increase 168% till Sept: NCSI

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The number of arrivals at airports across Oman recorded an increase of 168 per cent this year till the end of September, compared to the same period in 2021.

According to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) data, the number of passengers departing increased 120 per cent in the same period. The total number of arrivals, departures and transit passengers was 6,969,976 in Oman's airports in the first nine months of 2022. A total of 55,814 international flights arrived at and departed from Oman's airports, compared to 26,636 in the same time in 2021.



Muscat International Airport witnessed a 113.6 per cent increase in the number of international flights, and the total number of international passengers (arrivals, departures and transfers) was 5,975,726 till September this year against 2,373,363 passengers in the same period of 2021.

The number of international flights through Salalah Airport increased 221.2 per cent, while domestic flights from it increased 39 per cent to 3,857 flights, compared to 2,774 during the same period in 2021.

There were 585 international flights (departures and arrivals) at Sohar Airport in 2022 till the end of September carrying 55,243 passengers. Duqm Airport recorded a 4.7 per cent increase in the number of domestic flights (departures and arrivals) to 490 till the end of September 2022, compared to 468 in 2021 till September. Among the nationalities flying through Muscat airport, Indians (113,785 passengers) topped the list passengers (departures and arrivals) this year, followed by Bangladeshi nationals (52,644) and Pakistanis (34,078).

MHUP offers 14 sites for investment in N Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has offered 14 investment sites for usufruct contracts via the Tatwir platform in North Sharqiyah governorate to attract investors and stimulate the real estate sector.

The initiative aims to achieve the objectives of economic growth, including commercial and industrial real estate units, while also aiming to enable the private sector to attract investments in various governorates to contribute to the development of integrated and sustainable urban communities.

According to an official, the ministry will offer land measuring between 4,000sqm and 5,000sqm for usufruct contracts through online auction.

The 14 sites include four in the wilayat of Mudhaibi, three each in Dima Wa al Taien and Bidiyah, two in Ibra, and one each in Wadi Bani Khalid and Sinaw.



Those interested in bidding must register through the electronic system -Tatwir platform- using ID number or the commercial register.

According to MHUP data, the government allotted 12,273 residential plots of land to citizens this year till the end of August compared to 1,762 in the same period of 2021, an increase 597 per cent.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information's data indicates 1,721 land plots were given away in South Batinah in 2022 compared to 181 in 2021, followed by 1,692 in Dakhliyah, 1,680 in North Batinah, and 1,562 in Dhofar.

In North Sharqiyah, 1,392 residential plots were allotted, 1,228 in Muscat, 602 in Buraimi, 230 in Musandam and 36 in Al Wusta in the first eight months of 2022.

New findings unearthed from Dibba dig site

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), in cooperation with an archaeological team from the Sapienza University of Rome, has announced new archaeological findings in Musandam.

A statement issued by MHT said, 'A joint Omani-Italian archaeological excavation team, supervised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, has announced the discovery of a set of distinctive archaeological items dating back to the 1st millennium BC in the wilayat of Dibba.'



Antiquities found include incense burners, bronze axes and utensils made of copper and steatite

The ministry confirmed that work is continuing for the seventh and final season of excavations in the mass grave, which is 24m long and more than 3m deep.

The joint team discovered antiquities, including incense burners, bronze axes and utensils made of copper and steatite.

According to the ministry, the site is considered one of the most important in the sultanate by archaeologist. It was a commercial centre trading with neighbouring civilisations in India, Persia and Mesopotamia.

'Many diverse and valuable items were found at the site, locally made and also imported from neighbouring civilisations. Commercial activity at Dibba continued for more than 1,000 years,' MHT stated

The ministry, in cooperation with OQ company, will establish a visitor centre at that site. It will be the first of its kind in the sultanate and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. The centre will display the antiquities unearthed from the site.

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WHY HOLIDAY ABROAD?

Oman is blessed with natural beauty, from lush green mountains to rolling sand dunes to colourful corals in the deep blue sea. The sultanate also has a rich diversity of flora and fauna. Yet during holidays, more and more people from the country opt to spend their time abroad, including Dubai, Georgia, India, Thailand and Europe. What can Oman do to encourage citizens and residents to spend their holidays in the country? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers said on the subject -



Mohammad Harthy
Accountant

The best way to encourage people is to give better prices. During holidays, the prices of everything including camps, restaurants and hotels increase. Prices sky rocket. For a family of five or six, holidaying in the country becomes too expensive. There must be control over hotel prices. Hotel prices are demotivating; for almost the same price, we could go to Dubai.

Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

Oman has pristine nature alongside the most modern destinations with world-class infrastructure. However, the sultanate needs more sports facilities - for football, tennis, cricket, hockey, boxing and the like - for weekends. Additionally, there should be more events for common people, both citizens and expatriates, on science, art, quiz

competitions, drawing competitions, music concerts and such others for people of all walks of life to engage in during holidays in the country.

Salman Amri
Businessman

I think that the best way to encourage people to spend time in the country is have more ads in local newspapers and media outlets.

The ministry can also have ambassadors to be part of special campaigns. This will motivate people to visit the places promoted.

Ruskeen S
Private sector employee

The country needs locations to lure people. Some popular sites are crowded. Lack of activities for night outs and camping facilities keep people from visiting remote areas. Passenger transport is another area to look into to encourage people to holiday in the country.

Govind Sampath
Private sector employee

People are nowadays looking for authentic experiences, so a focus on experiencing a slice of life by staying with local communities and sharing their lifestyle for a few days will encourage domestic tourism. This can be popularised through radio and television programmes.

Yasser Balushi
Driver

The places of interest in Oman are not well organised. There are so many exceptionally good places, mainly for camping, hiking and other adventure sports, that we are unaware of. Good information is not available, except some random coverage in newspaper articles. The government must make sure that information on accommodation, how to reach there, and on the basic facilities like restaurants, washrooms, petrol pumps and hotels are readily available.



Are small and medium enterprises in Oman given enough support by the government? What can be done to help them prosper?

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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Heavy rains lash parts of Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Heavy rains lashed several parts of Oman during the early hours of Sunday, impacting Muscat and other cities, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

Oman Meteorology has announced chances of sporadic rain continuing on Monday. A statement issued by CAA said, 'Oman Meteorology's aerial pictures indicate continued cloud activity and flow of clouds over parts of the governorates of Musandam,

Seeb records 33mm rain in 2 days

Muscat - Heavy to moderate rains lashed several governorates in the last two days, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR), Se-

eb recorded 33mm rainfall in two days - December 10-11.

Data collected from the rain monitoring stations of MAFWR from Saturday till Sunday showed Amerat received 21mm of rainfall, Bausher 20mm and Muttrah 18mm.

Buraimi, and North Batinah, with sporadic rain and thundershowers in Muscat and light rain in parts of Dakhliyah.'

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority underlined preventive measures during rains to prevent the risk of drowning, in-

cluding avoiding crossing flooded wadis, standing under trees, and using telephones and electrical appliances, in addition to not leaving the safety of homes unless absolutely necessary.

'Stay away from electricity poles, avoid touching metal objects, and keep an eye on children not allowing them to approach flooded areas,' a CDAA statement said, urging people to follow official weather forecasts.

Royal Oman Police called on motorists not to risk crossing flooded wadis during rains.

PROTECTED AND PRESERVED



A greenish tinge adorns mountains of the Al Hajar range in Dakhliyah. The green coating is copper rust - locally called 'nuhas' - and protected by the government with fences as seen on the way to the popular tourist site Wadi Bani Khalid. Such 'green' mountains exist in the northern and southern parts of the country (*Muscat Daily*)

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Muscat	27	17
Abu Dhabi	26	16
Doha	25	16
Kuwait City	21	14
Manama	24	17
Riyadh	21	11

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.19am
Sunrise	6.39am
Duhr	12.05pm
Asr	3.06pm
Maghrib	5.27pm
Isha	6.42pm

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OHRC to celebrate International Human Rights Day today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) will celebrate International Human Rights Day on Monday, in the presence of His Highness Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

The International Human Rights Day is held annually to celebrate the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948.

"During the celebration, six humanitarian initiatives will be honoured for their roles in providing free shelter for children with cancer and their families; providing psychological, counselling, and educational support; monitoring the psychological, social, cultural, and health challenges faced by young people; and pro-



viding a safe and supportive environment for child development," said an OHRC official.

In addition, the initiatives were keen on their early intervention to deal with disabilities that may occur in children, raise the level of community awareness about autism spectrum disorder, activate the role of the injured and enhance their participation in the society, protect

children from exposure to exploitation and help them build confidence in themselves and in their communities.

"A film projecting the efforts of the government agencies and civil society institutions taken on child rights in the sultanate, and a theatrical show on the problem of neglect in general and towards children in particular; shedding light on the aspect of such unfortunate practices of neglect, will be shown during the day," the official informed.

"The commission also updated its website and activated its electronic accounts recently to enhance communication and strengthen interaction with all members of society."

"OHRC members during the past one year, made several field visits in cooperation with the departments concerned with human rights. The commission also monitored and followed up on all international issues and reports," he added.

Oman's trade with Tanzania growing, says H E Sayyid Badr

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Sunday said that the trade between Oman and Tanzania, which stands at RO80mn, is steadily growing.

He expressed hope that the volume of mutual investments will grow further across various domains, opening broader horizons for the private sector on both sides.

H E Sayyid Badr made this statement during the second session of the Omani-Tanzanian Joint Committee, held at the Foreign Ministry on Sunday.

While H E Sayyid Badr headed the Omani side, the Tanzanian side was led by Stergomona Lawrence Tax, Tanzanian Minister for Foreign Affairs and East African cooperation.

At the outset of the meeting, H E Sayyid Badr said that the Oman-Tanzania partnership scaled new heights after the visit of Tanzanian President Dr Samia Soloho Hassan to Oman recently. Ties of cooperation in particular gained impetus in the areas of



energy, tourism, fisheries and the logistic sector, he added.

The Tanzanian minister was delighted to be in Oman for this official visit and expressed pride over the historical relations binding the two countries' leaderships and peoples. She stressed the importance of exploiting investment opportunities between the two nations, and voiced her keenness to follow up what was agreed upon during the visit of President Samia to Oman in June this year.

H E Sayyid Badr told ONA that the second session of the committee was held to follow up on the outcome of the two recent visits made to Oman by Tanzanian President Samia Soloho Hassan and Dr Hussain Ali Mwini, President of Zanzibar.

H E Sayyid Badr underscored the significance of following up the implementation of programmes, memorandums of understanding and agreements that were signed earlier and another set of bilateral agreements to be signed between the two friendly countries in future.

On her turn, the Tanzanian minister said that the meeting of the Omani-Tanzanian Joint Committee was aimed at fostering cooperation between the two friendly countries, which are bound by joint historical relations. She noted that the sectors of trade and investment witnessed a steady growth after the signing of memorandums of understanding with Oman. ONA

Oman's skies to dazzle in meteor shower

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman will be able to witness the Geminid meteor shower that will reach its peak on Tuesday night and Wednesday wee hours.

Oman is known for its beautiful sites such as the Starlight Reserve in Al Hajar al Gharbi in Dakhliyah governorate for viewing astronomical objects.

The Geminid meteor shower is going to be one of the most active displays of the year, accord-



ing to the American Meteor Society. This year, the shower will peak in the evening of December 13 and 14, it added.

Ibrahim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, a member of the Omani Astronomical Society,

said that the meteor shower will be from a point in the constellation Gemini, hence the name Geminid.

He said that the meteor shower will not be fully visible due to the presence of the hump-back moon in the sky's dome coinciding with its peak activity, which will cause the obliteration of most of the faint meteors. However, Geminid meteors are numerous and bright, so it is possible to have a clear view of the shower after the moon descends around 1.30am.

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TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION	LAST DATE OF PURCHASING	LAST DATE FOR SUBMISSION	DCRP GRADE	TENDER BOARD GRADE	TYPE OF PARTICIPATION	TENDER PRICE R.O
MZEC/2022/T25	ADVANCED METERING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SMART METERS (BOOT MODEL)	15/12/2022	17/01/2023	(C) & ABOVE	SPECIALISED COMPANIES	OPEN TENDER (LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL)	OMR 2,500/-

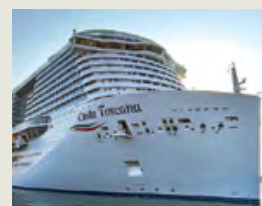
- Specialized companies registered with the Distribution Code Review Panel and Tender Board Registration Certificate and their valid registration can apply to purchase the tender document via e-mail: SCM.TENDERS@MZEC.NAMA.OM Registration requires attaching valid documents of the Commercial Registration, Municipality Authorization, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Tax card.
- The sale of the Tender Document shall start from 27th November 2022.
- International companies & organizations which are not registered in the Sultanate of Oman may participate and obtain tenders documents provided that they shall register in accordance with the rules in force in the Sultanate of Oman within thirty (30) working days from the date on which they are notified of the success of their bids.
- Every company or specialized institution wishing to participate in this tender must attach with its bid a Bid Bond in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman, with amount of 1% of the bid value, addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Minor Tender Committee and valid for a period of (180) days from Bid submission date. Any bid that does not contain the Bid Bond will be disqualified.
- The original guarantee must be submitted in an envelope sealed with red wax and addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Minor Tender Committee and written on outside the project name, the tender number and the name of the owner of the guarantee, and it should be placed in the tender box in the main building of the Mazoon Electricity Company SAOC in Bidbid / Al-Saih Al-Ahmar before 10:00 AM of the last day for submitting bids.
- The Tenderer shall submit the Technical Offer (separate) and the Financial Offer (separate) as hard copy and two copies as soft copies in the tender box in the main building of the Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C
- The offers shall be valid for a period of (180) days from the date of bid submission.
- Bids must be submitted before 10:00 AM of the last day for bid submission.
- All Clarifications should be directed to the e-mail: MZEC-Clarification@mzec.nama.om based on the clarification form attached with the tender documents. The deadline for submitting inquiries for Tender MZEC/2022/T25 is on 10th January 2023.
- Mazoon Electricity Company S.A.O.C. is not bound to accept the lowest tender.
- We would like to inform you that above documents prices not include VAT 5% and it will be charged if purchase invoice issued.

Note: Local companies that are not registered with the Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) are allowed to purchase the tender document by submitting undertaking letter to register in the DCRP or confirmation from DCRP declaring the application is in the accreditation stage. Accordingly, companies must submit Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) accreditation certificate when submitting bids.

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Cruise ship brings over 3,600 tourists to Salalah

Muscat - As Many as 3,616 tourists aboard the Costa Tuscan cruise ship arrived at Salalah port on Sunday, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said.

Port of Salalah received the Italian cruise ship Costa Tuscan, which arrived with 3,616 passengers, including 2,356 tourists, as part of its programmes in a number of ports in the world.

"The tourist programme of the cruise will include tours to major archeological and historic landmarks in the Governorate of Dhofar, besides visits to beaches and traditional markets in Salalah," the ministry added.

BRIEFS

Taiwan slams China over fresh import bans

Taiwan's premier on Sunday accused China of violating international trade rules and "discriminating" against the island after it halted more Taiwanese imports.

According to Taiwan's finance ministry, Chinese customs authorities "suddenly suspended" imports of certain alcoholic beverages from the island on Friday.

