



Decree ratifies agreement on linking GCC payment systems

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 6/2023 on Tuesday ratifying the 'Agreement on the System of Linking Payment Systems of Arab Gulf Cooperation Council States', endorsed in the city of Al Ula on January 5, 2021.

Article 1 states that the abovementioned agreement will be ratified in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 instructs the departments concerned to deposit the Ratification Document for the abovementioned agreement in line with its provisions.

Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA

820km Tour of Oman set for Feb 11

Event to see launch of new race - Muscat Classic

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Tour of Oman will return for its 12th edition on February 11 when for the first time in the history of the event, the final stage will lead the riders to the slopes of the iconic Jabal Akhdar, after an ascent of nearly 6km at more than ten per cent gradient. Earlier, all editions ended at Muttrah Corniche.

Additionally, for the first time, a new race will be launched - Muscat Classic - which will be held on the eve of the five-day Tour of Oman on February 10.

'Thirteen years after the birth of Tour of Oman, the sultanate welcomes a new professional road race to go along the emblematic stage event at the start of the season in the Middle East: the Muscat Classic, stepping into



TOUR OF OMAN

Stage 1: Rustaq Fort to OCEC (147.4 km)

Stage 2: Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex to Quriyat (174km)

Stage 3: Al Khobar to Jabal Haat (151.8km)

Stage 4: Izki to Yiti Hills (194.2km)

Stage 5: Samail to Jabal Akhdar (152.2km)

Muscat Classic: Al Mouj Muscat to Al Bustan

the international calendar as the only 1.1 race organised in Asia,' organisers stated.

The 173.7km course of Muscat Classic will explore demanding roads from Al Mouj towards Al Bustan, where punchers and sprinters have regularly fought for victory. 'Peter Sagan, Alexey

Lutsenko, Fabian Cancellara and André Greipel are among the stars who already claimed victory on the route. A one-day event, the Muscat Classic can offer new, even more explosive racing dynamics to crown its first champion on February 10.'

The following day, the 820km

Tour of Oman will return with the first stage from Rustaq Fort to Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The course, favouring sprinters, saw Fernando Gaviria take the first leader's jersey in 2022, before he achieved another success five days later in Muscat.

Starting from Sultan Qaboos

Sports Complex, Stage 2 leads towards Quriyat, where Anthon Charmig displayed his talent in 2022. And the finale will be even tougher the next day (Stage 3), on the irregular slopes of Jabal Haat (4.6km at eight per cent gradient), before another tough finish on the Yiti Hills (Stage 4). On this day, the riders will face the longest stage (195.5km), with two climbs inside the last 10km. 'After the last summit, there will only be 800m left... The end promises to be thrilling.'

The contenders for victory will have to catch their breath for the decisive stage of Tour of Oman 2023. For the first time, the last finish line is set on the slopes of Jabal Akhdar. 'Who will emerge as the winner after 5.7km of climbing at an average of 10.5 per cent gradient? The race to succeed last year's winner Jan Hirt will soon begin,' stated the organisers.

Nine UCI World Teams have confirmed their participation and the national team of Oman is making its comeback after a successful first in 2022.

Hot air balloon service launched in N Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

People visiting Al Wasil in Bidiyah, North Sharqiyah, for desert safaris now have another tourist attraction - hot air balloons.

Sheikh Ali bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Governor of North Sharqiyah, presided over the launch ceremony of commercial operations of Royal Balloons - a Turkish company operating hot air balloons in Bidiyah - on Tuesday.

Also present at the launch was Saeed al Obaidani, Director General of Tourism Development in the governorate.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) stated on Tuesday that it has granted a commercial licence to Royal Balloons to operate hot air balloons in Oman.

In a statement, CAA said, 'In the context of supporting sources of economic diversification in the civil aviation sector, the authority has granted Royal Balloon a commercial permit to operate hot air balloons in the



sultanate.'

It added that the licence was issued following completion of all requirements in accordance with the conditions mandated by the authority.

In July 2022, the authority issued a type acceptance certificate for hot air balloons in Oman.

'CAA issues the first certificate of type acceptance for hot air balloons in Oman, in accordance with international standards and recommendations set by the International Civil Aviation Organization,' a statement said

Sub-zero temperatures, snowfall in Jabal Shams

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With Jabal Shams recording sub-zero temperatures in the past few days, the highest peak in the sultanate witnessed snowfall on Monday.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Abdullah al Khatri, owner of Jabal Shams Moon Guesthouse, informed that the area is experiencing freezing temperatures and the hills were laden with snow on Monday.

According to the Directorate General of Meteorology, Jabal Shams recorded -3.6°C on Monday, the lowest temperature of the year so far. At 7am on Tuesday, the mercury dipped to -2°C.

The directorate stated that the lowest recorded temperature in Jabal Shams was -9.7°C in January 2015 since monitoring began in 2003.



(Supplied photo)

Khatri added that Jabal Shams, or the Mountain of the Sun, offers one of the most picturesque settings in Oman, especially during the winter season. It is also one of the most popular destinations for camping.

'Currently, the area is witnessing a large turnout of foreign tourists, residents and citizens alike. On an average, more than 400 European tourists are visiting Jabal Shams daily to enjoy the freezing temperatures,' he said.



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SEASON 2022-2023

MUSCAT NIGHTS

CAPITAL COMES ALIVE



Among the activities attracting visitors to the ongoing Muscat Nights at Naseem Garden are acrobatics and stage shows. The event is also being held at Oman Automobile Association, Qurum Natural Park and Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (V K Shafer)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The ongoing Muscat Nights feature a wide variety of attractions, including entertainment activities for the whole family, sports, art competitions and cultural programmes.

Oman Automobile Association is one of the four venues chosen by Muscat Municipality to woo visitors to enjoy its activities.

The three other venues are Qurum Natural Park, Naseem Garden and Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, a Muscat Municipality official

said, "Oman Automobile Association is presenting many activities - competitions that challenge intelligence and physical strength, stunt activities like drifting, car games and it also has a Children's Games Village."

Other attractions include stage performances, a pavilion for SMEs and productive families, food carts, a padel court, a Japanese village, a crafts village, a special theatre for electronic arts, electronic gaming truck competitions (the first in the sultanate), and racing simulators, which are attracting and dazzling many youngsters.



Fourteen-year-old Hossam Mohamed said, "I came to enjoy the outdoor electronic games here. It's a lot of fun with many enthusiastic contestants. I love the atmosphere. There is a wide variety of interesting activities, especially for young people who love car racing."

Another visitor, 23-year-old Hamed al Balushi from Seeb, was impressed with the open-air gaming area. "This is an opportunity to enjoy these games with other gaming enthusiasts."

Twenty-year-old Ali al Sheyadi who came from Rustaq said, "I love simulation games. These games are very stimulating and also improve ability to

control real automation, like tanks, ships and planes."

However, Sheyadi also enjoyed the other attractions at Oman Automobile Association, such as the comedy theatre, SMEs stalls, sports equipment shops, antique collections and food carts.

Zaher al Aghbari, who came to enjoy the stage shows with his family, thoroughly enjoyed the racing simulators and the products available in the Japanese village.

"I was impressed with the online ticket booking facility. It made entry to the festival's activities easy without encountering any crowds," Aghbari said.

INVITATION TO TENDER

SOHAR ALUMINIUM

Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No. : 2022-ENG-SOW-0063

Tender Title : Electronic EHS Permits

Scope : Vendor shall study and design SA online Risk Assessment & EHS work permits as per the existing SA requirement and processes from design to Implementation of the product in all SA process.

Tender No. : 2022-ENG-SOW-0059

Tender Title : Supply of computer – Laptop

Scope : Vendor shall supply of new Laptops with similar or higher specifications as per Sohar Aluminium Technical Specifications. With on-site warranty support (services & spare parts) for the laptop models procured, this include repair jobs whenever required. Vendor should take care of the logistics. Preventive maintenance every quarter.

Tender No. : 2023-ENG-SOW-0002

Tender Title : Cyber Security Assessment Findings Closure – SIEM

Scope : The SIEM solution must be On-Prem. The proposed SIEM solution should include SOAR and UEBA, the license activation and go-live of SOAR/UEBA should be after the successful completion and maturity of SIEM solution. Implementation should be carried out by certified engineer, including building use cases as per Sohar Aluminium requirements.

Start Date for Issuing Tender Documents
01 February 2023

Last Date for Applying Tender Documents
31 January 2023

Last Date for Tender Submission
15 February 2023

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

Excitement over SRK-starrer
Pathaan releasing today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bollywood buffs eagerly await the release of *Pathaan* on Wednesday. The high-octane spy thriller stars Shah Rukh Khan (SRK), Deepika Padukone and John Abraham.

The film is of special interest to Hindi film lovers as the mega-star SRK returns to the silver screen after a gap of four years. His last film – *Zero* – had one of its premieres in Muscat with the star attending the event himself.

Commenting on *Pathaan*, an official of Stars Cinema said, "Few films create an air of excitement around their release; *Pathaan* is one of them. Most of our audience is from South India, but there have been a good number of enquiries from them. People of other nationalities, including many Omanis, love Shah Rukh's movies. So we expect a good turnout."

Families and many companies have made advance bookings in theatres.

Nada Balushi, a corporate communications manager, said,



"I have been a SRK fan since my teens. I waited eagerly for four years to see him come back. To add to my excitement over the film, I also like Deepika - for her grace, style and the strong characters she portrays."

At the ongoing Muscat Nights in Qurum Natural Park, Lunar Cinema will screen the movie for a week for RO1 per ticket. Badraa Syed, a senior official, said, "This

movie will be a great experience to see under the open sky on a giant screen."

Adding to the interest in the film in Oman is the fact that part of story is set in Dubai. Vincent D'Souza, who works in the advertising industry, said, "I visit Dubai for work often, so I am curious to see how this big-budget production makes use of the location."

Ironman to be
held in Muscat
on Feb 4

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) announced on Tuesday that Ironman 70.3 Muscat, a triathlon championship, will be held on February 4. The fifth edition of the championship will take place at Qurum beach, held by the ministry in cooperation with TriMe Middle East.

MHT informed that participants representing several countries will take part in the race, considered one of the world's toughest athletic challenges.

"The Ironman 70.3 Muscat race aims at raising awareness on the triathlon sport across Oman and to serve the organising company's (TriMe Middle East) vision of adding Oman on the global map of international sporting events," said Asma Salim al Hajariya, Assistant Director General of Tourism Promotion in the ministry. "The championship is also an ideal step for Oman to showcase itself as a major destination to host international sporting events and adventure tourism activities," she added.

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Omran opens 'Walk In' Creative Art Space

Unique art space at OCEC showcases works of prominent Omani artists

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) celebrated the opening of 'Walk In' Creative Art Space at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Tuesday.

The initiative falls within the framework of the 'Creatourism' programme of the group to promote Oman's rich and diverse art, culture and heritage in its various developments and ho-



(Supplied photo)

tels, as well as giving creative minds ample opportunities to showcase their talent. The art space is a permanent platform

that will be used to exhibit works of prominent Omani artists.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H E

Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Culture in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is working towards activating the cultural strategy (2021-2040) by supporting platforms and initiatives that promote Omani art and culture

H E SAYYID SAID
AL BUSAIDI

On occasion, H E Sayyid Said said, "The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is working towards activating the cultural strategy (2021-2040) by supporting platforms and initiatives that promote Omani art and culture, in particular those that achieve the eight values that un-

derpin our strategy. By supporting these initiatives, we are delivering on the mission of our strategy. This encompasses organising and developing cultural works and creating the appropriate environment to foster creativity to strengthen the country's cultural identity."

He added that supporting platforms that celebrate the creative work of Omani artists fulfil the values of the cultural strategy. "This 'Walk In' Creative Art Space, and the 'Creatourism' initiative under which it falls, are exactly such platforms. They bring together creative minds from all over the country to showcase the depth and breadth of art, culture and heritage in Oman while contributing to the growth and development of the country's tourism sector."

The art space, located at one of the main entrances of OCEC, will serve as a permanent space

that celebrates creative arts. Currently, it features more than 30 specially curated art pieces by renowned Omani artists, including Alia al Farsi, Anwar Sonya, Asila Juma, Budoor al Riyami, Gaith al Siyabi, Hassan Meer, Idris al Hooti, Israa al Balushi, Majeda al Hinai, Marwa al Kaabi, Mazin al Harthi, Moosa Omar, Nada al Masoudi and Ruqayia al Balushi.

On the occasion, Hassan Meer, Art & Culture Expert at OMRAN Group, said, "As part of our 'Creatourism' initiative, we aim to give local artists a platform to showcase their talent and celebrate their creative artworks. Moreover, we aim to leverage the initiative to enrich our assets with creative arts by local artists, utilising their skills and capabilities to enhance the country's tourist experiences, primarily through art and culture-related shops, exhibitions, and activities at our tourist facilities."

ASMED, Sharakah sign MoU to support SMEs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To empower small and medium enterprises and support the development of their businesses, Sharakah recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Authority for SMEs Development (ASMED).

The agreement endeavours to strengthen collaboration between the two entities on sharing of expertise related to the ecosystem, which will boost growth of the SME sector and help them operate successfully and be sustainable. The cooperation will focus on initiatives and activities related to SMEs while supporting and promoting each other in serving the sector.

This promising sector is accelerating, and we are committed to consolidate the presence of SMEs in all fields to increase their contribution to the GDP

HALIMA AL ZARIA

Halima bint Rashid al Zaria, Chairperson of ASMED, and Ali bin Ahmed Muqibal, CEO of Sharakah, signed the MoU at a ceremony that took place in ASMED's head office.

On the occasion, Muqibal said, "We feel honoured to sign this agreement with ASMED. Both entities are playing a vital role in supporting and developing the SME ecosystem in Oman. The objective of this collabora-

tion is to expand and boost the support extended to SMEs. The MoU will contribute to the advancement of entrepreneurship in Oman, boost the SME sector's contribution to the economy, and make small businesses more active and robust. Our goals and objectives are strategically aligned, and this MoU comes as a validation of our strategic alliance."

On her part, Halima said that

the agreement will enhance the existing cooperation and partnership with Sharakah, "as we seek to enhance the authority's role in empowering SMEs and expanding their capabilities with basic knowledge and skills to engage in entrepreneurship and keep pace with changes around us".

She added, "This promising sector is accelerating, and we are committed to consolidate the presence of SMEs in all fields to increase their contribution to the GDP and development of the national economy. We also strive through innovative initiatives and programmes to stimulate SMEs to raise their capabilities in order to compete locally, regionally and globally."

Empty Quarter Festival kicks off today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is organising the second edition of the Empty Quarter Festival in the wilayat of Thumrait, Dhofar, from January 25 to February 3.

The opening ceremony will be

held in the Al Khadf area of Al Shahr in Thumrait under the auspices of H E Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in MHT at 5pm on Wednesday.

Commenting on the festival, H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, tweeted, "Such fes-

tivals aim to leverage the advantages of each governorate and provide spaces for entertainment, employment, craft industries and adventures."

He also pointed out that it is imperative to provide and improve basic services in each governorate to achieve the tourism targets.

Pact signed to set up small fishing firms, provide funds

Muscat - A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed on Monday to establish small enterprises specialised in fishing and provide funding for their projects.

The MoU was inked by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), Fisheries Development Oman and the Ministry of Labour. It will empower owners of enterprises through training in technical skills.

The MoU also aims to enable the owners to keep pace with labour market developments, achieve growth and sustainability in their businesses and find investment.

In partnership with the entities supporting the initiative, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources will facilitate the beneficiaries with appropriate fishing licences. It will also oversee training programmes to ensure optimum system integration.

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MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 5 /2023

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following bidding :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding description	Document fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for Submission
1	AB/01/2023	Car park construction and management project in the Plot Number (409) at Al arin at Mutrah	75/- OMR	14/03/2023	05/03/2023	26/03/2023

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bid are invited to participate as per the following procedures:

- Company registration with Muscat Municipality have to be valid as per note number one below, to be able to get the bid document.
- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:

Bank Muscat	0423010702710024
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- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
- The bidding documents will be send to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted.**

Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and drop in the box located in Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to send their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om).
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

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MOH No. 44/2023

MARKET WATCH	
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Bangladesh	276.87
Philippines	142.53
Sri Lanka	945.41
*Rates as on January 24 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Uganda launches first oil drilling programme

Uganda on Tuesday officially launched an oil drilling programme as it seeks to join the club of crude-producing nations with a mega-project that has incensed environmental groups.

The Kingfisher field is part of a US\$10bn scheme to develop Uganda's oil reserves under a lake in the west of the country and build a vast pipeline to ship the crude to international markets via an Indian Ocean port in Tanzania.

"The president (Yoweri Museveni) has officially commissioned the start of drilling campaign on the Kingfisher oilfield," the Petroleum Authority of Uganda (PAU) said on Twitter, describing the development as a "milestone".

Uganda's first oil is expected to flow in 2025 - almost two decades after reserves were discovered in one of the world's most bio-diverse regions.

Oman's oil exports jump 11% in 2022 as output rises 9.6%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's average daily production of crude oil and condensates exceeded 1.06mn barrels per day (bpd) for the full year 2022, up by 9.6 per cent in comparison to average daily output of 971,200 bpd recorded in 2021.

The sultanate's total oil production in 2022 increased by nearly 10 per cent to 388.4mn barrels compared to 354.5mn barrels in 2021, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Of the total production, crude production grew by 12.8 per cent to 309.5mn barrels in 2022 from 274.4mn barrels in 2021, while condensates output decreased by 1.4 per cent to 78.9mn barrels during last year against 80mn barrels in 2021.

Total oil exports for the full year 2022 grew by 10.6 per cent to 319.5mn barrels in comparison with 288.9mn barrels in the previous year, the NCSI data showed.

Exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman's crude, accounted for nearly 82 per cent of the sultanate's total oil exports during 2022 compared with 84 per cent share in 2021. Total exports to China last year increased by 7.6 per cent to 260.8mn barrels compared to 242.2mn barrels in 2021.

On the other hand, exports to



India increased by 7.8 per cent to 31.2mn barrels in 2022 from 28.9mn barrels in 2021. Oil exports to South Korea and Japan jumped by 93 per cent and 179 per cent to 12.6mn barrels and 11.7mn barrels in 2022, respectively.

Elevated prices

The average price at which Oman sold its crude during 2022 surged by more than 48 per cent to US\$95.4 per barrel against US\$64.3 per barrel recorded in the previous year.

Oman crude price on Tuesday rose by one per cent to close at US\$85.22 per barrel (for March delivery) at the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.

The sultanate posted a budget surplus of RO1.146bn for the full year 2022 against an estimated

Average price at which Oman sold its crude oil during 2022 surged by more than 48% to \$95.4 per barrel compared to \$64.3 per barrel recorded in the previous year

deficit of RO1.550bn in the beginning of last year year, mainly due to higher oil revenues.

Oman crude prices closed the year 2022 with a second straight annual gain. Oil prices remained elevated during the first half of

2022, climbing on tight supplies due to the Russia-Ukraine war. However, the prices started sliding in the second half of the year on weaker demand from China and worries of a global recession due to rising interest rates.

As a precaution against oil price volatility, Oman's 2023 state budget is based on an average oil price estimate of US\$55 per barrel and average oil production of 1.175mn barrels per day. Global credit rating agency Moody's last week said that high oil prices will continue to bolster GCC sovereigns' credit quality in 2023. Moody's assumes Brent crude oil will average around US\$95 per barrel this year, below the 2022 average of US\$100 but significantly above the average of US\$57 per barrel during 2015-2021.



CBO issues treasury bills worth RO105mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week issued two tenders of the government treasury bills worth total RO105mn.

The value of the allotted treasury bills for a maturity period of 28 days amounted to RO40mn. The average accepted price for this tender reached RO99.673 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.665.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.2659 per cent and 4.2799 per cent, respectively, for 28 days maturity treasury bills.

On the other hand, the value of the allotted treasury bills for a maturity period of 91 days amounted to RO65mn. The average accepted price reached RO98.788 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.785.

For 91 days maturity treasury bills, the average discount rate and the average yield reached

4.8610 per cent and 4.9206 per cent, respectively.

It may be noted that the interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 5.0 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with the central bank is 5.5 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance. These instruments provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

The government treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.



UAE banks' total assets hit AED3.6tn mark

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The Central Bank of the UAE (CBUAE) announced that the UAE banks' gross assets, including bankers' acceptances, increased by 0.7 per cent to AED3.639tn in November 2022, rising from AED3.615tn at the end of October 2022.

According to figures published in CBUAE's summary report on monetary and banking developments, gross credit rose by 0.5 per cent from around AED1.878tn at the end of October 2022 to around AED1.887tn at the end of November 2022.

Gross credit increased due to 0.8 per cent rise in domestic credit, overriding the 1.7 per cent reduction in foreign credit. Domestic credit grew because of 0.4 per cent, 2.0 per cent and 0.7 per cent climbs in credit to the government sector, public sector (government related entities) and private sector, respectively, overriding the reduction in credit to the non-banking financial institutions by 3.8 per cent.

Total bank deposits increased by 1.6 per cent, mounting from around AED2.204tn at the end of October 2022 to some AED2.239tn at the end of November 2022.

The growth was due to the rise in resident deposits by 2.5 per cent, overshadowing the reduction in non-resident deposits by 6.2 per cent. The deposits increased owing to 0.6 per cent, 9.8 per cent, 2.0 per cent and 1.3

per cent expansions in government sector deposits, public sector (government related entities) deposits, private sector deposits and non-banking financial institutions deposits, respectively.

The report also revealed that the monetary base expanded by 3.7 per cent climbing from AED468.8bn at the end of October 2022 to AED486.0bn at the end of November 2022. The main drivers of this expansion were increases in currency issued and banks' current accounts and overnight deposits of banks at the CBUAE by 4.8 per cent and 58.3 per cent, respectively. Whereas, reserve account and certificates of deposit and monetary bills decreased by 23.7 per cent and 1.9 per cent, individually.

The money supply aggregate M1 increased by 0.9 per cent (month-on-month) reaching AED729.7bn at the end of November 2022. This was due to AED1.7bn and AED4.9bn rise in currency in circulation outside banks and in monetary deposits, respectively.

The money supply aggregate M2 ascended by 3.0 per cent, from around AED1.629tn at the end of October 2022 to around AED1.678tn at the end of November 2022. M2 swelled due to an improved M1 and an increase of AED42.1bn in quasi-monetary deposits.

WAM

Microsoft invests \$10bn in ChatGPT firm OpenAI

San Francisco, US - Microsoft on Monday said it had extended its partnership with OpenAI, the research lab and creator of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence chatbot that has sparked widespread fears of cheating in schools and universities.

In a company blog post tweeted by CEO Satya Nadella, the tech giant announced a "multi-year, multibillion dollar investment to accelerate AI breakthroughs" that would be "broadly shared with the world."

OpenAI's ChatGPT became an internet sensation when it was released without warning in November, allowing users to experiment with its ability to write essays, articles and poems as well as computer code in just seconds.