It said the move was related to a regulation Beijing imposed on January 1 that requires all food and alcoholic beverage exporters to the mainland to be registered with Chinese customs. Some Taiwanese companies had still been under review.

Premier Su Tseng-chang accused Beijing of violating World Trade Organization (WTO) norms by "making its own rules" and "meddling in trade through administrative means".

China "is especially tough on Taiwan and especially discriminates against Taiwan... They've asked Taiwan to do this and do that," he told reporters on Sunday.

Taiwan plans to appeal to the WTO and will assist the affected businesses, he added.

Beijing claims self-ruled democratic Taiwan as part of its territory to be taken one day, by force if necessary.

Omantel closes \$495mn towers deal with Helios

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) announced that it has closed the sale process for its passive tower infrastructure in Oman with Helios Towers.

Omantel has sold its passive infrastructure of 2,519 sites to Helios Towers for a gross consideration of US\$495mn.

'The sale of Omantel's passive infrastructure assets is part of its strategy to focus on effective deleveraging and focus on optimised capital structure for the company,' Omantel said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Sunday.

In its previous disclosure on Thursday, Omantel said it continues to target the sale of 226 further sites to Helios Towers, which are In-Building Solutions that remain subject to regulatory approval, for a gross consideration of US\$53mn. Helios Towers and Omantel have extended the long-stop date for the potential acquisition of these [additional] sites to May 2024.

Helios Towers also confirmed the closing of its acquisition of Omantel's passive infrastructure assets for a gross consideration of US\$495mn.

In May 2021, Omantel had



Omantel says the sale of the passive infrastructure assets is part of its strategy to focus on effective deleveraging and optimised capital structure for the company

entered into an agreement to sell its passive tower infrastructure assets comprising 2,890 sites to Helios Towers for a cash consideration of US\$575mn.

The group has acquired

2,519 sties out of the 2,890 sites previously communicated, and accordingly, the gross consideration has been adjusted downward to reflect the amended perimeter,' Helios Towers said in a press statement.

Tom Greenwood, chief executive officer of Helios Towers, said, "We are delighted to close the acquisition of Omantel's tower assets. The transaction represents our first in the Middle East, and we enter one of the fastest growing markets for mobile infrastructure in the region with our valued local partner, Rakiza."

"Since announcing the transaction last year, we have built a talented local team and instilled

our business excellence principles, and we now look forward to working with Omantel and the other mobile network operators to drive the growth of mobile communications across Oman," he added.

Talal al Mamari, chief executive officer of Omantel, said, "We are pleased to complete the sale of our passive tower infrastructure in Oman. This aligns to our strategy to develop world class asset-light, strategic and advanced communication networks in Oman. We believe Helios Towers will bring in extensive savings and efficient passive infrastructure solutions and services for Omantel, which in turn will help efficient telecom sector operations and job growth in Oman."

The London-listed Helios Towers is a leading independent telecommunications infrastructure company, having established one of the most extensive tower portfolios across Africa. It builds, owns and operates telecom passive infrastructure, providing services to mobile network operators.

Through the acquisition of Omantel's tower infrastructure, Helios Towers will establish its presence in the Middle-East region, becoming a leading independent tower infrastructure provider in Oman.



Fitch upgrades Sohar International and Ahlibank ratings

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has upgraded Sohar International Bank's and Ahlibank's long-term issuer default ratings (IDRs) to 'BB-' from 'B+'. The rating agency's outlooks on both banks are stable.

Fitch has also upgraded both banks' government support ratings (GSRs) to 'bb-' from 'b+'. The short-term IDRs have also been affirmed at 'B'.

'The stable outlooks on the banks' long-term IDRs mirror that on the Omani sovereign rating. The rating actions reflect the Omani authorities' improved ability to provide support to the banking sector,' Fitch said in a statement.

According to the ratings agency, Sohar International Bank's and Ahlibank's IDRs are driven by potential sovereign support, as expressed by their 'bb-' GSRs.

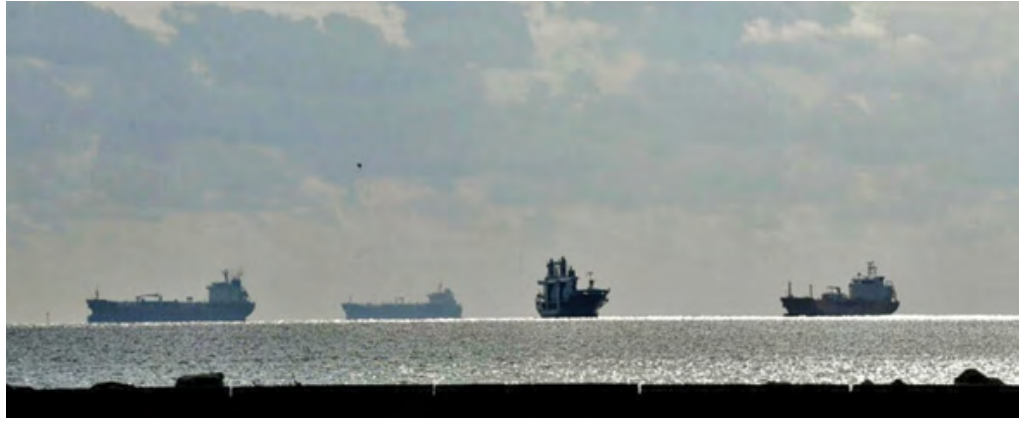
'Oman's external balance sheet position has significantly improved and we expect this will be sustained over the rating

According to Fitch, Sohar International Bank's and Ahlibank's issuer default ratings are driven by potential sovereign support

horizon,' Fitch said.

Fitch forecasts the government's debt-to-GDP ratio will fall to 46.7 per cent in 2022 and 44.9 per cent in 2023, from around 70 per cent in 2020, on better budget performance and oil-fuelled nominal GDP growth in 2022.

Fitch believes the Omani authorities' propensity to support the banking system is high because of high contagion risk in the sector, the role the banking sector plays in financing the economy and the authorities' drive to preserve financial stability as the country implements its economic development plans.



Russia oil embargo, price cap disrupts tankers

London, UK - The European Union embargo on Russia's oil and an international cap on the price of the country's crude is disrupting the maritime transport sector.

The EU on Monday enforced an embargo on Russian crude shipments, the bloc's latest sanction in retaliation for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

This week also saw the start of a US\$60 cap on a barrel of Russian crude, agreed by Western nations.

Tanker traffic jam

Aimed at depriving Russia of key income, the measures have also slowed transportation of its oil by sea.

This is because Turkey has started to request proof of insurance from tankers loaded with Russian crude, slowing their passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and onto international markets.

The Financial Times has reported that Russia has assembled a "shadow fleet" of more than 100 vessels seeking to circumnavigate the Western sanctions regime.

These ships are reportedly using non-Western insurers and selling oil at higher prices to countries that have not subscribed to the new sanctions.

A 1936 treaty guarantees the freedom of navigation to merchant vessels passing through

Turkey's two straits.

But it also gives Turkey the right to regulate security - a provision it is now using to make sure the oil ships are insured against spillage and other accidents.

The London P&I Club, a leading provider of maritime protection and indemnity insurance, claims "the Turkish government's requirements go well beyond the general information that is contained in a confirmation of entry letter.

"It requires... (confirmation) that cover will not be prejudiced under any circumstances, including where there is a sanctions breach on the part of the assured."

Marcus Baker, global head of Marine & Cargo at insurance broker Marsh, said the price cap "adds another layer of complexity to an already pretty complex situation".

He also told AFP: "The slowdown that might happen because of this added administrative burden may have the desired effect that the G7 wanted anyway."

The price ceiling was agreed by the Group of Seven rich countries, which includes Britain, Japan and the United States, as well as the EU and Australia.

Meanwhile as much as 95 per cent of the P&I insurance market is run by insurers in the EU and Britain, who suddenly can no

longer insure cargoes of Russia oil sold for more than US\$60 per barrel.

The market price of a barrel of Russian Urals crude is around US\$65, suggesting the cap may have only a limited impact in the short term.

President Vladimir Putin on Friday warned that Russia could reduce crude production in response to the price limit.

Avoiding ban

"Moscow is already working on circumventing the ban on insurance by providing its own insurance to potential clients through its state-controlled Russian National Reinsurance Company," noted Edoardo Campanella, analyst at UniCredit Bank.

An executive at an oil shipping company, who wished to remain anonymous, said "it will take a week or two, I think at a minimum, to see how the market will function in light of the price cap".

They added: "There's a general view that there is enough shipping capacity in what can be called a 'Dark Fleet' or a sanctions-indifferent fleet so that Russia can sell its oil without regard to the price cap.

"This means to China, to India, potentially some to Brazil or other parts of the world. So it doesn't have to comply with the price cap. So there's enough capacity," the executive told AFP.

AFP

CMA dissolves Raysut Cement's board of directors, appoints a temporary board

Muscat - The Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Sunday issued a decision to dissolve Raysut Cement Company's current board of directors and appoint a temporary board with experienced, competent and independent members.

In a statement, the CMA said that the new board of directors of Raysut Cement Company will begin its duties to organise and restructure the company to ensure the stability of its financial position, and deal with the reasons that led the company to precarious conditions.

The CMA assured the investors and shareholders of Raysut Cement that the task of the appointed temporary board of



directors will be completed as soon as it completes the mission to bring the company back to its stable position and finish dealing

with all observations that the CMA monitored through the field audit process carried out recently. A new board of directors

thereafter will be elected by the shareholders of Raysut Company, the CMA said.

ONA

Saudi Arabia's GDP grew 8.8% in Q3

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia's real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 8.8 per cent in the third quarter of 2022 compared to the same period last year, mainly driven by an increase in oil activities, according to a report released by the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT).

GASTAT noted that the real GDP growth in the third quarter was up 2.1 per cent compared to the second quarter of this year.

According to the report, carried by Arab News, oil activities in the third quarter increased 14.2 per cent year-on-year, and 4.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter.

The report further pointed out that non-oil activities in the kingdom also grew 6 per cent year-on-year, while it decreased by 0.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter.

Government activities also



rose by 2.5 per cent in the third quarter compared to the same period a year ago.

The GASTAT report further noted that crude petroleum and natural gas grew by 14.8 per cent year-on-year,

thus contributing 35.2 per cent to the national GDP.

"The non-oil economic activities outside the government contributed with a share of 50.7 per cent to GDP, with the manufacturing

(excluding petroleum refining) with a share of 7.8 per cent being the most important sub-category within the non-oil economy," the report said.

WAM

US Fed poised for smaller rate hike with eye on wage growth

Washington, US - The US Federal Reserve is poised to slow its interest rate hikes next week, economists say, as central bankers' most forceful moves in decades to fight inflation ripple through the economy.

But the half-point jump analysts expect to see in the Fed's benchmark lending rate will still be a steep rise, as it struggles to cool demand in the United States to bring consumer costs down.

Households in the world's biggest economy have been contending with red-hot prices, with conditions worsened by surging food and energy costs after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

To make borrowing more expensive, the Fed has raised interest rates six times this year, including four bumper 0.75-point increases, bringing the rate to between 3.75 per cent and four per cent.

"We think the stage is set for a (half-point) hike this month," said Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics, as sectors sensitive to interest rates like housing reel and inflation shows signs of easing.

The decision will be announced after a two-day meeting of the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) starting Tuesday.

US Fed Chair Jerome Powell



Policy makers are keeping a close eye on wage growth, given concerns that higher salaries will add to inflation pressures.

"The primary concern for the Fed here is really wage growth," said Martin Wurm of Moody's Analytics, adding that the Fed is unlikely to ease policy until there is consistent development on this front.

"That doesn't necessarily mean it's going to keep hiking

forever, but it does mean that the rate will increase for a little bit and... stay elevated throughout the next year," Wurm told AFP.

With a higher benchmark rate, it becomes more expensive to borrow funds for big-ticket purchases such as cars and property, or to expand businesses.

'Signs of stress'

Despite the Fed's forceful

moves, consumer inflation stood at 7.7 per cent in October while job gains remained robust, sending jitters through markets on worries that the central bank would prolong its aggressive campaign.

"The strong jobs market, rising wages and the strong household balance sheet... are key areas of support" for demand, said economist James Knightley of ING.

Household wealth has in-

creased by US\$30tn since the start of the pandemic, he noted, allowing consumers to dip into their savings as the cost of living spiked.

"However, we are also seeing greater use of consumer credit and credit cards to fund spending, which could hint at some signs of stress and that household efforts to maintain their standard of living are starting to be exhausted," Knightley told AFP.

Inflation in Russia slows to under 12%

Moscow, Russia - Inflation has continued to slow in Russia, standing at less than 12 per cent in November year on year, after soaring to a 20-year high after the start of Moscow's assault on Ukraine, statistics showed.

Last month, the rise in prices stood at 11.98 per cent, down from 12.63 per cent in October, the Rosstat state statistics service said. The decline in inflation comes despite a barrage of Western sanctions that have affected much of the Russian economy, such as the automobile sector.

Earlier Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he expected inflation to stand at 12.2 per cent this year while GDP would contract by 2.9 per cent.

The rise in food prices is a huge concern for Russians on low incomes. According to Rosstat, the annual food price increase stood at 11.5 per cent in November. "In November, an increase in the cost of fruits and vegetables had a significant impact on the dynamics of food prices," the statistics agency said.

Prices for cucumbers went up by 32.5 per cent and tomatoes by 16.9 per cent.

Since Putin moved troops into Ukraine on February 24, Russia has been hit with a barrage of international sanctions, including embargoes on key exports, accelerating already high inflation.

AFP

Twitter subscription service to be relaunched

New York, US - After several false starts, Twitter announced that it would relaunch its subscription service next week, including a system for authenticating accounts on the platform.

"We're relaunching @TwitterBlue on Monday - subscribe on web for \$8/month or on (Apple's) iOS for \$11/month to get access to subscriber-only features, including the blue checkmark," the company tweeted.

A blue checkmark on an account, which indicates it has been verified by Twitter, was previously free but reserved for organizations and public figures in an attempt to avoid impersonation and misinformation.

After buying Twitter in October, billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk announced his intention to diversify the company's revenue stream beyond advertising, turning to new paying



formulas for premium features.

A first version was launched 10 days after Musk took control in early November, but it caused an uproar when many fake accounts popped up pretending to be celebrities or companies. The version was quickly suspended.

Under the new offer, accounts seeking blue checkmarks will again be reviewed by Twitter, the company said.

The checkmark will become gold for businesses and, later in the week, gray for government organizations, it added.

AFP

Global economic chiefs laud China's zero-Covid reversal

Huangshan, China - Global economic leaders have hailed China's move away from its hardline zero-Covid policy, with the IMF chief saying the "decisive actions" would help revive growth both in the country and globally.

The relaxation would help to shore up a world economy struggling with the impact of the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the head of the World Trade Organization said after a conference in the eastern Chinese city of Huangshan hosted by outgoing Premier Li Keqiang.

Beijing on Wednesday announced a loosening of its zero-tolerance approach to coronavirus outbreaks, ending large-scale lockdowns and allowing some positive cases to isolate at home following widespread protests against the restrictions.

The decision indicated that the world's second-largest economy is finally shifting towards living with Covid after years of grinding curbs stifled growth.



"We welcome very much the decisive actions taken by the Chinese authorities... to recalibrate the Covid policies so as to create a better impetus for the revival of growth in China," International Monetary Fund managing director Kristalina Georgieva said at a press briefing with the heads of other major economic institutions.

The effort to boost vaccination rates and anti-viral treatments "is very good for the Chinese people,

but also important for Asia and the rest of the world", Georgieva added.

"China's performance matters (not just) to China - it matters to the world economy as well."

The global economy has been rocked this year, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine adding to a stuttering post-pandemic recovery and a cost of living crisis in many countries.

The retreat from zero-Covid "will help remove one set of un-

certainities" in a world reeling from the impacts of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and climate change, said WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala at the same briefing.

Secretary-general of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Mathias Cormann, said the "adjustments will support the strength of the recovery both in China and globally".

Beijing's step back from zero-Covid has helped to prop up global stock markets fearful of a looming recession in the United States, but analysts have warned that China's route to a full reopening remains bumpy.

Long criticised for disrupting business operations and global supply chains, the zero-Covid policy has acted as a constraint on China's economy, with analysts expecting Beijing to miss its stated annual growth target of 5.5 per cent.

Public frustration with snap

lockdowns and mass testing boiled over last month as protesters took to the streets in cities around the country, with some calling for greater political freedoms in China's most widespread demonstrations since 1989.

On Friday, China rolled back more restrictions, with the culture and tourism ministry announcing that visitors will no longer be required to show "health codes" when entering a range of venues.

A spokesperson for the National Health Commission (NHC) said at a press briefing that hospitals must not refuse care to coronavirus-positive patients, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

The move marks a further pivot away from China's long-standing strategy of isolating all those who test positive and treating them in state-run quarantine facilities.

AFP

China makes delivery of homegrown passenger jet

Beijing, China - China on Friday announced the first delivery of its new domestically produced passenger jet, with the aircraft expected to make its commercial debut early next year.

Beijing hopes the C919 commercial jetliner will challenge foreign models like the Boeing 737 MAX and the Airbus A320, though most of its parts are sourced from abroad.

The first model of the narrow-body jet, which seats 164 passengers, was formally handed over to China Eastern Airlines during a ceremony at an airport in Shanghai, state media reported.

The move marked "an important milestone" in the journey of China's aircraft industry, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Footage broadcast Friday by



CCTV showed the jet bearing the China Eastern insignia standing on a rainswept airfield and gave a glimpse inside the aircraft's cabin.

The state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corp of China (COMAC) passed the airline a "commemorative key to the

world's first C919," CCTV reported.

COMAC said at an airshow last month that it had secured orders for 300 C919s, but did not clarify whether the orders were fully confirmed and gave no details about the value of the deals or delivery dates.

But if the orders go through, they would take the number of known deals for the C919 to over 1,100, based on figures from previous COMAC statements.

Domestic media previously reported that four aircraft were expected to be delivered to

China Eastern -- the country's second-largest carrier by passenger numbers - by the end of the year before going into operation in the first quarter of 2023.

China sealed a deal for Airbus jets worth US\$17bn earlier this year, and the company began producing its A321 model in the northeastern city of Tianjin last month.

The Boeing 737 MAX has been grounded in China since 2019 after two fatal crashes, though the aerospace giant said in July that it may be approved for delivery by Chinese regulators this year.

But lingering US-China trade tensions and China's worst commercial air disaster earlier this year involving a Boeing 737-800 have slowed progress.

AFP

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the commercial companies law. The Company (North Ocean Enterprises Ilc) which is registered with the commercial registration no 1649922 here by announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 1,250,000 to 150,000

Whoever has any objections to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of commerce and Industry within 30 days from the date hereof.

إعلان تخفيض رأس المال

وفقا لأحكام المادة 150 من قانون الشركات التجارية، تعلن مشاريع شمال المحيط (ش.م.م) المقيمة بالسجل التجاري رقم 1649922 أنها بصدد تخفيض رأسمالها من 150,000 إلى 1,250,000 ريال عماني.

وكل من له اعتراض على ذلك عليه أن يتقدم بأسباب اعتراضه إلى أمانة السجل التجاري بوزارة التجارة والصناعة وترويج الاستثمار خلال 30 يوما من تاريخه.

MG Motor, MHD present ‘Festival of Dreams’

MG Oman has announced ‘Festival of Dreams’ for its customers who make their purchases from MHD dealerships. The promotion encompasses multiple chances to win cars and smart-phones along with a bouquet of free offerings, the MHD said.

Apart from this, all MG Cars now come with Oman’s first-ever ‘Ten Years Unlimited Kilometres’ warranty. ‘Win Big, Be delighted and Get more with MG; that is the ‘Festival of Dreams’ in a nutshell,’ the company said about the promotion, which will run until December 31.

‘It is time to celebrate when the dreams of owning an MG car turn out to be a more rewarding and fulfilling experience, than ever,’ it added.

The details of the promotion are as follows:

The mega prize - When a customer purchases any MG, he/she can enter the Mega Raffle Draw and stand a chance to win an MG5. There are eight cars to be won - one car per week.

Lucky draw gift - Every customer who visits the MG showroom under MHD dealerships and test drives any MG model during the promotion period can enter the Lucky Draw with a chance to win a smartphone. There are 15 smartphones available to be won.



The free offerings - Registration, Insurance, 30,000km-Service and Window tinting.

MG Motor is a fast-growing automotive brand known to offer cars with features and technology at a price that’s hard to match. It brings 98 years of classic British design combined with the most advanced global technology in every model they produce. The MG brand lives up to promises which are in line with its ‘Do More’ philosophy.

MHD ACERE is primarily committed to supporting the growth of MG brands through a significant emphasis on customer satisfaction and providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. A wide network and round-the-clock support have earned the company a massive following among the customers.

MHD ACERE Chief Executive Officer Mohsin Hani al Bahrani affirmed that world over, MG Cars “are known for their value,

technology and price advantage”.

“We bring exclusive promotions to delight our customers,” adding that this time, “we hope to fulfil their wishes with the ‘Festival of Dreams’ where they get to win in multiple ways. We wish and invite them to celebrate the ‘Festival of Dreams’ and many years of driving pleasure in their favourite MG car.”

The Festival of Dreams promotion is applicable on the purchase of M5, MG6, MG GT, MG

ZST, MG HS, MG RX5 and MG RX8.

MG5

An adventurous sedan with a push-button start, the MG5 can race to a top speed of 180km per hour amply powered by the 1.5-litre engine and an impressive torque of 150Nm.

MG6

The hallmarks of the magnificent MG6 are head-turning aesthet-

ics, sporty styling and dynamic performance to match. This vehicle comes in three trim levels. A turbocharged 1.5-litre engine providing torque of up to 250Nm drives the MG6 to a top speed of 210km per hour and can even race from 0-100km per hour in as little as seven seconds.

MG GT

A sleek, sporty coupe-like fast-back sedan, the all-new MG GT is inspired by the 1962 MGB GT. It is available in two engine variants - the 1.5 Turbo model produces 173HP and 250Nm maximum torque and hits 0-100km per hour in only 8.5 seconds. A 1.5L engine matched to an eight-speed iCVT gearbox offers a fuel economy of 5.7l/100km.

MG ZST

The sporty, agile MG ZST is designed and built with a British heritage in mind and turns out to be popular in the Middle East. The lively and energetic 1.3-litre Turbo engine delivers an output of 160hp and a peak torque of 230Nm. The six-speed automatic gearbox helps acceleration touch 0-100km per hour in just 9.8 seconds. The 1.5-litre CVT engine with 118hp and 180Nm of torque provides improved fuel economy of 16.5km per litre.

MG HS

A smart SUV, the MG HS has both charm and capability. Embracing the design concept of X-Motion, its performance never stops to thrill. Powered by a 2.0-litre Turbo engine, the MG HS delivers a torque of 360Nm and a maximum speed of 210km per hour.

MGRX5

The versatile MG RX5 is the ultimate SUV that encapsulates MG’s ‘Do More’ ethos. Two engine options are available for the MG RX5 - a 1.5T in two-wheel drive and a 2.0T which is available in two and all-wheel drive iterations. The smaller of these engines provides 250Nm of torque, with the 2.0T increasing this to 350Nm.

MGRX8

The MG RX8 - a bold and capable seven-seater SUV - has a power-packed 2.0T engine paired with a six-speed automatic transmission providing 360Nm of torque. The model is also supported by 4x2 RWD as standard, with both higher specification editions incorporating an innovative Torque on Demand system for the driver.

The MG ‘Festival of Dreams’ promotion is only valid at the MHD dealerships across Oman.

BankDhofar receives award

In recognition of the exceptional services, products and financial solutions for Al Riadah Priority Banking Services, BankDhofar recently won ‘Outstanding Priority Banking Services of the Year’ award.

Hind Abdul Malik al Sabbagh, AGM & Head of Priority Banking, received the award on behalf of the bank at the Red-Carpet Signature Luxury 100 event, the bank informed.

The high-profile event was attended by a number of dignitaries and corporate leaders, where the distinguished brands were recognized for their excellence.

On receiving the award, Sabbagh took pride in having a high standard of work culture at BankDhofar, where “we spare no effort in designing a top-notch banking services and products that ensure outstanding experience for our Priority Banking customers”.

“We are proud to have been



recognized with this prestigious award, which will motivate our team to go the extra mile design banking solutions that will exceed the expectations of our customers.”

Al Riadah Priority Banking provides a unique range of banking products and services that are tailored to suit the unique lifestyle of priority customers, ranging from personalized cheque book, exclusive Al Riadah card, including; Visa Infinite Debit Card, Visa Signature Debit Card, Visa Infinite Credit Card, and MasterCard Platinum Credit

Card. Customers can enjoy exceptional times at restaurants, shops, as well as procurement protection, extended warranty, access to airport lounges around the world, travel insurance for cardholders and their families, in addition to other exclusive services.

BankDhofar has tailor-made financing solutions to meet the needs of its priority banking customers with low insurance fees and simple and fast procedures. The Bank also provides deposit accounts at competitive interest rates and low insurance fees.



ACI Asia-Pacific elects 3 new board members at 34th meeting in Muscat

Airport Council International (ACI) for Asia-Pacific concluded on Wednesday its 34th meeting, which took place in Muscat, with the attendance of ACI Asia-Pacific chairman Emmanuel Menanteau and its director general Stefano Baronci, a number of board directors and Aimen Ahmed Sultan al Hosni, the chairman of ACI and the CEO of Oman Airports.

The board of directors announced the election of three new directors to be added to other 27 directors. They are Lorie Argus from Australia, Muham-

mad Awaluddin from Indonesia and Chang Yi Wang from China.

Lorie is the CEO of Australia Pacific for Airports (APAC) which operates and manages Melbourne and Launceston airports.

While Awaluddin serves as the president director of PT Angkasa Pura II, a state-owned enterprise under the Indonesian Department of Transport overseeing airports in Western Indonesia, Wang serves as the chairman of Capital Airports Holding Limited & Beijing Capital International Airport Co Ltd.

The Board of directors of ACI Asia-Pacific, which consists of aviation leaders across Asia-Pacific and MENA, the strategic direction for ACI Asia-Pacific through its advocacy program and activities in the region.

Welcoming the new directors, Emmanuel Menanteau said, “We are proud and grateful for amazing group of successful aviation expertise who have joined the board of directors”, adding that “I am confident that the new directors will continue being strong support for the region to assist the travel recovery with

the recovery of the aviation industry”.

He mentioned that the professional experiences are valuable as “we work closely with our stakeholders to revive the industry and I take this opportunity to thank the directors who have completed their mandates for their exceptional contributions in ACI Asia-Pacific”.

After the election, Stefano Baronci congratulated all the new elected directors of the board, “confirming that Australia, China and Indonesia are important markets in the region”.

Alila Hinu Bay’s GCC offer unveils exciting benefits for residents to discover Salalah

It’s that time of the year again; the season of discovery, joy and enchantment. In celebration of the sparkling season, Alila Hinu Bay, Salalah has introduced ‘Festive Journey’ spread over a span of 12 days, blending natural discovery with indulgent dining, signature pampering treatments at Spa Alila and dazzling winter celebrations.

The group said, ‘Guests can escape the hustle and bustle of city life and head to a harbour of undisturbed luxury and adventures at Alila Hinu Bay in Salalah to collect beautiful memories’.

‘Get ready to savour festive international dishes with a modern twist and enjoy unrivalled gastronomy at The Orchard Restaurant or embark towards the flavours of South-East at SeaSalt Restaurant,’ it added.

For families, there is plenty to keep the little ones entertained including Festive Cookie Decoration Workshops, Paper Aeroplane Competition, Sack Race Games, Musical Chairs and Tug-



of-War.

‘Rejuvenate the mind, body and soul, and capture mindfulness at Spa Alila for optimum wellness’, Alila Hinu Bay staid, adding ‘additionally, guests can participate in a range of activities, specifically curated for each day; some of which include exploring history at The Museum of the Frankincense Land, Sunset

Shore Fishing, raising spirits through Mountain Biking, living the joy of the season with Ricotta Cheese Making and more’.

With feel-good movies under the stars, live entertainment and nature’s beauty all around, soak up the energy of Salalah this festive season.

‘Raise a toast to 2023 in style; celebrate New Year’s Eve with a

delicious Fisherman’s Feast and sample the freshest Omani seafood, sparkling beverages, live cooking, BBQ stations and signature desserts by the mystical lagoon. Don’t forget to whisper your dreams into the night, where awe-inducing experiences, exciting excursions, and all things merry await at Alila Hinu Bay,’ the group added.

Arab Open University hosts virtual symposium on digital business

The Arab Open University Oman held an international symposium on digital business transformation last Wednesday.

The symposium ‘Digital Business Transformation - The Way Forward’ hosted several international speakers which consist of academics and experts who are involved in digital transformation process in various sectors.

‘The participants were from across the world. The speakers for the symposium are all experts and academics working for prestigious universities across the world,’ the university stated.

The presentations were done virtually on topics including Oman Government Digital Transformation Plans, Digitalisation and Development of Smart Cities in The World, Digital data, and ethical implication of digital adopting in SMEs etc.

The symposium was organised by the Faculty of Business Studies, Arab Open University in Oman, in collaboration with Oman Data Park.