With teachers alarmed by its ability, ChatGPT is banned in universities and school districts - in-



This picture taken on Monday in Toulouse, southwestern France, shows screens displaying the logos of Microsoft and ChatGPT (AFP)

cluding in New York City and Washington DC - and has sparked nervous debates about the future of office work.

California-based OpenAI is also the creator of DALL-E, a program that can swiftly draw up

digital images and illustrations at a simple request. Media reports have put Microsoft's fresh investment in OpenAI at US\$10bn, which would value the company at roughly US\$29bn.

The announcement comes

less than a week after Microsoft said it would lay off 10,000 employees in the coming weeks and redeploy investment to new priorities such as AI.

Microsoft's statement said that the company would deploy OpenAI's models "across our consumer and enterprise products."

This indicated that Microsoft intended to include the technology behind ChatGPT and DALL-E into its own software products such as Bing, the search engine or the company's Office apps.

"With ChatGPT being one of the most innovative AI technologies seen in the industry, Microsoft is clearly being aggressive on this front and not going to be left behind on what could be a potential game changing AI investment," analyst Dan Ives of Wedbush Securities said in a note.

Founded in late 2015 with Tesla tycoon Elon Musk an early investor, OpenAI is led by Sam Altman, a 37-year-old entrepreneur and former president of startup incubator Y Combinator.

The company has counted on the financial support of prestigious contributors from the start, including LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, investor Peter Thiel and Musk.

The multi-billionaire served on OpenAI's board until 2018, but left to focus on Tesla, the electric vehicle company.

The startup also relies on a team of computer scientists and researchers led by Ilya Sutskever, a former Google executive who specializes in machine learning.

OpenAI had about 200 employees by 2021, according to a query made directly on ChatGPT.

AFP

Oil prices decrease over demand fears

London, UK - Oil prices slightly decreased on Tuesday over economic recession fears ahead of an expected interest rate hike by the US Federal Reserve, putting a hold on hopes for an imminent economic recovery.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$87.94 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 0.28 per cent decrease from the closing price of US\$88.19 a barrel in the previous trading session.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at US\$81.52 per barrel at the same time, a 0.12 per cent loss after the previous session closed at US\$81.62 a barrel.

Amid comments by US Federal Reserve policymakers signalling an interest rate over 5 per cent, both benchmarks posted slight decreases over weak de-



mand concerns in the US, the world's largest oil-consuming country. The market expectation is a policy rate hike by 25 basis points during Fed's meeting on February 1.

Meanwhile, hopes for a strong demand in China support upward price movements as the

country expects about 2.1bn domestic journeys to be made over a 40-day travel season that includes the weeklong Lunar New Year holidays which started on Saturday.

However, such a massive influx of people also sparks fears that the number of cases would

rise again to provoke China's strict "zero-COVID policy."

On the inventory side, US stocks of crude oil and gasoline were expected to have risen last week while distillate stocks were forecast to fall, a preliminary Reuters poll showed on Monday.

Agencies

Guide launched for startups, SMEs

Muscat - The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (ASMED) on Tuesday launched its first edition of bulletin 'Guide for Small and Medium Enterprises and Startups'.

The step seeks to market SMEs and introduce them to different government and private establishments, segments of society and investors. ASMED also aspires to help local SMEs and start-ups go global.

The guide, which comprises 84 such nascent enterprise in its first edition, also covers Omani trademarks specialised in industry and technology. It reflects diversity in terms of activities, products and services that the firms offer to individuals and establishments.

ONA

Hopes grow that Europe will dodge recession

Brussels, Belgium - Europe's economy grew in January for the first time since June, a closely watched survey showed Tuesday, raising hopes that the eurozone will avoid a recession this winter.

Europe has benefited from lower inflation, improved supply chains and the recent reopening of China's Covid-scarred economy, leading to increased optimism for 2023.

The outlook for the single currency area is significantly brighter than it was a few months ago, when panic set in over the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on Europe's economy.

The S&P Global Flash Eurozone purchasing managers' index (PMI) rose to 50.2 in January from 49.3 in December. A figure higher than 50 indicates growth.

"This was the third successive increase and, as such, provides more evidence that the region has so far avoided the sharp downturn that we and many others had predicted," Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics, said in a note.

Almost all experts warned last year that the eurozone would enter a recession - two consecutive quarters in which the economy shrinks - in the final three months of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023.

Those fears are receding, but Europe still faces challenges ahead.

Demand for goods and services continued to weaken, industrial orders fell in January - although less sharply than in December - and the impact of more interest rates hikes could still be felt.

European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde on Monday showed no signs of moving away from more rate hikes, insisting they must continue rising at a "steady pace" in order to avoid



The European Central Bank (ECB) headquarters in Frankfurt

Europe has benefited from lower inflation, improved supply chains and the recent reopening of China's Covid-scarred economy, leading to increased optimism for 2023

inflation becoming entrenched.

Inflation in the single currency area remains high at 9.2 per cent, but has fallen for two months in a row, boosted by the slowdown in the rate of energy price rises.

'Welcome news'

Last week Lagarde said she expected the eurozone economy to fare "a lot better" than initially feared, with expectations of "a small contraction" instead of a recession.

"The survey undoubtedly brings welcome good news to suggest that any downturn is likely to be far less severe than previously feared and that a re-

cession may well be avoided altogether," said Chris Williamson, S&P's chief business economist. The economy has been helped by concerns easing over the impact of soaring energy bills, thanks to mild winter weather and generous government support on the continent.

But Williamson warned that the region was "by no means out of the woods yet".

The EU's economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni last week said there was an expectation of "subdued growth" for the rest of 2023.

"The war in Ukraine of course continues to cloud the outlook.

And while high storage levels and lower demand have helped to bring energy prices down, the crisis is certainly not over," Gentiloni added.

The European Union's statistics agency will publish growth data for 2022's fourth quarter next Tuesday.

The single currency area's largest economy, Germany, benefited from the easing of supply chain pressure which helped manufacturing, S&P said, and reported improvement with the composite PMI rising from 49.0 in December to 49.7 in January.

But output in France, where activity is driven by domestic consumers and services, fell for a third consecutive month after a sharper drop in services activity.

S&P said output for the rest of the eurozone, which comprises 20 countries after Croatia joined in January, also returned to growth.

AFP

Interest rates need to rise at 'steady pace': ECB chief

Frankfurt, Germany - European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde said Monday that interest rates need to continue rising at a "steady pace" in order to avoid inflation becoming entrenched.

While energy prices have recently come down, Lagarde said underlying inflation continues to rise.

"It is vital that inflation rates above the ECB's two-percent target do not become entrenched in the economy," she said at an event hosted by the operator of the Frankfurt stock exchange.

In less than six months the ECB has raised its key policy rates by 2.5 percentage points, the fastest increase in its history.

"ECB interest rates will still have to rise significantly at a



ECB chief Christine Lagarde

steady pace to reach levels that are sufficiently restrictive, and stay at those levels for as long as necessary" to bring inflation down, Lagarde added.

"We must bring inflation down. And we will deliver on this goal," she vowed.

ECB policymakers are expected to raise rates at their meetings in February and March.

"We will stay the course to ensure the timely return of inflation to our target," said Lagarde. AFP

UK borrowing balloons on energy support: Data

London, UK - The UK government's debt almost tripled last month as it subsidises gas and electricity bills to protect Britons from high energy costs following producer Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Public sector net borrowing hit £27.4bn (US\$33.9bn) in December, up £16.7bn from a year earlier, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement on Tuesday.

That was the highest monthly December figure since comparable records began in 1993, and was far greater than expectations of £17bn.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's energy support schemes for businesses and individuals added almost £7bn to borrowing.

Interest payments soared to £17.3bn, which was the second highest month on record and followed £8.7 billion a year earlier.

The Bank of England has em-



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

barked upon a series of aggressive interest rate hikes to cool sky-high inflation, but this has also ramped up the cost of state borrowing.

The BoE in December hiked its interest rate by half a point to 3.5 per cent, the highest level in 14 years.

It began tightening monetary policy in December 2021, when the key rate stood at a record-low 0.1 per cent.

UK annual inflation slowed to 10.5 per cent in December, but remains close to historically high levels, fuelling a cost-of-living crisis and mass strikes by tens of thousands of public and private-sector workers.

The government believes the economy has already entered recession on fallout from rampant consumer price increases.

Separately Tuesday, a survey showed UK private sector business activity suffered its biggest drop in two years this month, underlining the threat of a prolonged downturn.

The composite purchasing managers' index (PMI) hit 47.8 for January from 49.0 in December, compilers S&P Global and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply said in a statement.

The reading fell further below the key 50 level signalling a deepening contraction.

AFP

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr.No	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date	Grade	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	90/2022 (Re-floated)	Providing support for media services for two years.	01/02/2023	07/02/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	52/500
2	03/2023	Supply of Insulated ladders and Oil Drum Drip Tray.	09/02/2023	14/03/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender:	By E-Tendering System.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer)
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from closing date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from closing date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from closing date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 99242969 , 93515198
Email	tenders@omangrid.com
Website:	www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



Oman Electricity Transmission Company s.a.o.c.
P.O. Box 1389, Al Khoudh, PC 132, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: +968 2428 3000 | Fax: +968 2230 9046
www.omangrid.com



إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية :

م	رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (ر.ع)
١	٢٠٢٢/٩٠ (إعادة طرح)	توفير الدعم للخدمات الإعلامية لمدة سنتين	٢٠٢٣/٠٢/٠١	٢٠٢٣/٠٢/٠٧	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل جاري ساري المفعول.	٥٢/٥٠٠
٢	٢٠٢٣/٠٣	توريد سلالام عازلة وحاوليات لإنسكاب الزيت	٢٠٢٣/٠٢/٠٩	٢٠٢٣/٠٣/١٤	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل جاري ساري المفعول.	٢٦/٢٥٠

الإشتراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة بعد تقديم الطلب عن طريق نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
طريقة الشراء	من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة - لا ترد (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)
آخر موعد للإستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العروض	يتم تسليم النسخة الأصلية فقط من الضمان البنكي للعطاء في الصندوق . أما العرض فيتم تسليمه من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الشروط و الضمانات	- عدم تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . - إرفاق تأمينا في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (١٪) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء . ومعتونا بإسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء . - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه . - الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع الضمان البنكي العطاء فقط في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم السكة ٢١٥٣ - مبنى رقم ٣٢٠ تفاصيل التواصل: ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨, ٩٩٢٤٢٩١٩
البريد الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com
الموقع الإلكتروني	www.omangrid.com link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش . م . ع . م
ص . ب : ١٣٨٩ ، الخوض الرمز البريدي : ١٣٢ ، سلطنة عمان
الهاتف : +٩١٨٢٤٢٩٣٠٠٠ / الفاكس : +٩١٨٢٣٠٩٠٤٦
www.omangrid.com



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Bank Nizwa named ‘strongest Islamic bank’

The fastest-growing Islamic bank in the sultanate, Bank Nizwa, has been awarded ‘The Strongest Islamic Retail Bank in Oman 2022’ conferred by the UK-based Cambridge International Financial Advisory (IFA) at the 8th Islamic Retail Banking Awards (IBRA) Ceremony 2022.

The award demonstrates Bank Nizwa’s commitment to providing consumers with tailored banking experiences that meet their changing needs through sharia’a-compliant, cutting-edge financial solutions. The IRBA analyses global Islamic banking efficiency performance using the most rigorous academic analysis. The prestigious awards recognise individuals and institutions that have demonstrated a solid commitment to Islamic retail banking and contributed significantly to its growth and success.