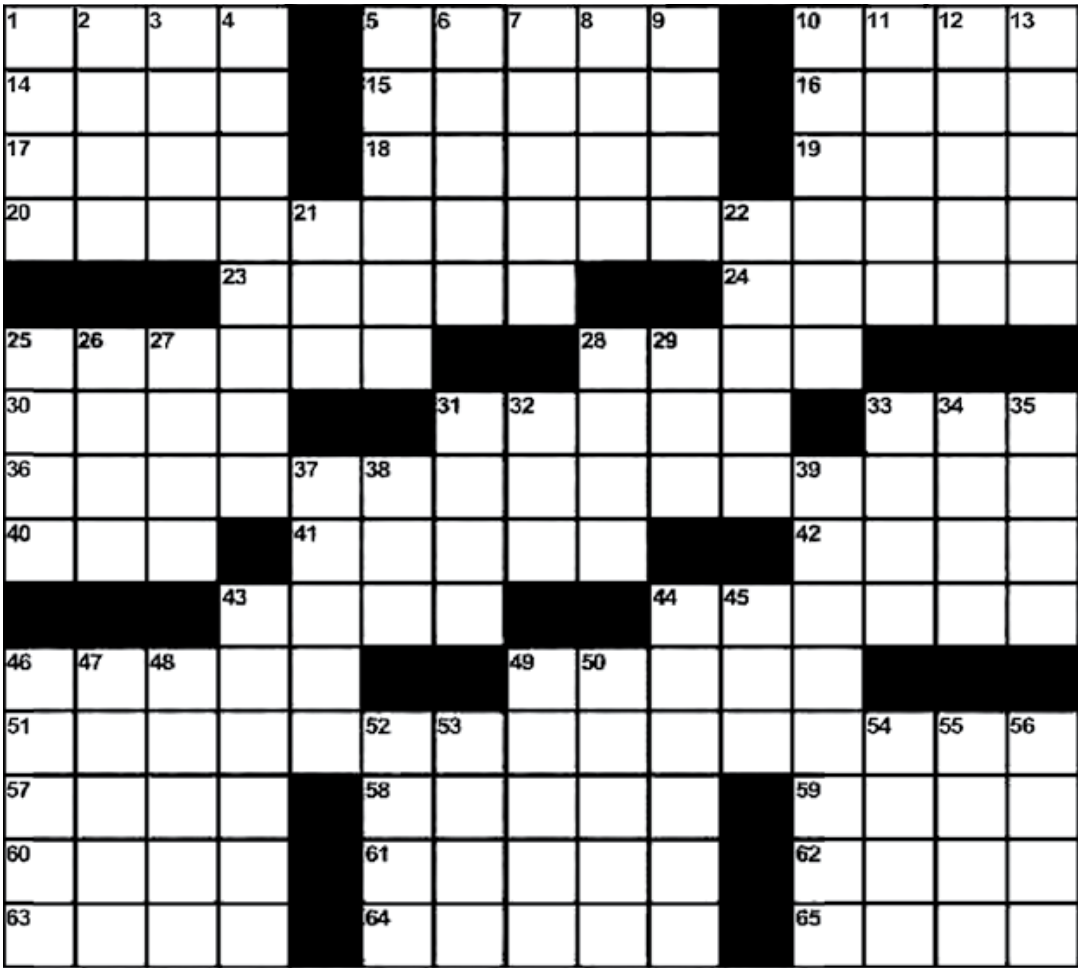
Oman Data Park is one of the leading Omani companies in the field of information technology. A few attendees had come in person for the event and that number reached about 60, which included experts in digital transformation process and academics from universities and colleges across Oman.

The virtual presence of the participants was also commendable, and the number of such participants reached around 175. This indicates how important is

the digital transformation for organisations and academics.

For organisations, digital transformation is a big shift since it is expected to yield a good number of benefits for them. Similarly, it offers a good scope for academicians to perform a lot of research on digital transformation. Thus, the Faculty of Business Studies (Oman) had provided an opportunity to share, contribute and gain knowledge on digital transformation through this symposium.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Farm yield
- 5) Black tea from India
- 10) Schooner part
- 14) Lamp type
- 15) Piggish types
- 16) State openly
- 17) Seemingly forever
- 18) _ del Sol
- 19) Domesticated
- 20) Future co-defendants
- 23) Like barely cooked eggs
- 24) Lubricated
- 25) No man is one, to Donne
- 28) Cameo stone
- 30) Bisque morsel
- 31) Subway handhold
- 33) A mammal has three
- 36) Sucking it up
- 40) Dash abbr.
- 41) They're crossed in Olympic competition
- 42) Creole pod
- 43) Kind of check
- 44) Loosely in "Chicken Little"
- 46) One place to be lost
- 49) Seize illegally

51) Kin of polls

- 57) It doesn't qualify as a duet
- 58) Some soft drink options
- 59) Reed in a pit
- 60) One way to stand by
- 61) Decree
- 62) "... we forget ..."
- 63) Some whiskeys
- 64) Office stations
- 65) Ogles

DOWN

- 1) Bit of thunder
- 2) Muffin head?
- 3) "Your tum"
- 4) Deli order, sometimes
- 5) Climb
- 6) Like much testimony
- 7) Cream puff
- 8) Nay sayer
- 9) Not easy to get along with
- 10) Reeves/Fishburne film (with "The")
- 11) Be of use to
- 12) WWI battle site
- 13) Material for many jackets
- 21) Mother Teresa was

one

- 22) Aquatic rodent
- 25) Nuclear weapon, for short
- 26) Berth place
- 27) Bedmaker's strip?
- 28) Rocks worth something
- 29) Apprehend
- 31) Proofreader's mark, sometimes
- 32) Not just any
- 33) Caribous' cousins
- 34) A_ pittance
- 35) "Don't go!"
- 37) High land
- 38) Feds' document producer
- 39) Way out of a contract
- 43) Onetime Indian soldiers
- 44) Hosts' handfuls
- 45) Food scrap
- 46) Buzzing
- 47) Not on time
- 48) Photographer's request
- 49) Wrinkly fruits
- 50) Buss
- 52) Decorated, as a cake

- 53) Central point
- 54) Comply with

- 55) One teaspoon, often
- 56) Adjusts, as a clock

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Make an effort not to sugarcoat what you say to people today. Your goal should be honesty, not diplomacy. Right now, people value your critical eye and are ready to hear the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Interestingly enough, you're in a slightly different frame of mind. When the tables turn, the scene might not be so pretty. For you, it will be hard to hear the truth, but it is what it is. You'll have to learn to accept it.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

It's a common saying that cream rises to the top, meaning, of course, that premium quality becomes obvious when it's compared to subpar quality. To find the quality in your life today, do some comparing of your own. If you've grown too comfortable in your routine, you might be settling for less than what you deserve. Try a new market, visit that new intriguing restaurant, and when you see someone with a particularly fetching haircut, ask them the name of their stylist. Refresh your routine.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Sometimes when you finish a journey, you arrive at a place that looks very different from what you thought it was going to look like. You might be disappointed, you might be pleasantly surprised, but you should definitely be hopeful that things will get better. You are where you need to be, and if you aren't happy about the accommodations, be patient. Learn to live with it and explore what it offers. This place you're in has much more to offer than you realize.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

As this day moves forward, you will feel more and more connected to the people around you. So if you are going to be in any type of crowded environment today, try to make it happen as late in the day as possible. That way, instead of potentially being overwhelmed by all the diverse energy around you, you'll feel energized. Being closely tied to your community can give you a significant sense of yourself, so consider stepping into a small volunteer role.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your fiery enthusiasm for what you believe in is powerful. You can always make things happen with your emotional conviction. But today, rein in that power and keep it to yourself. Controversial conversations could be filled with traps. If you jump into things heart first, you may end up getting burned or putting your foot in your mouth. Experiment by taking an impersonal point of view. Don't let your listening skills be hampered by your passion.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Have you been giving someone the silent treatment? It won't do you much good. You can't make your point unless you clearly communicate your feelings and needs. People can't read your mind, so get in touch and clear the air. If you're the one receiving the silent treatment from someone else, reach out and check in with them. Find out whether they're ready to talk. Approach things compassionately and with your defenses down.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

While you might not have clairvoyant powers, today you will have a neat knack for predicting the future. Friends will want to know which risk is safe to take, which person is interested the most, even which stock to buy. If you'd rather keep your secret, you don't have to divulge the fact that you're not psychic and can't tell the future. Amaze them with your powers, and enjoy providing them with the temporary escape from the burden of having to make all their own decisions.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Right now, you're only seeing one small aspect of a very complex situation. What you think is a problem is actually nothing to worry about, and what you think is fine on its own actually needs much more attention from you. If you can step back and look at the bigger picture today, you'll immediately see what you need to do and how you need to spend your time. It's all about perspective, and yours is a bit too narrow. Widen your horizons and push through those self-imposed barriers.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You can take command today if you want to. Slowly, you've been noticing how those in power are those most scrutinized. Are you ready for the extra attention? Your experience, intelligence, and flexibility have made prepared you to step up to a power position, but you might not quite be ready emotionally. It might be time to push yourself past your comfort level. Today offers a chance to put your stamp on things and really shape them to your liking.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Getting a little time to yourself will be extremely difficult today. You are the most popular person in the room, for one of many possible reasons. Since ignoring the external world will be pretty near impossible, you are better off giving in and socializing with the people who are clamoring for your attention. There will be plenty of time in the coming days to find the alone time you so desperately want right now. For now, enjoy the shared laughter of your old friends.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your ego is going to get many small boosts today, which will send you into a well-deserved, confident phase of life. This new feeling of self-worth will be so strong that without even realizing it you'll be pumping up the egos of everyone you come in contact with. Call up a homesick friend and remind them of what a friendly voice sounds like, smile at a stranger on the sidewalk, tip extra big on that cup of coffee. Make people feel good for no reason!



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A lot of details are still up in the air about a big event or adventure, and some exciting travel plans might have to be put on hold a little bit longer. Unfortunately, the uncertainty around you will only grow for the next few days. If you can increase activity in your life right now, you will be able to concentrate on keeping yourself calm and positive about not knowing everything all the time. Let the Universe take you where you're supposed to go.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What does the Indian company MX Player specialise in?
- A. Video streaming and video on demand
 - B. Technical development in gaming machines
 - C. Cricket equipment
 - D. Dance competitions

02. A celebrated case in 1734 in England concerned Judith Defour, found guilty of murdering her two-year old daughter. What was the reason she gave?

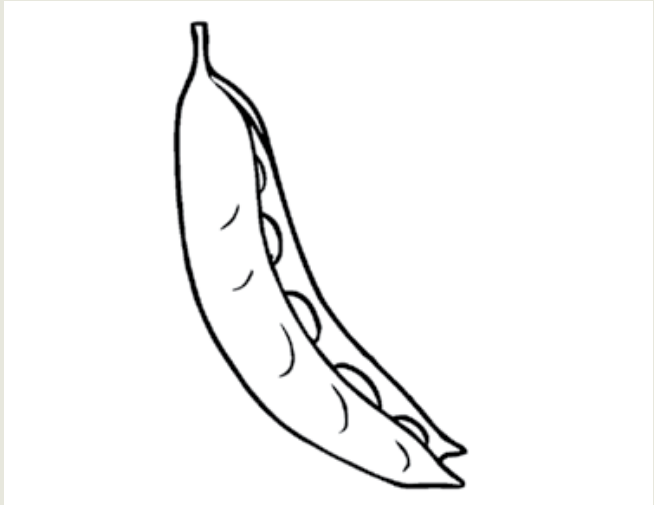
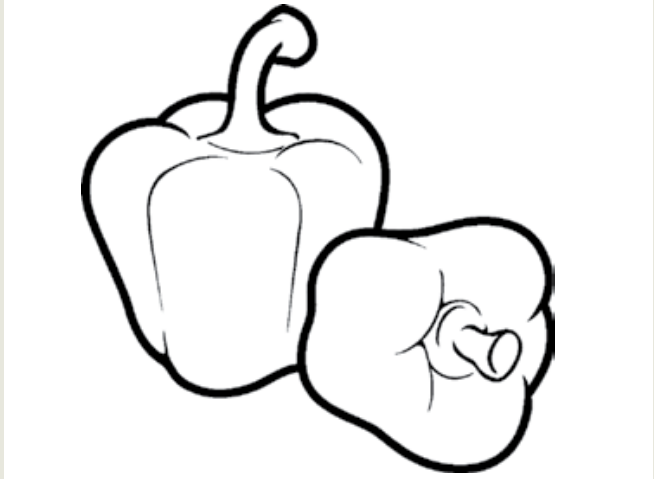
- A. She needed to sell the child's clothes to buy gin
- B. The child cost too much to keep
- C. The child would not stop crying
- D. Her current man did not like the child

03. Which river is the largest contributor (by volume) to the waters of Lake Titicaca?

- A. The Huanacán
- B. Rio Desaguadero
- C. Rio Ramis
- D. Marañon River

Answers: 1. A 2. A 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	P	O	R
H	L	R	S
E	O	A	D
R	E	Y	L

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Peru's new leader swears in cabinet as unrest intensifies

Lima, Peru - Peru's new leader Dina Boluarte unveiled her cabinet on Saturday as protesters blocked highways and pelted police with rocks in the wake of Pedro Castillo's ouster as the president.

Boluarte, Peru's first woman president, oversaw a ceremony in which 19 ministers - eight of whom are women - took the oath of office at the presidential palace.

Boluarte was hastily sworn in on Wednesday hours after Castillo, who faced a series of corruption probes, tried and failed to dissolve Congress, which then impeached him. Castillo is now under arrest.

Boluarte's new chief of staff is a former prosecutor who specialised in corruption cases and her new cabinet comprises members seen as technocrats who are politically independent.

"Consolidation of democracy, rule of law, balance of powers, governability - this is the essential line of my government," Boluarte, who was vice president under leftist Castillo, said in her first speech.

The 60-year-old lawyer has said she will serve out Castillo's term through July 2026, but on Friday she did not rule out holding an early presidential vote.

Elections are a key demand of protesters who have been blocking roads and burning tires across the country, which has a record of political upheaval and instability.

Protests took a violent turn on Saturday in the southern Andean city of Andahuaylas, where police used tear gas to quell



Peru's new president, Dina Boluarte (centre), poses for a picture with her newly appointed cabinet ministers after the swearing-in ceremony at the Palace of Government in Lima on Saturday (AFP)

Consolidation of democracy, rule of law, balance of powers - this is the essential line of my government

DINA BOLUARTE

thousands of marchers, some of whom used slingshots to repel police.

Twenty people - including four police - were injured in the clashes, the national human rights ombudsman's office said in a tweet.

Two police officers who were taken hostage by protesters were later freed, the office said.

"We call for calm given the

events taking place in Andahuaylas," the National Police tweeted.

Students, workers and left-wing political parties held new rallies on Saturday evening in the capital Lima to demand the closure of Congress and to protest the ouster of Castillo.

Many roads remained blocked in the south of the country, where Castillo enjoys wide support, including the Pan-American Highway, leaving dozens of buses and cargo trucks stranded near the agricultural hubs of Ica and Arequipa.

'A usurper'

Castillo had tried to head off Wednesday's impeachment vote - the third against him since he took office 18 months ago - by dissolving the legislature and an-

nouncing he would rule by decree. But lawmakers voted to fire him anyway.

The prosecution accuses the left-wing rural teacher of rebellion and conspiracy, and a high court ordered him held for seven days in preliminary detention.

Castillo was taken into custody by his own security personnel on Wednesday after his failed decree, as he headed to the embassy of Mexico to seek political asylum. On Thursday, he was placed in preventive detention. The charges against Castillo carry a jail term of between 10 and 20 years.

Boluarte had been negotiating for three days over the formation of her government with conservative parties that dominate congress. Her leftist allies refused to take part after the

ouster and arrest of Castillo. Her intention to serve out his term has run into headwinds.

The protesters have expressed fierce rejection of congress and view Boluarte's leadership as illegitimate.

A poll released in November this year said 86 per cent of those questioned disapprove of the legislature.

"Dina Boluarte does not represent us because she is a usurper. We did not elect her," said Maria Tolentino, a home-maker who took part in protests Friday in Lima.

Hundreds of people marched through the streets of Lima on Friday for the second day, demanding Castillo's release. On Thursday, police fired tear gas and clashed with demonstrators. AFP

UK medics laud first treatment for resistant leukaemia

London, UK - Doctors in Britain have hailed a pioneering treatment for an aggressive form of leukaemia, after a teenager became the first patient to be given a new therapy and went into remission.

The 13-year-old girl, identified only as Alyssa, was diagnosed with T-cell acute lymphoblastic leukaemia in 2021.

But her blood cancer did not respond to conventional treatment, including chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant.

She was enrolled on a clinical trial of a new treatment at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children (GOSH) using genetically engineered immune cells from a healthy volunteer.

In 28 days her cancer was in remission, allowing her to receive a second bone marrow transplant to restore her immune system.

Six months on, she is 'doing well' back home in Leicester, central England, and receiving follow-up care.

"Without this experimental treatment, Alyssa's only option was palliative care," the hospital said in a statement on Sunday.

Robert Chiesa, a GOSH consultant, said her turnaround had been 'quite remarkable', although the results still needed to be monitored and confirmed in the next few months.

Cutting edge

Acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL) is the most common kind of cancer in children and affects cells in the immune system, known as B cells and T cells, which fight and protect against viruses.

GOSH said Alyssa was the first patient known to have been given base-edited T cells, which involves chemically converting single nucleotide bases - letters of the DNA code - which carry instructions for a specific protein. Researchers at GOSH and University College London helped develop the use of genome-edited T cells to treat B-cell leukaemia in 2015.

But to treat some other types of leukaemia the team had to overcome the challenge that T cells designed to recognise and attack cancerous cells had ended up killing each other during the manufacturing process.

Multiple additional DNA changes were needed to the base-edited cells to allow them to target cancerous cells without damaging each other.

"This is a great demonstration of how, with expert teams and infrastructure, we can link cutting edge technologies in the lab with real results in the hospital for patients," said GOSH consultant immunologist and professor Waseem Qasim.

AFP

Japan launches first lunar mission

Washington, US - A Japanese startup's spacecraft was launched to the Moon on Sunday in the country's first-ever lunar mission and the first of its kind by a private company.

The launch was carried out by Elon Musk's SpaceX at Cape Canaveral in the US state of Florida after two postponements for additional pre-flight checks.

The spacecraft, produced by Tokyo-based startup ispace and carrying a UAE-built rover, blasted off aboard a Falcon 9 rocket at 2:38am (0738 GMT), live footage of the launch showed. "Our first mission will lay the groundwork for unleashing the Moon's potential and transforming it into a robust and vibrant economic system," the startup's CEO, Takeshi Hakamada, said in a statement.

So far only the United States, Russia and China have managed to put a robot on the lunar surface. The ispace mission is the first of a programme called Hakuto-R, which means 'white rabbit' in Japanese.

The company said its lunar lander was expected to touch down on the visible side of the Moon in April 2023 - the Year of the Rabbit in the Japanese zodiac. Measuring just over two by 2.5 metres, the spacecraft has a payload that includes a 10kg rover built by the United Arab Emirates. The Gulf country is a newcomer to the space race but sent a probe into Mars' orbit last year. If the rover, named Rashid, successfully lands, it will be the Arab world's first Moon mission.

AFP

Nobel Prize winner Annie Ernaux hails Albert Camus

Stockholm, Sweden - French writer Annie Ernaux hailed Albert Camus as she received her Nobel Prize for literature on Saturday, 65 years after the author of existentialist classic *The Stranger* won the same award.

"Finding myself here, 65 years later, leaves me with a deep sense of astonishment and gratitude," Ernaux told 2,000 guests gathered for the ceremony at Stockholm City Hall.

She said she felt 'astonishment at the mystery represented by the path of life and hazardous, solitary pursuit of writing. Grati-



Nobel Prize in Literature 2022 laureate French writer Annie Ernaux speaks during the royal banquet to honour the laureates of the Nobel Prize 2022, following the award ceremony on Saturday (AFP)

tude for allowing me to join Camus, and these late or contemporary writers that I admire'.

"By rewarding my work, you force me to be even more demanding in the search for a reality," she said.

Camus, then 44, won the prize in 1957 for his body of work which included novels such as *The Stranger*, *The Plague* and several plays and essays.

Like Camus, who was born to a poor family in French Algeria, Ernaux's writing explores her own journey from a working class background to France's lit-

erary elite.

Honoured by the Swedish Academy for 'the courage and clinical acuity' of her work, Ernaux is just the 17th woman to win the prize since it was first handed out in 1901, and the first French woman.

Outside France, recognition for her work has only come in recent years, notably after the English translation of her key 2008 work, *The Years*, which was nominated for the prestigious Man Booker International Prize in 2019.

AFP

Activists warn a toothless UN nature pact will fail

Montreal, Canada - The world's next global pact for nature is doomed without clear mechanisms for implementing targets, conservation groups said on Saturday on the sidelines of UN talks, as hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Montreal demanding greater action.

Similar factors were widely blamed for the failure of the last 10-year biodiversity deal, adopted in 2010 in Aichi, Japan, which was unable to achieve nearly any of its objectives.

"Strong text that commits countries to review progress against global targets and ratchet up action over time is essential to hold governments accountable," said Guido Broekhoven of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), adding he was 'very worried' about the current state of negotiations on this point.

Implementation mechanisms are at the heart of the Paris agreement on the fight against global warming, in the



Protestors with the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) enter the room as negotiators meet to discuss Target 3 at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada on Saturday (AFP)

form of 'nationally determined contributions.'

However, the current text on biodiversity only 'urges' countries to take into account the conclusions of a global review in four years' time - without

committing them to enhance action if the review finds targets aren't on track. "So what we have on the table is barely an encouragement to maybe do better," Aleksandar Rankovic, of the US nonprofit Avaaz, told

AFP. "And there is no compliance mechanism being discussed that could help organise this necessary conversation between governments, on how they could cooperate better."

The UN meeting, called

COP15, running from December 7 - 19, bringing together nearly 5,000 delegates from 193 countries to try to finalise 'a pact of peace with nature,' with key goals to preserve Earth's forests, oceans and species.

On a freezing Saturday, people young and old, including a large contingent of Indigenous Canadians, braved the biting cold to make their voices heard in Canada's second city.

Some wore costumes, dressed as birds, trees, and even caribou - an emblem of Canada's boreal forests that are now threatened.

"The people are trying to speak, trying to say you can't just talk, you have got to act," said Sheila Laursen, part of the group Raging Grannies.

"Let's not forget that... to protect biodiversity we need to protect Indigenous people first, Indigenous people are protecting biodiversity," Helena Gualinga, who belongs to a tribe in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

'Missing critical elements'

Saturday was supposed to be the last day for delegates to work on the implementation text, before their environment ministers arrive on December 15 for the home stretch of the negotiations. Under pressure, an additional meeting day next week was approved.

"If biodiversity targets are the compass, implementation is the actual vessel to take us there," Li Shuo of Greenpeace told AFP.

"The implementation negotiations are missing critical elements that will ensure countries to ramp up their action over time: this is like a bicycle without gears."

"There has been some progress," Juliette Landry, a researcher at French think tank IDDRI added, pointing out that the countries have for the first time adopted common planning and reporting templates, making cross-comparison possible.

AFP

Sanctions-hit Iran consolidates hold over Iraq

For years, Iraq is caught in a delicate balancing act between its two main allies Tehran and Washington

Baghdad, Iraq - Sanctions-hit Iran is consolidating its hold over neighbouring Iraq, an economic lifeline where pro-Tehran parties dominate politics, all to the chagrin of the United States, experts say.

For years, Iraq has been caught in a delicate balancing act between its two main allies Tehran and Washington, themselves arch foes.

After a 2003 US-led invasion toppled Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, Iran's influence has grown through political links among both countries' Shiite-Muslim majorities.

Pro-Iran parties now dominate Iraq's parliament, and in October they named a new prime minister following a year-long tussle with their Shiite rivals.

Iraq has become an 'economic lifeline' for Iran, said Ihsan al-Shammari, a political scientist at the University of Baghdad.

This has 'even more so with sharpening Western economic sanctions and nuclear negotiations that do not seem to be leading to a favourable deal for Iran', Shammari said.

"Iran's role will be even more important than during previous



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (right) meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani, on the sidelines of the Arab-China Summit in the Saudi capital Riyadh, on Friday (AFP)

(Iraqi) governments."

During a visit to Tehran late last month, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani and Iranian officials urged greater bilateral cooperation in all fields.

He thanked Iran which provides gas and electricity - around one-third of Iraq's needs - and added this would continue

until Iraq was self-sufficient.

His country is already the number one importer of Iranian goods. In Shammari's view, Tehran has an 'urgent need' to keep Iraq close.

'Contested'

Under a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, Iran agreed to

curbs on its atomic programme in exchange for relief from economically crippling sanctions.

The deal began unravelling in 2018 when then-president Donald Trump withdrew the United States, and reimposed financial penalties including a ban on Iran's oil exports. Efforts to revive the nuclear deal since then have

largely stalled. Western countries have imposed additional sanctions following Iran's crackdown on protests that have rocked the country since September.

Iran accuses exiled Kurdish opposition groups of fomenting the unrest, and has carried out cross-border strikes in Iraq against them.

"Iraq is contested by the

With a pro-Iranian figure at the head of the government, Iran will be able to take advantage of the Iraqi economy

FABRICE BALANCHE

United States and Iran, with Turkey in third place in the north," said Fabrice Balanche, from France's Lumiere Lyon 2 university. "With a pro-Iranian figure at the head of the government, Iran will be able to further take advantage of the Iraqi economy," he added, referring to Sudani, who is close to pro-Iran

former prime minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Iran's influence can also be seen through its links with Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi, a former paramilitary force made up mainly of pro-Iran militias that have since been integrated into the regular forces. The Hashed played a major role in defeating the Islamic State group in Iraq and now has a significant presence in the country's politics.

Its representatives are part of the Coordination Framework parliamentary bloc, which controls 138 of the legislature's 329 seats and is made up of pro-Iran factions, including that of Maliki.

'Not fair'

Last month, Iraq's government handed the Hashed control of a new public company, endowed with around US\$68mn in capital.

The Al-Muhandis firm's mission in oil-rich but war-ravaged Iraq is 'provincial rehabilitation and development: infrastructure, housing, hospitals, factories', said a Hashed communications official on condition of anonymity, in keeping with the low profile officials have adopted over the project. The company's

name is in homage to Hashed deputy commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. He was killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad in 2020 along with Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, who headed that country's Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In November, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said it was 'not fair' to consider his coalition government 'an attachment' to Iran's.

The Iraqi Kurdish diplomat pointed to its multi-party and multi-confessional make-up as showing 'balance' between the different forces.

But pro-Iran parties appear to now have free rein, after rival Shiite leader Moqtada Sadr tried for months to name a prime minister and prevent Sudani's appointment. The standoff led to deadly clashes in late August that pitted Sadr supporters against Hashed members and the army.

As Iran's influence grows, ally the United States still remains present, with around 2,500 US troops stationed in Iraq as part of ongoing efforts to combat the Islamic State group.

AFP



People wearing face masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic walk along a street in Beijing on Sunday (AFP)

COVID 'spreading rapidly' after rules easing, says top China expert

Beijing, China - One of China's top health experts has warned of a surge in COVID-19 cases, state media said on Sunday, in the wake of the government's decision to abandon its hardline coronavirus strategy.

Shops and restaurants in Beijing are deserted as the country awaits a spike in infections following the decision to reduce the scope of mandatory testing, allow some positive cases to quarantine at home and end large-scale lockdowns.

Top epidemiologist Zhong Nanshan told state media in an interview published on Sunday that the Omicron strain of the virus prevalent in China was highly transmissible and could lead to a surge in cases.

"The (current) Omicron mutation... is very contagious... one person can transmit to 22 people," said Zhong - a leading advisor to the government throughout the pandemic.

"Currently, the epidemic in China is... spreading rapidly, and under such circumstances, no matter how strong the prevention and control is, it will be difficult to completely cut off the transmission chain."

The easing of China's so-called 'zero-COVID' policy followed nationwide protests against harsh virus rules that had battered the economy and confined millions to their homes.

But the country is now facing a surge of cases it is ill-prepared to handle, with millions of elderly still not fully vaccinated and underfunded hospitals lacking the

capacity to take on huge numbers of patients.

The country has one intensive care unit bed for 10,000 people, Jiao Yahui, director of the Department of Medical Affairs at the National Health Commission, warned on Friday. She said 106,000 doctors and 177,700 nurses will be redirected to intensive care units to cope with the spike in coronavirus patients, but did not offer details on how this would affect the health system's ability to treat other diseases.

'I'm afraid to step out'

Long lines sprung up outside pharmacies in Beijing on Sunday as residents rushed to stockpile cold and fever medicines and antigen test kits.

Some told AFP they were ordering drugs from pharmacies in nearby cities.

"I've asked my family in Shijiazhuang to courier fever medicine because nearby pharmacies don't have stocks," said Julie Jiang, a Beijing resident.

Dozens of restaurants and small businesses in Beijing put up signs saying they were 'temporarily closed', without offering details. Several major online grocery and food delivery platforms including Meituan, Fresh Hippo and Ding Dong were struggling to operate in Beijing without enough delivery drivers.

"I'm afraid to step out," said Liu Cheng, a mother of two young children living in central Beijing's Jianguomen area.

AFP

'No survivors in Jersey explosion'

Saint Helier, Jersey - Rescuers in Jersey said on Sunday after an all-night search that there was no hope of survivors from an explosion that flattened a three-storey apartment block.

At least three people were confirmed killed in the blast early on Saturday in the Channel island's port capital St Helier, following a suspected gas leak.

"We have three confirmed fatalities and it's fair to say we expect to find more," police chief Robin Smith told a news conference, saying that around 12 residents remained unaccounted for.

"It is with sadness that I am confirming that the search-and-rescue operation has been moved to a recovery operation," he said. The next phase involved a 'meticulous and painstaking search of the debris' which could take weeks, Smith said, adding that a gas leak was the 'likely' cause.

Aided by sniffer dogs and experts from southern England, Jersey emergency workers had searched the rubble overnight.

Fire chief Paul Brown con-



Fire crews mobilise work in the rubble of a low-rise apartment block after an explosion in Saint-Helier, Jersey Island on Saturday (AFP)

firmed that firefighters were called out to investigate the smell of gas on Friday evening, more than seven hours before the explosion. He conceded that something had gone 'horribly wrong' given the subsequent disaster, but insisted that Jersey islanders could still have confidence in his service.

Jersey's gas supplier, Island Energy, said it was working with the fire service to understand what happened.

Like many others in St Helier, Jersey's Chief Minister Kristina

Moore said she was awoken by the blast. "Across the island you could hear this extraordinary sound," she told the BBC.

"It's unthinkable news, we're all absolutely devastated and really concerned for the people who are involved, for those whose lives have been lost."

The incident caps a tragic week for Jersey, a British Crown dependency not part of the United Kingdom, whose economy relies on banking, tourism and fishing.

AFP

Ex-coup leaders face off in tight Fiji election

Suva, Fiji - Fijians go to the polls on Wednesday after a bitter and close election race between two ex-coup leaders that could test the Pacific nation's fledgling democracy.

Prime minister and former military commander Frank Bainimarama came to power almost 16 years ago in a bloodless coup, but is looking for a third elected term via the ballot box.