“Our pursuit of becoming the global leader in Islamic finance has been acknowledged with these wins by Bank Nizwa. Beyond growing our assets, we strive to provide sharia’a-compliant products and solutions of the highest quality,” said Arif al Zaabi, assistant general manager - Retail Banking.

“The award motivates us to keep offering sustainable financial solutions to the community



and provide the most exceptional customer service. With our solid footprint, as Oman’s leading Islamic bank, we are well positioned to promote Islamic banking,” said a confident AGM. “Our retail banking business has made remarkable achievements over the past few years. We have also expanded our customer base significantly by responding quickly and efficiently to emerging market trends and accelerating the shift to digital banking. Taking advantage of technological evolution, we are Oman’s first bank to open a dig-

ital-only branch to motivate those who still use conventional banking methods to adopt digital banking,” Zaabi pointed out. “Keeping our focus on product diversification and innovation will enable the bank to continue to pursue its strategy and create value. In particular, we will focus on delivering operational excellence and adding the greatest value for our bank and for the Islamic banking sector,” he added. The Retail Banking Division, which constitutes the majority of the company’s operations, provides innovative sharia’a-compli-

ant products, such as savings, current, and investment deposit accounts, as well as home, personal and auto financing solutions to meet the financial needs of people across the country. It has worked towards continuously redefining the Islamic banking experience in Oman by providing customers with innovative products and services underpinned by responsive customer care and technologically advanced solutions, meeting today’s dynamic requirements. This approach has brought about positive change in

Oman’s retail banking space, prompting other institutions to re-examine their product and service offerings. Increasingly, customers expect banking platforms to be intuitive, frictionless and connected. As a result, Bank Nizwa has created FinTech solutions for the retail division through technology and innovation. Among these projects is its partnership with the Islamic Finance Initiation Network (IFIN), which offers instant Islamic ‘Goods Financing’ to its customers. By leveraging IFIN’s

cloud-based platform, Bank Nizwa can make Islamic financing processes faster, easier, and more hassle-free. In addition, Bank Nizwa became the first Islamic bank in Oman to introduce sharia’a-compliant eco-friendly credit and debit cards made from Polylactic Acid (PLA) after recognizing the importance of sustainability and forming a strategy dedicated to it. One of the bank’s main objectives is to increase financial inclusion and accelerate the transition to a digital economy. In

line with this, Bank Nizwa constantly improves its products and services portfolio. The bank constantly strives to improve consumer convenience by adopting tactics that meet their expectations. Furthermore, the division conducts knowledge sessions about Islamic banking and sharia’a-compliant financial services and products to empower attendees to make informed financial decisions. The Retail Banking Division strives to offer a richer customer experience by innovating its products and services.

Khedmah signs deal with Honeywell to provide energy saving solutions

Furthering its position as a leading company working with the water and energy sector, Oman Investment and Finance Company (OIFC) Khedmah signed an agreement with Honeywell, (Nasdaq: HON).

This deal supports Khedmah’s continuous effort to offer innovative solutions to its customers, individuals and corporates, in order to reduce their carbon footprint, and contribute towards a more sustainable future.

The agreement was signed on January 9 at the Sheraton Oman Hotel, with the presence of Said bin Ahmed Safrar, OIFC’s Chief Executive Officer, and Umar Khan, General Manager for Energy, Sustainability and Smart Cities of Honeywell Building Technologies, Middle East, Turkey and Africa, paired with senior management teams from both parties.

“This fruitful collaboration aligns with the royal directives to stay current with global ad-



vancements in clean energy and sustainable practices, and supports the company’s endeavours towards digitalisation and the incorporation of environmentally conscious measures,” the OIFC CEO said.

“Our collaboration with Honeywell exemplifies the company’s commitment and efforts to promote sustainability within the lives and future plans of our clients.” The agreement between

Khedmah and Honeywell will help make available innovative and more environmentally friendly solutions to customers. Through offering efficient solutions that help reduce customers’ carbon footprints, this

collaboration also supports the country’s journey to establish smart and sustainable cities. Specifically, Honeywell will deploy its advanced sustainability and smart city solutions, including Honeywell Buildings Sustainability Manager. Through utilisation of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML), customers will benefit from smarter, more sustainable buildings without compromising on the occupant experience. “Honeywell is fully committed to leading change towards a more sustainable digital future and to help enable our customers’ sustainability efforts and support their carbon reduction goals,” Umar Khan said. “Together, with Khedmah’s service network, we will support the sultanate’s strategic goals by deploying our advanced solutions across buildings, communities and cities to help reduce their carbon impact and support ESG goals.”

Ahlibank offers daily growth benefits through ‘Wafra Plus’

ahlibank is offering its customers to enjoy daily interests on their savings through ‘Wafra Plus’ account option, which promises interest rates ranging from 1.00 per cent (for deposits up to RO9,999) to 1.75 per cent (for deposits of RO100,000 and more), depending on the deposit amounts.

The ‘Wafra Plus’ account enables new and existing customers to better develop their financial resources on a daily basis. This comes as part of ahlibank’s efforts to provide a suite of banking products and services that exceed customers’ expectations, the bank said.

The ‘Wafra Plus’ Daily Growth Account is a savings account that pays up to 1.75 per cent interest per year on the daily balance in the account. At the end of each day,

the benefit is compounded and credited to the clients’ accounts. Key benefits for Wafra Plus accountholders include up to 1.75 per cent interest per annum in competitive benefits, compounded advantages on a daily basis, unlimited transactions on the account, and benefits being credited to the account every day. “The ‘Wafra Plus’ account comes in line with the comprehensive growth strategy of ahlibank. We at ahlibank are always keen to encourage smart and sustainable money management in all our operations, and the ‘Wafra Plus’ account comes as a good example of that, as it supports our customers’ efforts to save in a simple and effective way that meets their goals and aspirations,” said Muneer al Balushi, AGM - head of Retail Distribution.

ISWK students excel in IGCSE exams

Students of IGCSE 2022 cohort of Indian School Wadi Kabir Cambridge International performed remarkably well in the October-November series for IGCSE, the school informed.

ISWKi announced cent per cent success in overall results. A total of 19 students have secured impressive results. ‘The students of ISWK Cambridge International have made the institution exceptionally proud with their outstanding exam results. It has gone to the annals of the school’s history as a momentous occasion for the ISWKi Management, Principal, Vice principal and the Educators. The students are elated to be part of such a momentous feat,’ the school said.

‘Nineteen students secured overall 35A* and 41 A grades this year, and we are all incredibly happy for the achievements of the cohort. ISWKi believes in the power of personal development for learners who dedicate them-

selves to a strong support system to achieve academic success. It seems that this year’s results reflect on the preparedness of our future leaders to face the challenges ahead in an ever-changing world. This will continue for the many students who embark on the IGCSE syllabus in ISWK Cambridge International,’ it added.

Good academic results are the by-product of individual determination and willpower, but beyond that they are an indication of great personal achievements formed together with conducive learning environments, quality teaching and a solid foundation for building future leaders.

Our heartiest congratulations to IGCSE toppers of the 2022 series on their excellent performance! We are very proud of each of you. We also thank our dedicated staff for their consistent and unrelenting efforts to boost the performance of our students.

Krish Sachin Kamath Krish Sachin Kamath has made the entire ISWKi fraternity proud by bagging A* in all subjects; First Language English, Mathematics, Computer Science, Economics. Physics and Chemistry

Ruchit Devraj Karnik Ruchit Devraj Karnik has scored A* in all subjects; English as a Second Language, Mathematics, Computer Science, Economics. Combined Science, Accounting and Foreign Language French. He received the International Certificate of Education (ICE) Award for his performance.

Samarth P Pujari Samarth Pramod Pujari has scored A* in First Language English, Mathematics, Economics. Combined Science, Business Studies. He has also received the International Certificate of Education (ICE) Award for his stupendous performance.

Maserati MSG Racing enters new era in Mexico

Maserati MSG Racing accelerated into a new era for Formula E at the Mexico City E-Prix, with the team narrowly missing out on the top 10 at the Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez.

Facing the dawn of Gen3, drivers Edoardo Mortara and Maximilian Günther gained invaluable insight during the Season 9 opener and showed promising initial pace following an encouraging pre-season test.

A challenging qualifying session, which saw both drivers fall short of the Duel stages, left the race was quickly paused when a collision for Robin Frijns brought out the Safety Car.

Action was resumed on lap five but was again halted one lap later when Jaguar’s Sam Bird stopped on track with a technical failure. The field took to green flag running again on lap nine.



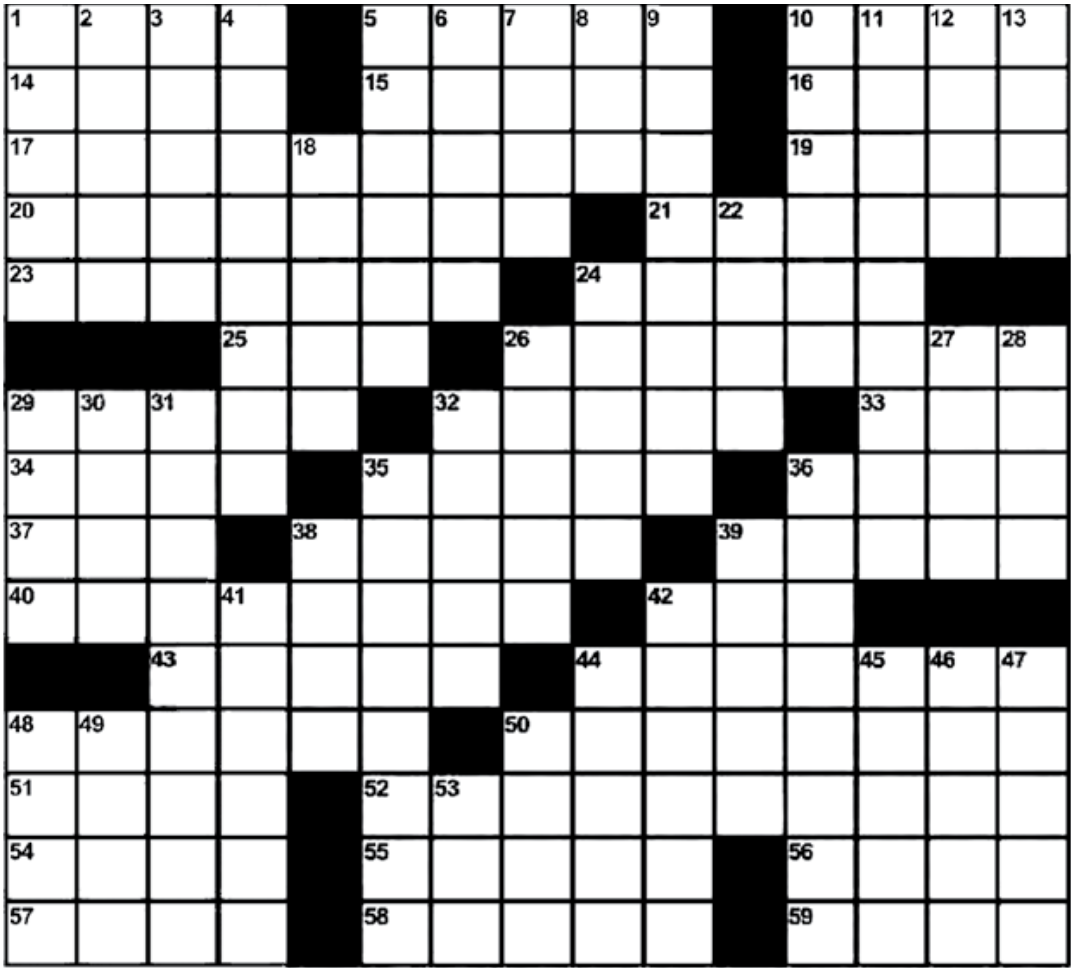
Edo and Max overtook a penalised Dan Ticktum during the restart, while the latter also passed Rast, who activated Attack Mode, for 15th. On lap 18, an unfortunate spin and collision caused by a snap of understeer forced Edo to retire, leaving Max as the team’s sole runner for the

remainder of the race. With a late Attack Mode activation, the German pilot made good progress to threaten for points in the closing laps and overtook DS Penske’s Jean-Eric Vergne on the final tour to finish 11th.