To win, his FijiFirst party will have to best that of long-time rival Sitiveni Rabuka - an ex-prime minister and military commander who himself led two coups in 1987.

In recent years, Bainimarama has switched his fatigues for suits and colourful bula shirts and focused heavily on Fiji's fight against climate change - an existential issue for the low-lying nation.

But the run-up to the vote has been marred by allega-

tions of corruption, prosecutions of rival politicians and threats against journalists.

Many local commentators are fearful of speaking publicly about a vote that is expected to be a close-run affair.

"Some are concerned another coup is on the cards," said analysts Lucy Albiston and Blake Johnson, writing for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

"Although there are no reliable pre-election polls, it's looking like Rabuka might win," they said, noting Bainimarama had not pledged to respect the result while his rival had.

But after democratic votes in 2014 and 2018, there are hopes Fiji can again avoid a return to instability that saw four coups in the last 35 years.

AFP

'More Iranians at imminent risk of execution'

Paris, France - Several Iranians were on Sunday at risk of imminent execution over protests that have rocked the country's clerical regime, rights groups warned, after an international backlash over Iran's first hanging linked to the movement.

The almost three-month protest movement was sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested by the Islamic republic's morality police.

It is posing the biggest challenge to the regime since the shah's ousting in 1979.

Iran calls the protests 'riots' and says they have been encouraged by its foreign foes.

Authorities are responding with a crackdown activists say aims to instill fear in the public.

Iran on Thursday executed Mohsen Shekari, 23, who had been convicted of attacking a member of the security forces. Rights groups said his legal process, which they described as a show trial, was marked by undue haste.

Iran's judiciary has reported that 11 people received death



Protesters marching after Friday prayers, chanting 'Death to the Basiji' and 'Death to the dictator', in the city of Zahedan in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province on Friday (AFP)

sentences so far in connection with the protests, but campaigners say around a dozen others are facing charges that could see them also receive the death penalty.

Unless foreign governments 'significantly increase' the diplomatic and economic costs to Iran, the world 'is sending a green light to this carnage', said Hadi Ghaemi, executive direc-

tor of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI).

Amnesty International said Iran was now 'preparing to execute' Mahan Sadrat, 22, just a month after his 'grossly unfair' trial. He was convicted of drawing a knife in the protests, accusations he strongly denied in court. On Saturday Sadrat was transferred from Greater Tehran

Prison to Rajai Shahr prison in the nearby city of Karaj, 'sparking concerns that his execution may be carried out imminently', Amnesty said.

"Like all other death row prisoners, he was denied any access to his lawyer during the interrogations, proceedings and show trial," said another group, Oslo-based Iran Human Rights.

Amnesty warned the life of

another young man arrested over the protests, Sahand Nour-mohammadzadeh, was also at risk 'after a fast-tracked proceeding which did not resemble a trial'.

He was sentenced to death in November on accusations of 'tearing down highway railings and setting fire to rubbish cans and tires', the group said.

Among others given the same sentence is rapper Saman Seyed, 24, from Iran's Kurdish minority. His mother pleaded for his life on social media in a video where she stated 'my son is an artist not a rioter'.

Another dissident rapper, Toomaj Salehi, who expressed support for anti-regime protests, is charged with 'corruption on earth' and could face a death sentence, Iranian judicial authorities confirmed last month.

"We fear for the life of Iranian artists who have been indicted on charges carrying the death penalty," United Nations experts said in a statement, referring to the cases of Seyed and Salehi.

AFP

Ukrainian, Russian Nobel Peace winners slam Putin

Oslo, Norway - A trio from the three nations at the centre of the war in Ukraine accepted their Nobel Peace Prize on Saturday, calling for an unabated fight against Russian leader Vladimir Putin's 'insane and criminal' invasion.

Jailed Belarusian rights advocate Ales Bialiatski, Russian organisation Memorial and Ukraine's Center for Civil Liberties (CCL) were honoured by the Nobel committee for their struggle for 'human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence' in the face of authoritarianism. "The people of Ukraine want peace more than anyone else in the world," the head of the CCL, Oleksandra Matviichuk, said. "But peace cannot be reached by a country under attack laying down its arms."

Founded in 2007, the CCL has documented war crimes allegedly committed by Russian troops in Ukraine.

These include shelling residential buildings, churches, schools and hospitals, bombing evacuation corridors, the forced displacement of people, and tor-



People carrying candles walk down the street during a torchlight procession to greet the 2022 Nobel Prize laureates in Oslo, on Saturday, following the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony (AFP)

ture.

Due to the Russian bombing of Ukraine's energy infrastructure, Matviichuk had to write her Nobel acceptance speech by candlelight, she told AFP.

In the nine months since the start of the Russian invasion, the CCL has documented more than

27,000 cases of alleged war crimes, which she said were 'only the tip of the iceberg'. "War turns people into numbers. We have to reclaim the names of all victims of war crimes," she said in her speech, her voice overcome with emotion.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelensky congratulated Matviichuk, the CCL 'and all human rights defenders', noting that the ceremony took place on International Human Rights Day.

Putin's 'imperial ambitions'
In Oslo's City Hall decorated with

red Siberian flowers, Matviichuk reiterated her appeal for an international tribunal to judge Putin, his ally Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and 'other war criminals'.

Her Russian co-laureate Yan Rachinsky, the chairman of human rights organisation Memorial, meanwhile denounced Russia's 'imperial ambitions' inherited from the ex-Soviet Union 'that still thrive today'.

Putin and his 'ideological servants' have hijacked the anti-fascist struggle 'for their own political interests', he said.

Now, 'resistance to Russia is called 'fascism', and has become 'the ideological justification for the insane and criminal war of aggression against Ukraine', he said, using harsh language considering the stiff penalties Moscow imposes on those who publicly criticise the invasion.

Founded in 1989, Memorial has for decades shed light on crimes committed by Joseph Stalin's totalitarian regime and worked to preserve the memory of the victims.

AFP

Tensions soar in Kosovo after attacks on police

Mitrovica, Kosovo - Tensions were high in northern Kosovo on Sunday after unknown attackers exchanged gunfire with the police and threw a stun grenade at EU law enforcers during the night.

Hundreds of Serbs, outraged over the arrest of a former police officer, gathered again early in the morning at the roadblocks erected on Saturday and which have paralysed traffic through two border crossings from Kosovo to Serbia.

Although Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, Belgrade does not recognise it and encourages the Serb majority in northern Kosovo to defy Pristina's authority. Hours after the barricades went up, police said they suffered three successive firearm attacks on Saturday night on one of the roads leading to the border.

"The police units, in self-defence, were forced to respond with firearms to the criminal persons and groups, who were repelled and left in an unknown direction," police said in a statement.

European Union police de-

ployed in the region as part of the rule of law mission (EULEX) said they were also targeted with a stun grenade, but no officers were injured.

"This attack, as well as the attacks on Kosovo Police officers, are unacceptable," EULEX said in a press release.

EU chief diplomat Josep Borrell condemned the attacks and called on Kosovo Serbs to 'immediately' remove the barricades.

"Calm must be restored... all actors must avoid escalation," Borrell tweeted.

NATO, which has deployed 4,000-strong peace-keeping mission in Kosovo under a UN Security Council mandate, blasted the 'unacceptable' attacks.

"Our @NATO_KFOR mission remains extremely vigilant & fully capable of carrying out its @UN mandate in #Kosovo," NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu tweeted.

Tensions mounted after Kosovo scheduled local elections in municipalities for December 18, with the main Serb political party saying it would stage a boycott.

AFP

Biden tries to reboot US brand in Africa amid China, Russia inroads

Washington, US - When Barack Obama welcomed African leaders to Washington in 2014, many viewed the summit as historic, not just due to the US president's background but for the pledges to make the partnership deeper and such events routine.

The sequel took eight years - the equivalent of two presidential terms - but on Tuesday, Joe Biden will host a second US-Africa summit.

Since 2014, China - viewed by Washington as its main long-term challenger - has consistently outpaced the United States as the largest investor in Africa and Russia has increasingly flexed its muscle, sending

mercenaries to hotspots and trying to rally opinion to blunt Western pressure over Ukraine.

Biden's three-day summit will feature announcements of new US investment and high-light food security - worsened by the invasion of Ukraine - but, unlike China, also focus on values such as democracy and good governance, as well as fighting climate change.

But the biggest message from Biden, a lover of backslapping face-to-face diplomacy, will be that the United States cares.

Since defeating Donald Trump, who made no secret of his lack of interest in Africa, Biden has thrown his support



US President Joe Biden delivers a speech in the South Court Auditorium at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on Thursday (AFP)

behind an African seat on the Security Council and at the Washington summit will call for the African Union to formally

join the Group of 20 major economies, an aide said.

"We believe that this is a decisive decade. The way in which

the world will be ordered will be determined in the coming years," said Biden's top Africa advisor, Judd Devermont.

Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken 'believe strongly that African voices are going to be critical in this conversation', he said.

African leaders have already been holding summits every three years with China and also have regular meetings with several US allies - France, Britain, Japan and the European Union.

All, almost, welcome

After a row over invitations distracted attention from his Western Hemisphere summit in Los Angeles in June, Biden

has been open with the guest list from Africa.

The United States is inviting all African Union members in good standing - meaning not Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali or Sudan - and with which Washington has full relations, which excludes authoritarian Eritrea.

One of the most closely watched leaders expected in Washington will be Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, a onetime US ally whom the Biden administration has accused of backing widespread abuses in the Tigray conflict, which has subsided with a breakthrough November 2 agreement signed in South Africa.

Also in Washington will be the presidents of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo as Blinken leads international pressure on Rwanda over alleged support to rebels advancing in its giant neighbor.

Other presidents due at the summit include Egypt's Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Tunisia's Kais Saied, who have both faced criticism on democratic rights, and Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, days after the United States called his latest election a sham. The foreign minister of Zimbabwe, which is under US sanctions, is also expected to attend.

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TAUREG FESTIVAL

Dishes of spit-roasted lamb were served and the sound of electric guitars echoed across the pink Saharan dunes towards the Air Mountains.

"It's like playing at home," said musician Oumara Moctar. "The desert," he said, "is where we were born, where we grew up, and it reminds us of where we come from."

One of the biggest cultural events in the Sahel region, the Air Festival returned last week, bringing the songs, dances and oral traditions of the nomadic Tuareg culture to an audience of thousands, and a burst of hope for jihadist-scarred Niger, in West Africa.

The eagerly-awaited three-day party unfolded in Ifrouane, an oasis sandwiched between desert and mountains 1,200km from the Nigerien capital Niamey.

Some 5,000 people, many of them local VIPs and a few foreigners, replaced the desert's usual calm with a ballet of 4x4s whipping up plumes of dust.

After attending concerts and beauty pageants, festival-goers spent long hours reclining on mats where, in between rounds of tea, discussion ranged from the merits of Toyota pick-up trucks to barely-concealed regionalism.

"Tuareg culture, in a nutshell," smiled young Ifrouane resident Mohamed Bouhamid. If not for the pervasive presence of troops to provide security, this scene could have taken place two decades ago.

The festival, launched in 2001, last took place in 2020. In its prime, well-heeled European visitors beat a path to Niger and neighbouring Mali, and men who are now rebel chiefs worked as tourist guides.



Bambino, a local Nierien music star, performs

Niger a "red zone" and recommended travel there be avoided.

For those wishing to visit the festival in Ifrouane, the French authorities recommended postponement.

Deputy mayor Hamadi Yahaya denounced the embassies that have sparked hysteria despite the conflict being more than 1,000km away from Ifrouane.

Mayor El Gondj Ahmed, or 'the Honorable' as he is called locally, repeatedly said, "Everything is secure here."

In addition to the troops, dozens of Ishumars - a name given to former rebels - have been deployed in the surrounding desert, said Rhissa Ag Boula, a rebel leader who now serves as an adviser to Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum.

At nearby Chiriet, the Ishumars' trucks bearing recognisable white flags remained at a discreet distance. They flanked a rowdy race between some 80 drivers speeding through the sand.

Rocco Rava, an Italian who manages a tour agency called Societe de Voyages Sahariens (SVS), had returned to the region for the first time in 15 years.

He grew up in the regional capital Agadez where he developed his tourism business before moving to neighbouring Chad when the 'turbulence' began in Niger.

GUARDED

Tourism

Tuareg festival revives dreams of tourism in troubled Niger (W Africa)



Tuareg camel riders, foreign tourists, traditional musicians, and tuareg dancers are all part of the scenes in Ifrouane during the Festival de l'Air

An airline linked Paris directly to Agadez in Niger and to Gao and Kidal in Mali. For many years, the Paris-Dakar rally raced through the desert.

Memories of this halcyon time persist today, despite the two jihadist insurgencies that beset Niger, and its chronic poverty - it is ranked the world's poorest country by the benchmark of the UN Human Development Index.

Hysteria

After six French citizens were killed just outside Niamey in 2020, France - previously the main source of tourists - declared

The tourism we'll have from now on will always involve the military, and I don't know if tourists are interested in that

KADER HAMADEDE

Tourism and machine guns

"There is a strong demand," he said, explaining he had come to Ifrouane to check out the possibility of bringing tourists back. But the situation is paradoxical, he said, "If it's really secure, then tourists ask us why we need to have a military escort."

Niger requires all Westerners travelling to the desert to be accompanied by an armed escort, for which they must pay.

"In what country in the world do you do tourism with a machine gun in front of you and another one behind you?" asked another tourism professional, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

People must accept that the 'before' times are over, said the president of Ifrouane's artisan collective, Kader Hamade, who has been making jewellery for three decades.

"The tourism we'll have from now on will always involve the military, and I don't know if tourists are interested in that."

Many local people were downbeat about prospects for a better life and some saw migration or working in the illegal gold mines dotting the Sahara as their only hope.

"There's nothing more to do here," said 22-year-old Mohamed Bouamid, who hopes to make his fortune with a four-month stint in the gold business.

AFP



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Life in the desert can be quite challenging and tough but those who reside there for decades cannot be distracted by the many lures of the city. A visit to a typical Bedouin home in Wahiba sands sheds some light on the embrace of the desert

SUN SAND SURPRISES

BEDOUIN LIFESTYLE



Anirban Ray

Vast stretches of ochre sand and blue skies play a photographic muse in the middle of Wahiba sands... The 'sound' of silence is the only background score among grazing camels... And the gigantic sand dunes, rising imposingly in the distance, make all existence suddenly seem insignificant.

Your pride comes crashing down, your ego evaporates, and tall claims of your achievements begin to lose ground as the majestic layers of sand of varying hues and textures glisten under the sunlight, like a sheet of luminescent pearls, putting nature's glory on the pedestal it deserves.

Out of nowhere, under the surprisingly cool shadows of truant clouds, a young lad appears, offering a toothless grin, and you instantly click back into reality from your trance. You are about to be escorted into a new world wherein cultural bonhomie and hospitality will attain new heights.

Dressed in a grey dishdasha, his hair disheveled, and his eyes eager with excitement, the six-year old boy greets you with an innocent smile, and gestures your to follow him on a sort of 'tour' of his Bedouin home.

Ali is the youngest member of the many Bedouin families that are spread across the desert. With time and modernity, including mobile networks, penetrating the depth of every dune, the number of Bedouin families have dwelt here over the last few decades. However, there are many who still prefer the desert way of life and believe that 'the sand is the only truth of life'.

Ali's family is one of them. His mother Muza (30) greets us with traditional Omani hospitality - kahwa and dates are offered. Her husband, who works in the city, comes home every weekend with gifts, gizmos, and provisions, much to their delight.

Blend of tradition and modernity

This is the new Bedouin lifestyle - a blend of tradition and modernity. There are hundreds of youths who work in the cities while their families continue to stay in the



desert. Most of them have two homes - one in Bidiya and one in the desert.

The Bedouin house is spacious, with a big majlis, a huge open kitchen, guest rooms and a private bedroom. Washrooms are located outside the boundaries of the house and a water tanker comes by once a week, doing away with the need for desert dwellers to go in search of water sources.

The majlis is spacious, with efficient air circulation that causes no claustrophobia. Muza said, "Life was tough in the past when both men and women struggled for survival. My mother and in-laws used to cook with wood, now we have cooking gas. Dry chicken, fish and camel milk were the staple diet and we used to bake bread over heated rock. Things are different now, though the sentiments we share in the family are much the same."

Among the many dangers Bedouins face in the sands these days are the risks from reptiles and insects, like snakes, venomous spiders, and scorpions. Muza said, "When we get stung by insects, we use lemon juice and a home-made oint-

ment. There are no other threats, unlike the past when one would fear from being attacked by hostile tribes who sought ransoms of water and cattle."

The Bedouins, however, are always wary of encountering sandstorms which come without much warning. Whenever there is a major sandstorm, the indications come forth well in advance and every house takes adequate precautions - they have strong blinds that protect the properties.

"During severe sandstorms, which can cause major destruction to our property, we huddle together with our expensive belongings and hope and pray that it will pass without causing much harm to us," Muza said, adding that they have developed the right mindset to accept nature's fury and prepare for it.

As the slow desert breeze whistles down the shining sand to the thatched palm leaves, Ali shows us the prized decor of the house - a whale vertebrae and a camel skull. They seemed as old as the sand dunes and are considered auspicious icons. Often, the status of a



The desert has given me love and life. The past was quite tough, yet I love every phase of the desert, though we have houses in the city

MAMA SALMA

house is determined by these items of decors.

Family business, big bucks

He ran to his favourite corner - the stable of camels. These animals form a very integral part of the family. Mohammad al Jabri, the tour guide from Elite Travel and Tourism said, "There are several types of camels in Oman - for racing, beauty contests, breeding, and for meat.

For Bedouins, camels are part of their family members. Often many families put a mark, like a tattoo, on their necks to identify them as part of a clan or tribe. Many Bedouins breed race camels and sell them for a premium to the sheikhs from Saudi or rich businessmen in Oman for prices as high as RO10,000.

This is a lucrative business and often youngsters evade education and continue the family business as it bring in big bucks. At the same time, there are, indeed, doctors, teachers and other professionals who hail from Bedouin clans.

"Those who have experienced the desert life can never be content else-

where for long. Some day, they will return to the slow-paced, pollution free and peaceful existence in the desert," he said, adding that children have to travel long distances in the desert to attend schools that are far-flung from their homes.

Influential matriarch

Salma al Wahibe, the matriarch of the tribe is a well known face in the desert. Fondly known as Mama Salma, she is a highly influential figure who is respected in the tribe and has been instrumental in resolving many family and community disputes.

Known for her intelligence, clout, as well as excellent hospitality, Mama Salma drives around in her SUV with an air of superiority. She speaks excellent English, sings old desert songs, and is considered the epitome of women empowerment and feminism.

A few years back, Mama Salma rescued a German tourist - Johannes Bentz - who was lost in the dunes for hours. With her assistance, the tourist got a new lease of life and he later came back to express his gratitude to the influential matriarch.

"I am born here and I have been residing here for decades. The desert has given me love and life. The past was quite tough, yet I love every phase of the desert though we have houses in the city. My husband and I hardly stay there, we prefer the embrace of the sands which feels like our true home."

Each day in a Bedouin family commences in the wee hours when people begin their day with prayers. The women then get down to daily chores. Often, people spend leisure hours enjoying a game of cards or indulging in gossip, which is also a way of catching up with events and happening within the tribe.

The families also get together to celebrate marriages, Eid, and child-births frequently. It is a time when relatives and friends get together, don traditional Bedouin attire and sing traditional songs.

A mother of six, Mama Salma said, "Previously we used to get annoyed with tourists who tend to disturb our camels with loud conversations. We soon learnt to accept them as our guests who are seeking to experience our lifestyle.

Quashing popular belief that Bedouins are a deprive lot, Mama Salma said, "People feel we are missing out on the privileges of the city - like easy transport, cinemas, malls, fast food. However, we have visited cities but have never been enamoured by these lures. The desert has always been our home - it is our first love, our heartbeat, and our life!"



FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022



MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2022 MUSCAT DAILY 13

KANE'S PAIN IN FRANCE'S GAIN

Olivier Giroud takes France into semi-finals as Harry Kane penalty miss costs England

Al Khor, Qatar - Olivier Giroud scored the winner while Harry Kane missed a late chance to equalise with a penalty as holders France beat England 2-1 in a tense World Cup quarter-final on Saturday.

Aurelien Tchouameni had swept France into a first-half lead only for Kane to level from the spot nine minutes into the second half.

England were the better side for long stretches of the game at Al Bayt Stadium but, almost from nowhere, France went back in front when Giroud headed home with 12 minutes left.

But Kane then blazed his second penalty of the game over the bar as England's wait to win a first major international trophy since 1966 goes on.

France remain on course to be-

come the first side since Brazil 60 years ago to successfully defend the World Cup.

With Brazil having been eliminated on Friday and England dealt with here in the desert north of Doha, France are now surely the favourites to retain their crown as they prepare to face Morocco in the semi-finals.

"It's fabulous because it was a massive game against a really good England team but it is magnificent to be into the last four once more," France coach Didier Deschamps said.

"We sort of gave them the ammunition with the two penalties, but we showed heart and guts to hold onto the result."

This, remarkably, was the first meeting of these two great rivals in a major tournament knockout



France's Olivier Giroud celebrates with Antoine Griezmann in front of his jubilant team-mates after scoring the winner against England on Saturday

This match reminds me of the Belgium game in 2018, even if the scenario is a bit different because England came back and believed in their chances and pushed forward. We showed superb spirit and worked so hard for each other. It is the same spirit as in 2018 and I hope we go as far as possible because this group is capable of great things

OLIVIER GIROUD, FRANCE

game, with Croatia's victory in extra time preventing England from joining France in the final four years ago.

England followed that by losing the Euro 2020 final on penalties to Italy, and now they go out of another tournament because of a squandered spot-kick.

"I just said to the players I don't think they could have given any more," England boss Gareth Southgate said.

"They've played really well against a top team. It's fine margins and things at both ends that have decided the game."

There is no shortage of goal threats in the French side but few could have predicted that the opener would come from Tchouameni, the 22-year-old midfielder who had scored only once for his country before this game.

There was a touch of controversy to the goal, as it came from a France break which started with what looked like a foul by Dayot Upamecano on Bukayo Saka.

AFP

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France's coach Didier Deschamps (C) celebrates with goalkeeper Hugo Lloris after their victory against England on Saturday (AFP)

Deschamps says 'hearts and guts' got France past England

Al Khor, Qatar - France coach Didier Deschamps said his side showed "hearts and guts" to defeat England 2-1 on Saturday to reach the World Cup semi-finals.

Aurelien Tchouameni scored first for the World Cup holders at Al Bayt Stadium but Harry Kane's penalty brought England level.

After Olivier Giroud's header gave France the lead, Kane wasted a golden chance to equalise when he blasted a penalty over the bar with minutes remaining.

"It's fabulous because it was a big match against a very good English team," Deschamps said. "We

responded once again, it's wonderful to reach the last four again, you have to savour it, a World Cup semi-final is quite something.

"There is quality in this team, but there is also a good mentality and a state of mind. We gave them a little ammunition with two penalties, but it is with hearts and guts that we held onto this result."

Deschamps said France's semi-final opponents Morocco "deserve all our respect and recognition".

"They weren't among the teams we were expecting there, but it's anything but a surprise."

AFP

Kane 'gutted' after penalty pain

Al Khor, Qatar - Harry Kane was left "gutted" on Saturday after missing a crucial penalty in England's 2-1 World Cup quarter-final defeat to France.

England skipper Kane blazed an 84th minute spot-kick over the bar that would have levelled the score at 2-2 at the Al Bayt Stadium.

It was another cruel chapter in England's decades-long psychodrama revolving around major tournaments and penalty heartaches.

Kane had earlier made no mistake with another penalty on 54 minutes that saw him equal Wayne Rooney's England goalscoring tally of 53 goals.

"As the captain, I'll take that on the chin and that responsibility, missing the penalty, so it's hard," Kane said afterwards.

"Really tough night to take. I'm gutted, the team are gutted. We had the belief that we could achieve something special at this World Cup, but it came down to small details.

"On the night we had the better chances, the better spells in the game, but it comes down to the execution."

Kane, 29, is one of the most reliable penalty-takers in world football, converting 58 spotkicks throughout his career with only 11



England's Kyle Walker consoles Harry Kane after their defeat to France in the quarter-final on Saturday (AFP)

misses.

The England captain said he had felt confident as he lined up his second penalty of the night against France goalkeeper and Tottenham team-mate Hugo Lloris.

"I'm someone who, whenever I prepare, prepare for one penalty in the game, two penalties, so I can't fault my preparation or detail," Kane said.

"In the lead-up I felt as confident as I did on the first as I did on

the second. It purely comes down to execution. I'll take that on the chin.

"Of course, it hurts now and it'll hurt for probably a long time, but that's part of being captain and a leader in the team, you have to take responsibility."

Kane had looked inconsolable at the final whistle, hunched on the turf as team-mates rallied to his support.

England manager Gareth Southgate sprang to Kane's defence.

"There's nobody I would have rather had in that situation and if we had one tomorrow I'd feel exactly the same way," Southgate said.

"For me he's been a fantastic leader of this group.

"He's the best but the best are still 85 percent (success rate) so even the best are going to miss at times so that's football."

AFP

FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022

THE DREAM GETS BIGGER

Morocco ‘Rocky Balboa of this World Cup’, says Regragui as Atlas Lions stun Portugal and book semi-final meeting with France

Doha, Qatar - Morocco coach Walid Regragui said his side are “the Rocky Balboa of this World Cup” after the Atlas Lions became the first African team ever to reach the semi-finals with a stunning victory over Portugal on Saturday.

The injury-hit North Africans held on for a 1-0 victory at Al Thumama Stadium to set up a last-four clash against either England or France, after Youssef En Nesry’s headed goal late in the first half.

The win over Portugal came after knocking out Spain in the last 16 on penalties and beating the world’s second-ranked team Belgium in the group stage.

“When you watch Rocky, you want to support Rocky Balboa because of his hard work and commitment and I think we’re the Rocky Balboa of this World Cup,” Regragui told reporters.

“We’re becoming the team that everyone loves at this World Cup, because we’re showing that even if you don’t have as much talent, if you show that desire, heart and belief, you can achieve.

“I’m sure many of you will say this is a miracle, but we’ve won without conceding against Belgium, Spain, Portugal and that’s the result of hard work.”

Morocco will take on either holders France or England on Wednesday at Al Bayt Stadium with the chance to become the first nation from outside Eu-



We can dream, why shouldn't we dream about winning the World Cup? It doesn't cost you anything. Anyone who plays us now will have to be at the top of their game to beat us
WALID REGRAGUI

rope or South America to reach the final.

“We can dream, why shouldn’t we dream about winning the World Cup?” added Regragui, who only took over as coach in August.

“It doesn’t cost you anything to have dreams. European countries have been used to winning the World Cup...

“We’ve played some really top sides, but so far we haven’t achieved anything.

“Anyone who plays us now will have to be at the top of their game to beat us, it won’t be easy for them, that’s the message I’m trying to send out.”

‘We had to write history’
Morocco had already surpassed expectations by becoming only the fourth African country and first Arab nation to reach the quarter-finals. But they managed to go one step

further than Cameroon in 1990, Senegal’s 2002 side and the Ghana team of 2010.

“We came up against a really great Portugal team. We’re drawing on all we have, we still have guys injured. We have a mindset,” Regragui told France’s TFL.

“I told the guys before the match we had to write history for Africa. I’m very, very happy.”

Regragui, a France-born former Morocco international, had already made history of his own as the first African coach to take a team into the World Cup quarter-finals.

Morocco were without injured defenders Noussair Mazraoui and Nayef Aguerd on Saturday, while captain Romain Saiss was stretchered off early in the second half.

“We’re very proud because the players who did come in did a fantastic job,” said Regragui. “We’re a 26-man squad and to get far in this tournament we’ll need all of them.”

Morocco still have the best defensive record in the World Cup. The only time they have conceded in five matches was an own goal against Canada.

“It’s crazy. We’re living a dream and we don’t want to wake up. I have goosebumps,” said winger Sofiane Boufal.

“Everything we have, we deserve. We work hard. It’s not over. There’s still the semi-final and god willing, the final.”



Morocco's Sofiane Boufal celebrates with his mother after their victory against Portugal on Saturday (AFP)



Morocco's Jawad El Yamiq is on cloud nine after the victory (AFP)



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo leaves the field in tears after losing to Morocco in the quarter-final on Saturday (AFP)

Tearful Ronaldo departs with World Cup dream in tatters

Doha, Qatar - Cristiano Ronaldo left the World Cup in tears on Saturday, walking off down the tunnel with his dreams of winning the trophy in tatters.

Morocco earned a shock 1-0 quarter-final victory over Portugal, the north Africans’ joy the stark opposite of Ronaldo’s misery.

The Portuguese forward, 37, may never have another chance to win the game’s biggest trophy, and his World Cup exit was especially bitter as he started the game as a substitute. With another result Ronaldo might have celebrated levelling the all-time men’s international appearance record with his 196th Portugal

cap, but his final minutes were desperate.

As soon as the final whistle blew, Ronaldo left, heading down the tunnel with tears streaming down his face, ignoring the Morocco players rushing to their fans to celebrate.

“If you take two people that are the most upset perhaps it was Cristiano Ronaldo and myself,” said Portugal coach Fernando Santos.

“Of course, we are upset, of course it affects us, that’s part of the game, that’s part of the job.”

In a surprise decision, Ronaldo had been relegated to the bench against Switzerland as Portugal romped to a 6-1 victory in the last 16

and Santos maintained that plan.

However, shortly after half-time, with his team trailing to Youssef En Nesry’s goal, Santos threw on Ronaldo and Joao Cancelo, looking to their all-time leading scorer to bail them out.

Ronaldo struggled to get involved in the game, with Morocco swarming him whenever the ball was close.

The striker had only one sniff at goal, but Moroccan stopper Yassine Bounou got down quickly to deny him.

Asked if he regretted starting with Ronaldo on the bench, the coach maintained he was content with his choice.

Pepe and Fernandes blast referee after exit

Doha, Qatar - Portugal players Pepe and Bruno Fernandes lashed out at the Argentine referee in charge of their 1-0 World Cup quarter-final defeat by Morocco on Saturday, claiming his nationality impacted the game.

Argentina progressed to the last four on Friday by beating the Netherlands and should they reach the final, might play against Morocco if they win their semi-final against England or France.