Formula E’s ninth season will continue on January 27 and 28, with a double-header event on the Riyadh Street Circuit in the Unesco Heritage Site of Diriyah. “It was a difficult day but in

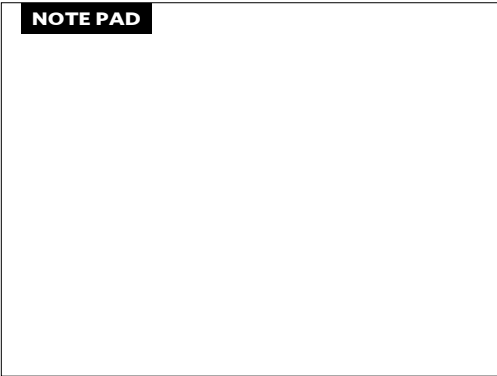
motorsport, you learn the most from your bad days - not your good ones. A poor qualifying put us on the back foot, but in the race, we were able to come back strong, with Max fighting from 17th to 11th and finishing just outside the points. Edo was showing really strong pace during the race, and his incident in Turn One was unfortunate,” said James Rossiter, Team Principal of Maserati MSG Racing. “It’s a shame as his pace was great. We need to process from this weekend so that we can be in a better position for the next race in Diriyah.” Edoardo Mortara, Driver, said, “This weekend wasn’t our best. After the pace we had in Valencia, I found it difficult to find a good rhythm in the car, especially over one lap. We will examine our data closely, understand what happened and come back for Diriyah.”

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) "Little Women" woman
 - 5) Rabbits' relatives
 - 10) Irving Bacheller's "Holden"
 - 14) Song for a diva
 - 15) Japan's "City of Water"
 - 16) Herr's wife
 - 17) CBS reality show
 - 19) Like some inaccurate watches
 - 20) Reaches a goal
 - 21) Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, e.g.
 - 23) Venomous snake
 - 24) Saturn features
 - 25) Former Mideast grp.
 - 26) Sweet snack
 - 29) Cornered, as a hunted animal
 - 32) Billionaire Bill
 - 33) Chicken_ king
 - 34) Billy the "Piano Man"
 - 35) Smokes meat
 - 36) Quick cut
 - 37) Not fore
 - 38) Drops, as pounds
 - 39) West Point student
 - 40) Showing no mercy
 - 42) La Brea _ Pits
 - 43) Word in a letter closing
 - 44) Big name in electricity
 - 48) Legacy maker
 - 50) Droning, as a voice
 - 51)_ off (switch choice)
 - 52) Homer king
 - 54) Commotions of Shakespearean proportions?
 - 55) "Can_ Witness" (Marvin Gaye hit)
 - 56) Horror film effects
 - 57) Vatican VIP
 - 58) Styles
 - 59) Greek war god
 - DOWN**
 - 1) Children's book elephant
 - 2) Writer Jong
 - 3) Too small
 - 4) Customary
 - 5) Thirty-first president
 - 6) Michaelmas daisy
 - 7) Part of a cheerleader's routine
 - 8) Barely manage (with "out")
 - 9) Canned fish
 - 10) Protest dummy
 - 11) Parade favorite
 - 12) One of the coasts
 - 13) Filberts, e.g.
 - 18) Type of race
 - 22) Justifiers of means
 - 24) Is important
 - 26) Greeting or playing items
 - 27) "That's_, and you know it!"
 - 28) Spellbound
 - 29) Partially open
 - 30) Protein source for vegetarians
 - 31) Classic cartoon character
 - 32) Surmise
 - 35) Second order of angels
 - 36) Site of a pivotal 1777 battle
 - 38) Speak thickly
 - 39) Imitation chocolate
 - 41) Rough, as a voice
 - 42) Tucker and Roberts
 - 44) Loud, in music
 - 45) Word with "blood" or "organ"
 - 46) "The Giant" of wrestling

- fame
- 47) Toady's responses
- 48) Type of opera
- 49) Useful word-processing feature for newbies
- 50) Old TV's talking horse
- 53) Gettysburg Address word



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Difficult situations and touchy conversations are always made easier when you are frank and open about how you feel. Facts and figures are indisputable, but feelings can be easily modified, and this isn't a good thing. Don't change how you express yourself out of fear that you'll trigger a bad response. Like it or not, there's no point in saying anything unless you say the truth. You'll never be able to make real progress any other way.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
If you're hungry for fun, you're certainly going to get a ton today as long as you keep smiling! Having a positive attitude will attract positive people to you and make your name the first one on everyone's lips when they're in search of a partner in (fun) crime. No one wants to try to cheer someone up. They would rather just join in on the good time with whoever is smiling the brightest smile. Keep that in mind when you walk into a room of strangers.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
You're feeling bright and jovial inside, and it's definitely showing on the outside today. Confidence is sexy, and yours is catching more than one person's eye. A lot more attention will be paid to you from a multitude of different sources than you're used to. Are you ready for it? When social invitations come flooding your way, you need to play it cool and not take the first one that comes along. Weigh your options. Hold out for better ones.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In July 2009, why did Russian physicists begin trying to synthesize Ununseptium?
A. The Ununseptium mines are running out of ore
B. It was an undiscovered chemical element
C. It is a cheap chemical that can be used to cure AIDS
D. A proposed trade embargo by China

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Being completely focused on what you want will help you get one step closer to getting it today, so avoid distractions. This isn't the time to go off and party with friends or sleep in all day, even though you might really need the extra rest. You have to buckle down! Be careful of others who say that you're wasting your time. They don't know what you know, which is that the more energy you put into something, the more reward you will get out of it.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Are you struggling to decide whether to attend an upcoming family event or obligation? Your family is important, but you know that it can cause you equal amounts of suffering and joy. Find out who's on the guest list as soon as you can, and make your judgment based on that. If there are going to be people there who you haven't seen in ages, you should make a special effort to go and keep those ties alive. They are more valuable than you realize.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
The long, rough road you've been traveling down is going to get a lot smoother today. The view is improving as well. A new person in your life is looking at you with a great deal of appreciation in their eyes, and there's a strong undercurrent of positive energy whenever they're near. You are free to roam on your own, but do you really want to? A traveling companion is such a nice idea, and it's one you should try on for size for the next few days.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You're finally starting to connect with someone new on a much deeper level. This is the start of something very exciting. Today, you have to do all you can to build on that momentum! Make sure you have at least one conversation with this person just to keep that connection alive and well. An email will do the trick, so don't worry about trying to track them down on the phone or in person. Just touching base will remind them of your place in their life.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Today, take time to figure out what your "must haves" are in a relationship and then convey them to your partner. You need to ask for what you're missing, and if you're told that they can't give it to you, then you know what you have to do. Balancing your desires with the desires of important people in your life is a nearly impossible task. When push comes to shove, you have to put yourself first. Who knows? They might be doing the same thing. And if so, then it's all for the best.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
The similarities you share with your close friends are getting so intense that you're starting to feel like you're part of a set of triplets! Before you lose all sense of your own identity (or worse: that new cutie doesn't know who you really are), step away from the group and make your own mark on the world today. Wearing matching outfits, constant messaging, and being attached at the hip is fine every now and then, but today you need to be your own person!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Be very mindful of other people today, and they'll reward your selflessness with a life-changing piece of information. Put yourself in the service of someone who can't do everything they need to do today, an elderly friend or relative, for example. What they need you to do is a nearly effortless task for you, but for them it's almost insurmountable. In exchange for your service, you'll receive a wonderful sense of usefulness as well as warm gratitude from someone who likes you even more now.

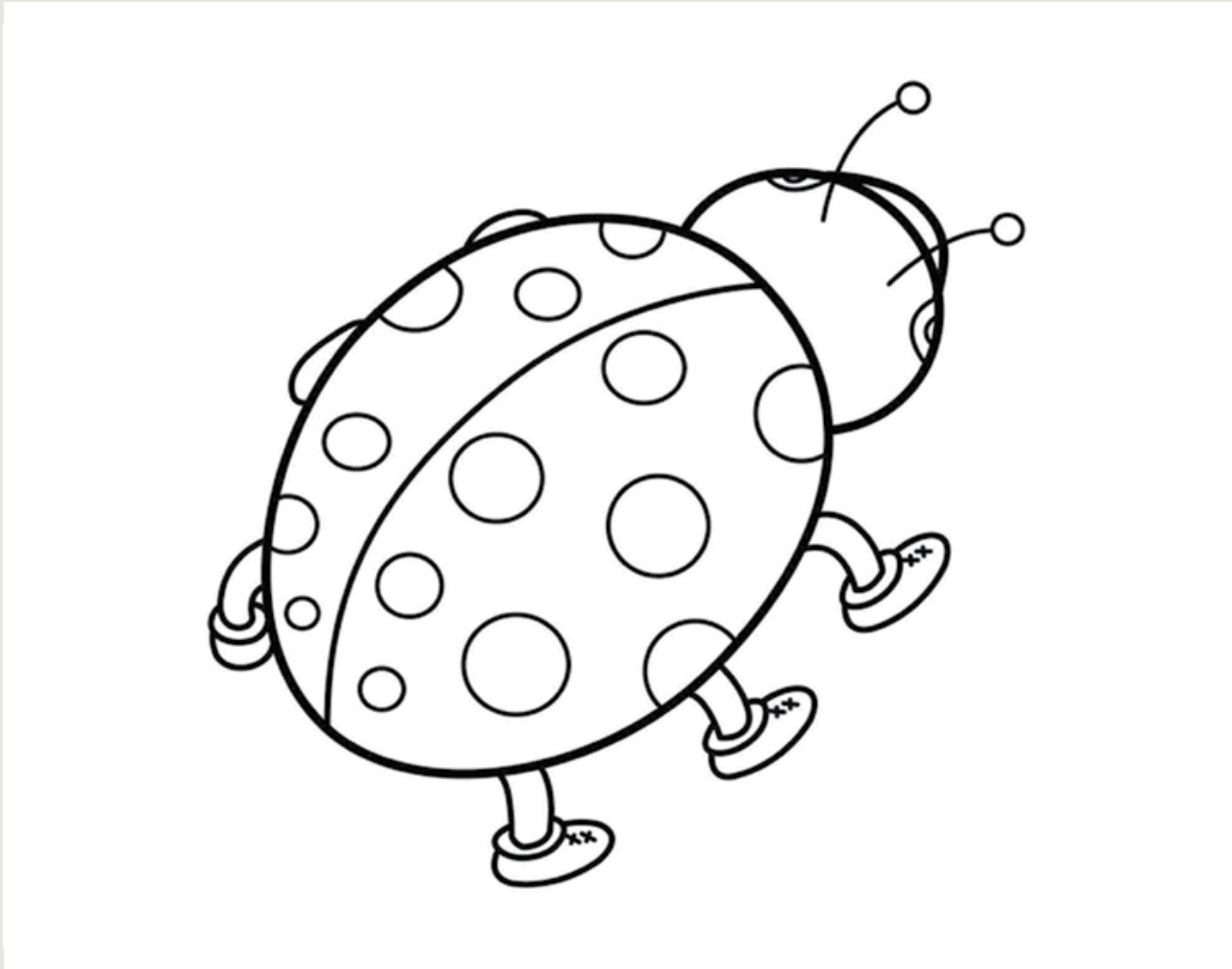
SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
You've seen enough fake people in your day to know one when you see one, so when someone brags about things that sound too good to be true today, trust your instincts. They aren't someone you can put a lot of faith in. The people you know you can trust, like your friends and family, add a nice energy to your day. A best buddy, sibling, or other relative contacts you with a short and sweet message. It seems like someone is thinking of you and sending you some love! Be sure to send some back.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
There's a big difference between someone who lives their life based on solid morals and someone whose self-righteous attitude guides them through their life. You're a person who tries hard to do the right thing, so don't pay attention when someone who thinks they're better than you looks down or passes judgment. The fact is you don't need to impress someone whose views on the world and life are so narrow. Only concern yourself with how the people you respect feel.