The match referee Facundo Tello, his two assistants and the video assistant referee were all from Argentina.

“It’s unacceptable for an Argentine referee to referee our game,” Pepe said on Portuguese television.

“After what happened yesterday, with (Lionel) Messi talking, all of Argentina talking, and the referee comes here.

“What did we play in the second half? The goalkeeper dropped to the ground. There were only eight minutes of stoppage time. We worked hard and the referee (only added on) eight minutes.”

Messi had complained about the refereeing of Argentina’s clash with the Dutch, saying too much time had been added on.

MOMENT IN TIME



AGONY AND ECSTASY: Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo (L) and Pepe are devastated as they are targeted in the dying moments of their quarter-final against Morocco at Al Thumama Stadium

1

Morocco have conceded just one goal in the tournament; and it was an own goal against Canada in the group stage.

6

Morocco extended their unbeaten streak at the FIFA World Cup to 6 games. This is the longest ever by an African team.

41

Sofyan Amrabat, who was in stunning form against Spain and Portugal, has won possession 41 times at the 2022 World Cup so far, the most of any player in the tournament.



Morocco's Youssef En Nesyri (L) celebrates with Achraf Hakimi after scoring the winner (AFP)



Morocco's Badr Benoun celebrates after their stunning win (AFP)

MOROCCO HEROICS CAN INSPIRE FUTURE 'MIRACLES', SAYS 'KEEPER BOUNOU

Doha, Qatar - Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou said his team's history-making World Cup campaign can show future generations from his country that they can create miracles.

The stopper produced a man-of-the-match display in Morocco's 1-0 win over Portugal on Saturday to take his team to the semi-finals for the first time.

"We're in the same state as you... pinch me, I think I'm dreaming," Bounou told reporters.

"These moments are great, but we're here to change the mentality. This feeling of inferiority... we have indeed changed this mentality, and the generation coming after us will know that Moroccan players can create miracles."

Morocco became the first African and first Arab side ever to reach the final four of the World Cup, in the first edition ever held in an Arab country.

"It's really, really hard to find the words to describe this moment," he continued.

"I want to thank my teammates for their hard work and our supporters who had our backs.

"Hopefully we can have some rest to prepare for what's coming next."

Morocco will face either England or France, who play each other later Saturday, in the semi-final on Wednesday.

The North African side started against Portugal without injured first choice defenders Nayef Aguerd and Noussair Mazraoui, while captain Romain Saiss went off hurt during the match.

"I'd like to thank all the players who all made a stellar performance," added Bounou.

"We had injuries and all the players on the pitch were at the highest level."

AFP



Morocco's supporters celebrate Youssef En Nesyri's goal in their quarter-final against Portugal, in Rabat, on Saturday (AFP)

Moroccans celebrate the impossible and ask for more from the team

Casablanca, Morocco - As their national team made history, crowds gathered in Casablanca on Saturday evening and chanted "Qualified! Qualified!"

There were also celebrations across the Arab world and in Europe after Morocco beat Portugal 1-0 in Qatar to become the first African or Arab team to reach a World Cup semi-final.

"My heart will stop, what a team, what stamina, what an achievement," Ilham El

do the impossible. We want the cup now."

The collective celebrations that greeted the final whistle are becoming a habit across the kingdom.

Morocco topped their group, beating Canada and Belgium and then eliminated Spain on penalties in the round of 16 before overcoming Portugal.

"There is no such thing as impossible in soccer, that's the magic of this sport", former Moroccan international Abdelrazak Khairi told AFP.

Khairi scored twice in the surprise 3-1 victory over the same opponents, Portugal, in the 1986 World Cup in Mexico, when Morocco became the first African nation to reach the knockout rounds.

No African or Arab country had managed to go beyond the quarter-finals. Cameroon in 1990, Senegal in 2002 and Ghana in 2010 came closest to reaching the final four.

"The Moroccan team has managed to do the impossible. We want the cup now," said Ali Gyne, 24.

In Casablanca, the temple of Moroccan football, the shirts of the national team and the red flags with the green star, are everywhere in the windows, the stalls, the markets.

"The Moroccan team has managed to do the impossible. We want the cup now"

MOUAD KHAIRAT



Idrissi, a 34-year-old Casablanca woman, told AFP. She was not alone in hailing the team known as the Atlas Lions who will face defending champions France for a place in the final.

"I think I am dreaming awake. Pinch me! What a huge pride. I thank them from the bottom of my heart," said Mouad Khairat, 29, an executive in a call centre.

"The Moroccan team has managed to

Fourth time lucky for Africa at World Cup

Doha, Qatar - Morocco's 1-0 victory over Portugal on Saturday made them the first African team to reach the last four of a World Cup. Morocco are only the third country outside of Europe and Latin America to reach the last four, after the US in 1930 and South Korea, co-hosts when they got to the semis 20 years ago.

Three African teams had fallen in the quarter-final stage before Walid Regragui's side finally ended the continent's long wait for a semi-final spot. Cameroon in 1990, Senegal in 2002 and Ghana in 2010 had all made strong runs in the tournament but were unable to go beyond the last eight.

CAMEROON'S PIONEERS

The first African team to reach the quarters were Cameroon in Italia '90 where the 'Indomitable Lions', having beaten Colombia in the last 16, came up against Bobby Robson's England.

David Platt put England ahead in the 25th minute but the introduction of the 38-year-old Roger Milla at the break sparked a turnaround.

Milla won a penalty which Emmanuel Kunde converted in the 61st minute and then

four minutes later set Eugene Ekeke to put the African side ahead.

But Gary Lineker's 83rd minute penalty took the game into extra-time and the England poacher struck again in the 105th minute to end Cameroon's dream.

Despite the defeat Cameroon took a deserved lap of honour at the San Paolo stadium in Naples having won many hearts and much respect with their performances which began with a 1-0 win over Argentina in their opening group game.

SENEGAL'S SURGE

Senegal's run to the last eight in South Korea and Japan was all the more impressive given it was their first appearance in a World Cup tournament.

The Lions made a grand entry beating the defending champion and favourite France 1-0 in the opening match.

That shock victory was followed up draws with Denmark (1-1) and Uruguay (3-3) to set up a round of 16 clash with Sweden which was won 2-1 thanks to two goals from Henri Camara, the second the match-winning 'golden goal' in extra-time.

Turkey were the opponents in the last eight but this time the golden goal rule proved to be the undoing of the Africans - after the game ended goalless in 90 minutes, Ilhan Mansiz struck four minutes into extra-time to send the Turks through. That was the last 'golden goal' scored in a men's international tournament, with FIFA returning to normal extra-time for the 2006 edition.

GYAN AND GHANA'S AGONY

Until Saturday's Moroccan success, the nearest an African team had been to the last four was in 2010 when Ghana were a last-second penalty away from the semi-finals.

The game finished 1-1 after normal time with Sulley Muntari cancelling out Diego Forlan's opener.

In the final moments of extra-time Uruguay forward Luis Suarez prevented a certain goal with a deliberate handball on the goaline to deny Ghana a winner.

Suarez was sent off but Asamoah Gyan smashed the resulting spot kick against the bar and Uruguay then won the penalty shoot-out.



Amrabat after the latter's header missed the target at the Lusail Stadium on Saturday (AFP)

INDIA-BANGLADESH ONE-DAY SERIES

'TRULY SPECIAL'

Sachin Tendulkar, VVS Laxman all praise for Ishan Kishan after the left-handed batsman hits fastest ODI double century

New Delhi, India - Ishan Kishan has raised expectations that India can turn around their flagging white-ball fortunes after the baby-faced assassin blasted the world's fastest ODI double century and said he could have reached 300.

India have not won an international tournament since 2013 and their 10-wicket loss to England at the Twenty20 World Cup last month prompted much soul-searching. Next year they will host the 50-over World Cup.

But on Saturday Kishan, 24, gave India something to cheer about, with the diminutive left-handed opener smashing a 131-ball 210 laced with 24 fours and 10 sixes against Bangladesh in Chittagong.

Kishan only played because skipper Rohit Sharma was injured but he grabbed the opportunity with both hands by producing a 290-run second-wicket stand with Virat Kohli to power India to 409-8.

It was the tattooed, earstud-sporting Kishan's first ODI century and the numbers and records stacked up in Kishan's knock, the quickest double ODI ton in 126 balls.

"The innings you played today deserves double the appreciation too," cricket icon Sachin Ten-

dulkar wrote on Twitter.

Batting great VVS Laxman tweeted: "What a phenomenal display of ball-striking... To get a double hundred in any format is awesome, to do so inside 35 overs is just mind-boggling!

"What a talent! I am sure this is the start of something truly special."

An Indian Premier League sensation, Kishan, a wicket-keeper-batsman, was retained by Mumbai Indians for a whopping \$2 million in the February auction this year.

But he did not set the IPL on fire and with patchy international form missed being part of the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia where India crashed out in the semi-finals to eventual winners England.

'In the zone'

Standing at five feet six inches (1.68 metres), Kishan comes from Bihar but played for his neighbouring state of Jharkhand in domestic cricket. He captained India to the 2016 Under-19 World Cup.

His career now gets a new wind with his sensational knock ahead of next year's 50-over World Cup in India as the hosts hunt for a demolishing batting combination in the "bazball" era.



India's Ishan Kishan, who was in a destructive mood against Bangladesh on Saturday, felt he missed out on a triple century (AFP)

Bowlers are under pressure. I was in the zone to get 300, but unfortunately I didn't... But it was a special one to get my name up there with so many legend players.

ISHAN KISHAN

The term bazball is homage to the nickname of new England Test coach Brendon McCullum whose ultra-aggressive approach has filtered into the limited-overs side.

Indian batsmen including new white-ball sensation Suryakumar

Yadav and Kishan seem to have the mindset to play a fearless game and bring India some international silverware at last.

"When I got out, 15 overs were left. That's 90 balls. If you play 45 balls, it's easy to get another hundred when you are that

set," Kishan said after India's 227-run win. "Bowlers are under pressure. I was in the zone to get 300, but unfortunately I didn't... But it was a special one to get my name up there with so many legend players."

AFP



Denmark's Viktor Axelsen celebrates his victory against Indonesia's Anthony Sinisuka Ginting on Sunday (AFP)

Axelsen and Yamaguchi win badminton World Tour Finals

Bangkok, Thailand - Men's badminton world number one Viktor Axelsen regained his mojo to claim his eighth title for 2022, steamrolling Indonesian ace Anthony Ginting at the season-ending World Tour Finals in Bangkok on Sunday.

Reigning world champion Akane Yamaguchi of Japan defeated Taiwanese powerhouse Tai Tzu Ying to claim the women's singles crown.

The Badminton World Federation had moved its \$1.5 million flagship event to the Thai capital's Nimibutr Arena after original host China dropped the tournament due to its tough Covid restrictions. Axelsen, the defending champion, appeared fresh, relaxed, energetic and in

control as he cruised to a 21-13 victory in game one.

His confidence had been shakey following a surprise loss to India's H.S. Prannoy on Friday - only his third defeat this year - but he appeared to be a different player on Sunday.

In the women's final, Yamaguchi was victorious in closely fought straight games - 21-18, 22-20.

In the men's doubles, Chinese pair Liu Yuchen and Ou Xuanyi were too good for Indonesia's Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan, winning 21-17, 19-21, 21-12. In the women's doubles, Thai sisters Benyapa and Nuntakarn Aimsaard lost to Chinese duo Chen Qingchen and Jia Yifan 13-21, 14-21.

Shakeel, Imam shine as Pakistan fight back after England set stiff second Test target

Multan, Pakistan - Pakistan's Saud Shakeel and Imam-ul-Haq hit fighting half-centuries on Sunday to foil England's seam and pace attack and set up an exciting finish to the second Test in Multan.

Set a challenging 355 runs for victory, Pakistan ended the third day at 198-4, needing another 157 with two full days remaining.

With reverse swing helping the fast bowlers, England derailed Pakistan's start of 66 without loss with three wickets for just 17 runs.

But Haq (60) and Shakeel (54 not out) led a remarkable 156-minute fightback during their stand of 108 for the fourth wicket before Jack Leach had the former caught at slip three overs before stumps.

Haq, who came in at number five instead of opening the innings following hamstring treatment, hit seven boundaries.

Allrounder Faheem Ashraf, promoted to number six, was three not out as Pakistan chased a series-levelling win after losing the first of three Tests by 74 runs



Pakistan's Saud Shakeel celebrates after scoring his half century during the third day of the second Test against England in Multan on Sunday (AFP)

in Rawalpindi.

England assistant coach Marcus Trescothick said he thought Haq's wicket shifted the balance in his team's favour.

"I think it was a really important wicket because with the partnership they put together they were building to a nice place," he said.

(Pakistan) players are confident that they can win this match

MOHAMMAD YOUSUF

"Hopefully we put ourselves in a position to win the game."

Still, Pakistan batting coach Mohammad Yousuf saw the balance at 50-50.

"Players are confident that they can win this match," he said.

Pakistan can take heart from the fact that their highest successful chase was 377 against Sri Lanka in Pallekele in 2015, and they beat the same opponents

after being set 342 in Galle in July.

No team has ever successfully chased more than 314 in Pakistan, a target reached by the home team against Australia in Karachi in 1994.

After Pakistan's solid start, veteran pacer James Anderson bowled Mohammad Rizwan with the fifth ball after lunch for 30, before Ollie Robinson dismissed skipper Babar Azam for one.

Azam was left shell-shocked as he tried to leave a ball which came in sharply to hit the stumps.

It became 83-3 when Mark Wood bowled Abdullah Shafique for 45 with a ball that reverse-swinging to hit the stump and beat a forward push.

Earlier, spinner Abrar Ahmed took 11 wickets for 234 across the two innings -- the second best by a bowler on debut for Pakistan, behind Mohammad Zahid's 11-130 against New Zealand in Rawalpindi 26 years ago.

Harry Brook top-scored with 108 in England's 275 all out.

AFP

West Indies out for 77 as dominant Australia win 2nd Test

Adelaide, Australia - Top-ranked Australia dismissed an out-classed West Indies for just 77 Sunday to win the day-night second Test in Adelaide by 419 runs and seal the series 2-0.

The visitors resumed day four on 38-4 and were all out in the first session with Mitchell Starc and Michael Neser doing the damage to end a lopsided campaign.

Australia won the first Test at Perth by 164 runs.

"Nice toss to win, the boys batted particularly well the first

day. The partnership between Marnus (Labuschagne) and Travis (Head) set the game up for us," said Australian skipper Steve Smith. "It's been a good week. Everyone is contributing when they need to and we got a lot of trust in each other and sets us up really nicely."

The defeat ended the reign of West Indies head coach Phil Simmons, who announced his intention to quit after their disastrous recent Twenty20 World Cup campaign, when they exited in the first round.



Australia's Mitchell Starc (C) celebrates with teammates after dismissing West Indies batsman Jason Holder (L) on Sunday (AFP)

Australia took a stranglehold on day one when Head smacked 175 and Labuschagne hit 163 and they never let up.

It propelled them to 511-7 declared with the visitors then dismissed for 214 before Australia posted a quickfire 199-6 to set the West Indies 497 to win.

The Caribbean side were never in the hunt after Scott Boland sent down a sensational three-wicket maiden under the lights on Friday evening to leave them decimated.

AFP