01. The Guarani Aquifer lies under Paraguay, Brazil, and what other country or countries?
A. Venezuela, Guyana and Suriname
B. Bolivia and Peru
C. Colombia
D. Argentina and Uruguay

Answers: 1. B 2. D 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

F	T	A	E
F	Y	E	S
E	A	N	S
I	S	B	D

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

Germany says allies can start training Ukrainians on tanks



Germany's Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (right) and NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg give a joint press conference following talks at the Defence Ministry in Berlin on Tuesday (AFP)

Berlin, Germany - Germany's defence minister said on Tuesday that allies could start training Ukrainian forces to use Leopard tanks, as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg predicted that a decision on their delivery

would be made 'soon'.

Germany has been under intense international pressure in recent weeks to allow the export of powerful German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine to help it repel Russia's invasion.

Berlin has so far declined to give permission despite a growing clamour from many of its allies. But Defence Minister Boris Pistorius indicated on Tuesday that a decision could be imminent, revealing that he had 'ex-

pressly encouraged partner countries that have Leopard tanks that are ready for deployment to train Ukrainian forces on these tanks'.

"I expect a decision to be made shortly," he added ahead

of a meeting with Stoltenberg in Berlin.

Stoltenberg welcomed the 'clear message' from the minister, 'because after a decision has been taken on the delivery on battle tanks, it will take some

time to... make them ready' and to train Ukrainian soldiers to use them.

He added that he expected a decision 'soon'.

"We must provide heavier and more advanced systems to Ukraine, and we must do it faster," Stoltenberg said.

Moscow has shown no signs of changing course in its invasion, he added.

We must provide heavier and more advanced systems to Ukraine, and we must do it faster

JENS STOLTENBERG

"We have no indication that President (Vladimir) Putin has changed his goals... The only way to lasting peace is to make it clear to Putin that he will not win on the battlefield," he said.

Pistorius had emphasised earlier that Berlin was not opposed to Leopard deliveries but had simply not made a decision yet.

"We are supporting Ukraine

not to lose this war, to win it against Russia," he said in an interview with the broadcaster ZDF.

"And to that end, Germany is doing more than practically any other ally except the US."

Asked when Germany was planning to make a decision on Leopard tanks, Pistorius said it was not up to him.

"This decision will be made in the chancellery," he said.

He also defended Chancellor Olaf Scholz against accusations of dithering on whether to approve the delivery of Leopards.

"Taking the lead does not mean blindly going ahead," he said. "And if the decision takes another day or two, then that's just the way it is."

Pistorius took office last week at a crucial time for the German defence ministry.

While scores of nations have pledged military hardware for Ukraine, Kyiv is clamouring for the more powerful Leopard tanks, seen as key to punching through enemy lines.

The tanks are used by several EU nations but these countries require Berlin's permission to send the German-made armaments on to Ukraine under Germany's war weapons control act. AFP

Thai police seize 1.1 tonnes of crystal meth in under a week

Bangkok, Thailand - Thai police seized 1.1 tonnes of crystal methamphetamine in less than a week, officers said on Tuesday, as the kingdom cracks down on smuggling that has surged since the country's borders reopened.

The haul comes after a spike in clashes between police and smugglers in the kingdom's remote northern hinterlands, long a hub for the trade in illegal narcotics.

Following a tip-off, police arrested 10 Thai nationals in a series of raids in the north and south of the kingdom.

"Some of these drugs were kept for a period of time before being transported to the

southernmost provinces, and they were supposed to be shipped to other countries later," said Police General Chinnapat Sarasin, Deputy National Police Chief.

He said Thailand was 'surrounded by drugs manufacturing hotspots', but that the COVID pandemic had prevented smugglers from moving their wares.

"Now that the country has been reopened, the pent-up products are just being shipped in non-stop," he said.

Police said in a statement that a transnational drugs gang was behind the illicit trade.

AFP



Finland to consider joining NATO sans Sweden

Helsinki, Finland - Finland said for the first time on Tuesday that it had to consider joining NATO without Sweden, whose bid appeared to grind to a halt as Ankara blasted Stockholm over anti-Turkey protests.

Finland - which shares a 1,300km (800-mile) border with Russia - and Sweden applied to join NATO last year after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, ending decades-long policies of military non-alignment.

"We have to assess the situation, whether something has happened that in the longer term would prevent Sweden from going ahead," Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto told broadcaster Yle.

He added however that it was 'too early to take a position on that now' and that a joint application remained the 'first option'.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom told media on Tuesday that he was 'in contact with Finland to find out what this really means'.

Haavisto later clarified his comments at a press conference, saying he did not want to



Finland's Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto arrives to hold a news conference at the Parliament Building in Helsinki, Finland on Tuesday (AFP)

'speculate' on Finland joining alone 'as both countries seem to be making progress', and emphasising their commitment to a joint application.

But 'of course, somewhere in the back of our minds, we are thinking about different worlds where some countries would be

permanently barred from membership', he said.

The Danish-Swedish far-right politician Rasmus Paludan set fire to a copy of the Q'uran on Saturday in front of Turkey's embassy in the Swedish capital, angering Ankara and Muslim countries around the world.

"Sweden should not expect support from us for NATO," Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday.

"It is clear that those who caused such a disgrace in front of our country's embassy can no longer expect any benevolence from us regarding their application for NATO membership," Erdogan said.

Swedish leaders have roundly condemned the Q'uran burning but defended their country's broad definition of free speech.

The incident came just weeks after a support group for armed Kurdish groups in Syria, the Rojava Committee, hung an effigy of Erdogan by the ankles in front of Stockholm City Hall, sparking outrage in Ankara.

Haavisto said the anti-Turkey protests had 'clearly put a brake on the progress' of the applications by Finland and Sweden to join the trans-Atlantic military alliance.

"My own assessment is that there will be a delay, which will certainly last until the Turkish elections in mid-May," Haavisto said.

'Plan B' out in the open

Turkey has indicated in recent months that it has no major objections to Finland's entry into NATO.

Helsinki had refused until now to speculate on the option of joining without Sweden, emphasising the benefits of joint membership with its close neighbour.

But 'frustration has grown in various corners of Helsinki', and 'for the first time it was said out loud that there are other possibilities', Matti Pesu, a researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, told AFP.

'There has been a change' in the Finnish position, he said. "These Plan Bs are being said out loud."

Haavisto also accused the protesters of 'playing with the security of Finland and Sweden', with actions that 'are clearly intended to provoke Turkey'.

"We are on a very dangerous path because the protests are clearly delaying Turkey's willingness and ability to get this matter through parliament," he said.

AFP

Seven dead in new California shooting

Half Moon Bay, US - A suspected gunman was in custody on Monday over the killing of seven people in a rural community in northern California, just two days after a mass shooting at a Lunar New Year celebration near Los Angeles.

The latest bloodshed occurred at two farms around Half Moon Bay, a coastal community south of San Francisco.

San Mateo County Sheriff Christina Corpus said seven people were killed and one wounded in the twin shootings, and that a 67-year-old Half Moon Bay resident named Chunli Zhao had been taken into custody.

Reports said the dead were Chinese farmworkers, and that Zhao had worked at one of the

farms. Corpus said deputies had been dispatched to two nurseries around Half Moon Bay, a rural spot known for surfing contests and a pumpkin festival, around mid-afternoon on Monday.

Four people were dead at one of them and one was critically wounded, while three more fatally wounded victims were found at a second location.

Corpus said children were present at one of the sites.

"It was in the afternoon when kids were out of school and for children to witness it is unspeakable," she said.

Corpus said Zhou then drove to a sheriff's substation in Half Moon Bay, where ABC7 crews captured dramatic footage of him being pulled to the ground



People attend a candle light vigil for victims of a mass shooting in Monterey Park, California on Monday (AFP)

by armed officers.

"Zhao was taken into custody without incident and a semi-automatic handgun was located in

his vehicle," Corpus said.

At the second shooting location, a short distance from the mushroom farm where four peo-

ple were killed, sheriff's deputies' cars packed a roadside business plaza, home to shops offering party rentals, landscaping supplies and other services.

As the new tragedy unfolded, detectives in southern California were still probing what drove an elderly Asian man to shoot dead 11 people gathered for Lunar New Year at a suburban dance hall on Saturday night - before taking his own life as police closed in.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said Huu Can Tran, who had been arrested in 1994 for unlawful possession of a firearm, fired 42 rounds in the attack in Monterey Park.

"What drove a madman to do this?" he said.

AFP

Several top Ukraine officials quit amid corruption claims

Kyiv, Ukraine - Several senior Ukrainian officials announced their resignations on Tuesday as the defence ministry was shaken by accusations of food procurement fraud, in the country's largest corruption scandal since the start of Russia's invasion.

Ukraine has a history of endemic corruption, including among the political elite, but efforts to stamp out graft have been overshadowed by Moscow's full-scale war that began in February.

Kyiv's Western allies, which have allocated billions of dollars in financial and military support, have been pushing for

anti-corruption reforms for years, sometimes as a precondition for aid.

Ukraine's deputy defence minister Vyacheslav Shapovalov, the deputy head of the presidential administration Kyrilo Tymoshenko and deputy prosecutor general Oleksiy Symonenko were among the officials who stood down.

The defence ministry announced the resignation of Shapovalov, who was in charge of the army's logistical support, on the heels of accusations it was signing food contracts at inflated prices.

AFP

Beirut blast: Probe aims at justice officials

The judge charged the prosecutor general, 7 others with probable intent to murder and other crimes

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon's campaigning judge Tarek Bitar, who is investigating the deadly 2020 Beirut port blast, charged the prosecutor general and seven others with probable intent to murder and other crimes, a judicial official said on Tuesday.

The prosecution service, however, quickly pushed back, rejecting the resumption of the probe that led to the indictments of its most senior figure, Ghassan Oueidat, and the others, also accused of arson and sabotage.

One of history's biggest non-nuclear explosions destroyed most of Beirut port and surrounding areas on August 4, 2020, killing more than 215 people and injuring over 6,500.

Authorities said the mega-explosion was caused by a fire in a portside warehouse where a vast stockpile of the industrial chemical ammonium nitrate had been haphazardly stored for years.

Relatives of the dead have been holding monthly vigils, seeking justice and accountability over the disaster which they blame on the crisis-torn country's entrenched ruling class which is widely deemed inept and corrupt.

A US State Department



This file photo shows a wounded man at the scene of the massive explosion that hit Beirut's port in the Lebanese capital on August 4, 2020 (AFP)

spokesperson said in a tweet on Tuesday that 'we support and urge Lebanese authorities to complete a swift and transparent investigation into the horrific explosion at the Port of Beirut'.

Bitar's probe has met with strong opposition from government figures and the powerful Shiite Muslim Hezbollah movement, which has accused him of political bias.

The judge was forced to suspend his probe for more than a year after a barrage of lawsuits, mainly from politicians he had summoned on charges of negligence. 'Port investigation: Tarek Bitar has gone mad,' ran the headline of the pro-Hezbollah daily *Al-Akhbar*, which also accused him of acting 'on the basis of American orders and with European judicial support'.

Bitar last week met with two French magistrates, who came to Beirut as part of the country's own investigation into the explosion that killed and injured French nationals.

Resuming probe

Bitar had decided on Monday, to widespread surprise, to resume his probe into the disaster, de-

spite the strong political pressure against him. Reopening the case after a 13-month suspension, Bitar charged an initial eight suspects, including General Security head Abbas Ibrahim and State Security agency chief Tony Saliba, and released five others.

In total, Bitar plans to question 13 suspects next month, including five officials whom Bitar indicted earlier - among them ex-prime minister Hassan Diab and former ministers.

According to the judicial official, who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity, Oueidat had in 2019 overseen a security services investigation into cracks in the warehouse where the ammonium nitrate was stored.

Lebanese state institutions have been reluctant to cooperate with the probe, which began the same month as the explosion.

In February 2021, Bitar's predecessor as lead judge was removed from the case after he had charged several high-level politicians. The interior ministry has also failed to execute arrest warrants issued by Bitar, further undermining his quest for accountability.

AFP

France repatriates more women, children from Syrian militant camp

Paris, France - France on Tuesday repatriated 15 women and 32 children held in a prison camp for suspected militants in Syria, the foreign ministry said, in the third major return of French citizens from the country.

Rights groups have been pressing for years for France to take back the wives and children of alleged Islamic State group fighters held in the camps, since the militant movement was ousted from its self-declared 'caliphate' in 2019.

But the government refused a blanket repatriation, saying the return of potentially radicalised IS family members would pose security risks in France, which has seen a wave of militant attacks since 2015.

Instead it said individual cases would be examined, leading to the first group repatriation of 16 mothers and 35 children from Syria in July 2022, and a further 55 in October. The women and children returned to France on Tuesday were at the Roj camp in northeast Syria under Kurdish administration, near the Turkish and Iraqi borders.

They were placed with social services and the mothers will be brought before judicial authorities, the foreign ministry said, thanking 'the local administration in northeastern Syria for its cooperation, which made this operation possible'. Lawyer Marie Dose, who represents relatives of those held in several camps in Syria, has said 150 French women and children were living in these camps before Tuesday's transfer. Contacted by AFP, the French foreign ministry declined to say how many more women or children might be returned.

'Must be repatriated'

Tuesday's operation came after the United Nations Committee Against Torture last week said that in refusing to repatriate women and minors

in Syria, France was violating the UN Convention against torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.

In a version of a ruling dated November 16, 2022, shared by Dose, the committee said that 'not taking all reasonable measures in its power to repatriate the plaintiffs' relatives would constitute a violation by a member state of articles two and 16 of the convention'. French families have been held in the Roj and Al-Hol camps in Kurdish-held territory.

Rights groups have denounced harrowing sanitary conditions, malnutrition and overcrowding at the Al-Hol camp in particular.

There are still some orphans and several mothers who are asking to be repatriated with their children, including a woman with a disability

MARIE DOSE

Dose said the latest arrivals showed that 'France is, and always has been, able to repatriate children and their mothers'.

"There are still some orphans and several mothers who are asking to be repatriated with their children, including a woman with a disability," she said, without providing a number.

Martin Pradel, another lawyer representing the relatives of French children in the camps, said 'too many children' had still not been returned, 'despite their country being condemned' for abandoning them.

"It's snowing in Syria. Some children are sleeping in tents," he said. 'They must urgently all be repatriated.'

AFP

UN Palestinian refugee agency seeks \$1.6bn for work in 2023

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, appealed on Tuesday for US\$1.6bn for its work in 2023, as it struggles to overcome chronic budget shortfalls.

UNRWA - which provides services to nearly six million Palestinians registered in the Palestinian territories, including Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria - warned that 'compounding challenges' had placed it under 'immense strain'.

The agency, which counts nearly 30,000 staff - most of them Palestinian refugees - runs more than 700 schools that offer education to half a million children, and provides health, sanitation and social services, including food and cash assistance.

Out of the US\$1.6bn requested, UNRWA said US\$848mn was needed for such core services. It said another US\$781.6mn was needed for emergency operations.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said the agency played 'an indispensable role' for millions of Palestinian refugees.



UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini attends a press conference in Geneva on Tuesday (AFP)

We cannot be and should not be always scrambling to bring in funds to cover our contribution to human rights and stability

PHILIPPE LAZZARINI

"We work to maintain the delivery of basic services in an incredibly difficult financial and political context," he said in a statement.

The agency warned that most Palestinian refugees now live below the poverty line and a growing number are dependent

on UNRWA for assistance, sometimes for their 'sheer survival'. Lazzarini said he had just returned from a trip to Syria where he had 'witnessed firsthand indescribable suffering and despair'.

That situation, he said, was 'sadly mirrored in other places

like Lebanon and Gaza where Palestine refugees are hitting rock bottom'.

"Many told me that all they asked for was a life of dignity; that's not much to ask for."

UNRWA has long faced chronic budget shortfalls, which worsened dramatically in 2018 when former US president Donald Trump cut support to the agency.

His administration branded UNRWA 'irredeemably flawed', siding with Israeli criticisms of the agency founded in 1949, a year after Israel's creation.

US President Joe Biden's administration has fully restored support but UNRWA has said it is still struggling.

Last year, UNRWA only raised nearly US\$1.2bn of the US\$1.6bn it had appealed for, Lazzarini said.

"We cannot and should not be always scrambling to bring in funds to cover our contribution to human rights and stability," Lazzarini said, stressing the need for 'a more sustainable model of funding... a predictable, long-term and regular source of funding.'

AFP

Hundreds of Israeli workers protest judicial reform plan

Tel Aviv, Israel - Hundreds of Israeli high-tech workers protested against the government's judicial reform plan on Tuesday, claiming the controversial measures will hurt the flourishing sector by undermining the rule of law.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government insists the reforms are essential to correct an imbalance that has given judges too much power over elected officials.

But critics, including tens of thousands of protesters who turned out in Tel Aviv and other cities on Saturday, say the plan threatens Israeli democracy, raising specific alarm over measures that would allow parliament to overrule Supreme Court decisions through a majority vote.

Israel's crucial tech sector, which expanded substantially during Netanyahu's previous tenure in office from 2009 to 2021, accounted for 54 per cent of Israeli exports in 2021, or US\$67bn, according to the most recent figures from the Israeli Innovation Authority.

AFP

Iran vows response to fresh sanctions by EU, UK

Tehran, Iran - Iran vowed on Tuesday it will respond to new sanctions imposed by the European Union and Britain over its handling of months-long protests triggered by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini.

The EU and Britain on Monday slapped another round of sanctions on Iran, which has been rocked by protests since the September 16 death of Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd who had been arrested for allegedly breaching the country's strict dress code for women.

Iran's warning of tit-for-tat measures comes after relations deteriorated sharply, with the EU and Britain ramping up sanctions over the authorities' response to the protests.

"The move by the European Union and the British regime is a sign of their mental inability to properly understand the realities of Iran, as well as their confusion

regarding the authority of the Islamic republic," foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said.

He said Iran 'reserves the right to reciprocate against such failed policies and will soon announce the list of new sanctions against human rights violators and promoters of terrorism in the European Union and England'. The EU imposed its fourth round of sanctions against Iran since the protests started, placing 37 more officials and entities on an asset freeze and visa ban blacklist.

The bloc targeted the minister of sports and the command of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the ideological arm of Iran's military, in 12 regions of the country as well as lawmakers and senior state media officials.

Britain on the same day sanctioned five more Iranian officials, broadening its blacklist to 50 in-



Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani (AFP)

dividuals and organisations it considers to be involved in dealing with the protests.

Also on Monday, the United States added 10 Iranian individuals and one entity - most of them linked to the Revolutionary Guards - to its list of human rights-related sanctions.

"This is the ninth round of

designations targeting actors responsible for the crackdown on peaceful demonstrators since the nationwide protests began in 2022," the US State Department said in a statement.

The Iranian foreign ministry did not respond to the new US measures in its statement issued on Tuesday.

Targeting IRGC

Iran has previously responded to EU and UK sanctions by placing persons and entities from both on its own sanctions list, banning them from entry to Iran and freezing any assets they may have.

The EU has already imposed sanctions on more than 60 Iranian officials and entities over the crackdown on protesters, including the 'morality police', state media and individual IRGC commanders.

But the 27-nation bloc has so far stopped short of blacklisting the IRGC as a whole despite calls from Germany and the Netherlands to do so.

Iran has warned the bloc against the move and EU officials are wary it could kill off stalled talks they have been mediating on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

AFP

INDIA

Rahul Gandhi firefights surgical strike row

The Congress MP distanced himself from Digvijaya’s remarks over authenticity of the strikes

Jammu and Kashmir, India - Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday distanced himself from senior party leader Digvijaya Singh’s remarks over the authenticity of surgical strikes in the aftermath of the 2019 Pulwama attack and said the army doesn’t need to provide any proof as he combated the fallout of Singh’s remarks calling them ‘outlying’ or views held by the fringe.

This comes after Digvijaya Singh said there is no proof of the 2019 surgical strike against Pakistan, while the Centre claims to have carried out the attack. Disagreeing with Singh’s remarks, Rahul Gandhi said that those were Singh’s personal views. The Wayanad MP, who is



Bollywood actress Urmila Matondkar joins Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the party’s Bharat Jodo Yatra, in Jammu on Tuesday (ANI)

currently in Jammu for the Bharat Jodo Yatra, said that Digvijaya’s views are outlying.

“We don’t appreciate Digvijaya Singh’s personal views. His views are outlying views. We are absolutely clear that the Armed Forces do their job exceptionally well and they do not need to provide proof of that,” said Rahul Gandhi during a press conference.

He also spoke about his meeting with a delegation of Kashmiri Pandits, who have complained that they have been used for political gains.

“I met a delegation of Kashmiri Pandits yesterday. They have expressed that they feel they are being disrespected and used for political gains. They requested me to raise their issues in parliament,” said the Congress MP.

When asked about the banned BBC documentary, he said that the truth always comes out and no amount of banning can suppress the truth from coming out.

“The truth always comes out. No amount of banning the press and using institutions like ED and CBI against people can suppress the truth from coming out,” said Gandhi.

Earlier during the yatra an agitated Jairam Ramesh lashed out at the media on Tuesday, saying all that needed to be said about Digvijaya’s comment have already been done. The questions should now be directed at the Prime Minister.

A day after Singh stirred up the hornet’s nest and the Congress distanced itself from the leader, party MP in charge of Communication, Ramesh told the media while walking for the Bharat Jodo Yatra in Jammu and Kashmir that all queries related to the surgical strike uproar have been answered by his party and the media needs to aim its questions at Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Digvijaya Singh trying to put an end to the row also said: “I have got the greatest regard for the Defence forces” as the leaders marched on along with other padayatris.

“Congress party has said whatever it wanted to. I tweeted yesterday regarding the same. I do not want to say anything other than this,” he said.

Taking to Twitter, Ramesh claimed that even the UPA government had carried out surgical strikes.

“The views expressed by senior leader Digvijaya Singh are his own and do not reflect the position of Congress. Surgical strikes were carried out before in 2014 by the UPA government. Congress has supported and will continue to support all military actions that are in the national interest.”

ANI

BBC series on PM Modi: Top university bans screening

New Delhi, India - A top Indian university has banned the screening of a BBC documentary about Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s role during deadly 2002 sectarian riots, after his government attempted to block its spread online.

The broadcaster’s programme alleges that the Hindu nationalist Modi, premier of Gujarat state at the time, ordered police to turn a blind eye to an orgy of violence there that left at least 1,000 people dead, most of them minority Muslims.

Students at the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi had planned to screen the documentary on Tuesday, defying efforts by Indian authorities to restrict its showing.

But a memo from the university’s registrar late on Mon-

Students at the Jawaharlal Nehru University had planned to screen the documentary. But a memo from the registrar ordered the students to cancel the event

day ordered students to cancel the event and warned it would take ‘strict disciplinary action’ if its edict was disobeyed.

“Such an unauthorised activity may disturb peace and harmony of the university campus,” it said.

Modi’s government has been accused of stifling dissent by free-speech activists and opposition leaders for

years. On Saturday it used emergency powers under India’s controversial information technology laws to block the documentary from being shared on social media.

Government adviser Kanchan Gupta slammed the series as ‘hostile propaganda and anti-India garbage’ disguised as a documentary.

India’s order to social media platforms to block links to the documentary ‘flagrantly contradicts the country’s stated commitment to democratic ideals’, Beh Lih Yi of the Committee to Protect Journalists said in a statement on Monday.

The 2002 riots in Gujarat began after 59 Hindu pilgrims were killed in a fire on a train. Thirty-one Muslims were convicted of criminal conspiracy and murder over that incident.

AFP

‘Putting RAW, IB inputs by SC Collegium in public domain is a matter of concern’

New Delhi, India - Reacting to the Supreme Court’s decision to make public the RAW and Intelligence Bureau (IB) reports on the appointment of judges in the High Courts, Law and Justice Minister Kiren Rijiju on Tuesday said putting RAW and IB inputs in the public domain is a matter of serious concern.

While addressing a press conference on the awards for eCourts Projects, Kiren Rijiju expressed happiness regarding the good work done by the Department of Justice and the impact it has in dispensing justice to the people.

On recent comments made by Supreme Court regarding a delay in the appointments on the Collegium recommendations, the Law minister Kiren Rijiju said, “No one should make a comment on a judicial order. But, these are administrative orders and not judicial. I have seen some tweets that are making



Union Minister of Law and Justice Kiren Rijiju speaks during the award function for E-Courts projects in New Delhi on Tuesday (ANI)

comments about NJAC is contempt. The order of the bench is totally different and this is all administrative.”

During the media interaction, Law Minister also raised the issue of the pendency of cases and said, “the total pendency is 4 crore 90 lakh cases in the country. Pendency in cases im-

nology is a major solution. We are also considering Alternate Dispute Resolution and mediation,” said Rijiju.

Recently, the Supreme Court Collegium has resolved to reiterate its recommendation dated November 11, 2021, for the appointment of Saurabh Kirpal as a Judge of the Delhi High Court and stressed that it needs to be processed expeditiously.

Collegium mentioned the letter of the Law Minister dated April 1, 2021 which states that though homosexuality stands de-criminalised in India, nonetheless same-sex marriage still remains bereft of recognition either in codified statutory law or uncoded personal law in India and the candidate’s ‘ardent involvement and passionate attachment to the cause of gay rights’ would not rule out the possibility of bias and prejudice.

ANI

Power returns to Pakistan a day after massive outage

Islamabad, Pakistan - The national power grid was restored in Pakistan, the energy minister said on Tuesday, a day after a nationwide breakdown left most of the country’s 220mn people without electricity and caused tens of millions of dollars in industry losses.

The outage started around 7:30am (0230 GMT) on Monday, a failure linked to a cost-cutting measure as Pakistan grapples with an economic crisis.

Energy Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan said the grid was repaired at around 5:15am (0015 GMT) but load-shedding would continue over the next two days as coal and nuclear plants were brought back online.

“There is a need to invest in the energy sector, especially to improve the distribution system, which has long been neglected,” he told reporters in Islamabad.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed ‘sincere regrets for the inconvenience our citizens suf-



Pakistan’s Federal Minister for Energy, Khurram Dastgir Khan gives a press briefing following the nationwide power outage, in Islamabad on Tuesday (AFP)

fered’. An inquiry is under way and ‘responsibility will be fixed’, he said on Twitter.

Electricity returned to urban centres overnight, including the mega cities of Karachi and Lahore. Secretary general of the All Pakistan Textile Mills Association Shahid Sattar estimated losses of US\$70mn to the sector, Pakistan’s largest exporter and a crucial booster of foreign ex-

change reserves.

Around 90 per cent of factories were shut down on Monday, with natural gas supplies too ‘patchy’ to stand in, he said.

“Each time there is a power cut the mill has to be restarted from scratch, which takes up a lot of time and resources,” he told AFP.

“We can’t pick up from where we stopped. All that thread that’s in the middle of being dyed and treated, et cetera, cannot be used again. So we face massive losses that way.”

Khan pledged that industries would be guarded from the load-shedding anticipated in the coming days.

The economy is already hobbled by rampant inflation, a falling rupee and severely low foreign exchange reserves, with the power cut piling extra pressure on small businesses.

Water disruption

Pakistan’s power system is complex and precarious, and problems can quickly cascade.

Khan earlier said a variation in frequency on the national grid caused the initial breakdown, as power generation

units were turned on early Monday morning.

The units are temporarily switched off on winter nights to save fuel, he had told reporters.

Localised power cuts and load-shedding are daily occurrences in Pakistan, and hospitals, factories and government institutions are often kept running by private generators. But the machines are beyond the means of most citizens and small businesses.

In Karachi, hundreds of water pumps were also offline during the power cut, heaping more problems on the more than 15mn residents of Pakistan’s largest city.

Schools mostly continued either in the dark or using battery-powered lighting.

A similar breakdown in January 2021 affected the entire country, after a fault occurred in southern Pakistan, tripping the national transmission system.

AFP

‘Climate change boosts human trafficking risks’

Vienna, Austria - Evidence is emerging that climate-related disasters are becoming a cause of human trafficking as criminal gangs exploit a growing number of uprooted people, the UN said on Tuesday.

The continuing war in Ukraine is also another risk factor for increased human trafficking, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime said in a report. “Climate change is increasing vulnerability to trafficking.”

“While a systematic global analysis of the impact of climate change in trafficking in persons is missing, community level studies in different parts of the world point at weather induced disasters as root causes for trafficking in persons.”

AFP

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

TSITSIPAS IN SEMIFINAL

Greek third seed powers past Jiri Lehecka into Australian Open last four

Melbourne, Australia - Stefanos Tsitsipas blasted into a fourth Australian Open semi-final on Tuesday and a showdown with Karen Khachanov as he zeroes in on a maiden Grand Slam title.

The Greek third seed proved too powerful for unseeded Czech Jiri Lehecka on Rod Laver Arena, storming home 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4.

He will face the Russian 18th seed Khachanov for a place in his first Melbourne Park final, having crashed in the semis three times previously, including in the past two years.

Russia's Khachanov booked his place when American Sebastian Korda retired hurt with a wrist injury while trailing 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 3-0.

"It felt different this time from any other match and the most important thing in the end is that I found a solution," said Tsitsipas, who will become world number one should he win the title.

Novak Djokovic can also achieve the feat if he does the same.

"It was a very difficult three-setter, one of the most difficult so far in the competition," added Tsitsipas, 24.

"Jiri had a very good tournament, he's started playing very well recently. He's a great player.

"I had to deal with his groundstrokes, which were coming over the net much heavier and deeper, so that was a task where I really had to put my heart out there and give it my best," he added.

Lehecka, ranked 71, warned Tsitsipas before the match he wanted revenge after losing to him in the semi-finals at Rotterdam last year.

But the 21-year-old, who beat 11th seed Cameron Norrie and sixth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime en route to the last eight, was immediately under the gun.

Tsitsipas worked five break points on his opening service game and got over the line when the Czech smacked a backhand volley wide.

He consolidated for a 3-0 lead and with his strong first serve offering Lehecka few opportunities to strike back, coasted to the first set in 36 minutes, sealing it with an ace.

Tsitsipas saved five break points to hold in a crucial third game of the second set as Lehecka came alive and began applying pressure.

Both players dug in and it went with serve to a tiebreak, where the Greek kept his cool to take an early advantage that he never gave up.

In a close third set, Tsitsipas's second double fault of the night handed Lehecka three break points in game seven.

But he saved them all to hold, pumping the air in celebration.

With the bit between his teeth, the Greek star dialed up the pressure as Lehecka served to stay in the contest and a crosscourt backhand earned him a match point which he converted.

AFP

Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas celebrates after victory against Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka during their men's singles quarter-final match on Tuesday (AFP)

Rybakina's serving 'weapon' blasts her into Melbourne semi-final

Melbourne, Australia - Elena Rybakina is on course for a second Grand Slam title after crushing Jelena Ostapenko to reach the Australian Open semi-final on Tuesday with a brutal display of power-serving.

The Wimbledon champion sealed a 6-2, 6-4 triumph over the 2017 French Open winner with her 11th ace, her 190km per hour serve proving her most potent weapon.

The Moscow-born Kazakh has delivered 35 aces in reaching the final four, more than any other woman at Melbourne Park.

It was a category she also led when she won her Wimbledon crown last year.

Ominously for her semi-final opponent, Jessica Pegula or Victoria Azarenka, Rybakina said her serve is better now than at Wimbledon. "I would say that I always served big, but for sure when I started to work with my coach, we did a lot of changes on the



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina hits a return against Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko during their singles quarter-final match on Tuesday (AFP)

technique," she said after taking 1hr 19min on Rod Laver Arena to dismiss Latvia's Ostapenko. "I gained even more power. It's my weapon on the court and of course we are trying to work on

it. Always a lot to improve."

The 23-year-old Rybakina had declared 'she could beat anyone' after knocking out top seed Iga Swiatek in straight sets.

AFP

Karen Khachanov draws on US Open feat to make it to semi-final

Melbourne, Australia - Karen Khachanov harnessed the confidence he took from making the US Open semi-final to match the feat at the Australian Open on Tuesday, helped by Sebastian Korda retiring hurt.

Korda needed treatment on a wrist injury in the second set of their quarter-final before calling it quits when trailing 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 3-0 to the Russian 18th seed on Rod Laver Arena.

Khachanov's reward is a clash with either Greek third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas or unseeded Czech Jiri Lehecka, who play later, for a spot in Sunday's final.

Victory equals the 26-year-old Khachanov's best performance at a major after his semi-final run at last September's US Open, where he lost to Norway's Casper Ruud.

He said his deep run at Flushing Meadows helped immensely.



Russia's Karen Khachanov reacts on a point against USA's Sebastian Korda during their quarter-final match on Tuesday (AFP)

"I would say I always believed in myself, but there are always ups and downs and sometimes when you have this great result (at US Open), it just shows you what you're capable of," he said.

"And then you start to believe more and more. So this belief and selfconfidence, I think, appeared much stronger after the US Open.

"I just hope to continue that way and to grow as a person and as a sportsman."

The Olympic silver medallist, who has won four Tour-level titles, came into the match with far greater experience at this stage of a Grand Slam than the American Korda, having reached the last eight at all four majors.

In contrast, the 22-year-old Korda - attempting to emulate father Petr's 1998 title run - was in his first quarter-final.

AFP

Azarenka beats 'fears of failing' for first Melbourne semi in 10 years

Melbourne, Australia - Victoria Azarenka reached her first Australian Open semi-final since winning the title in 2013, then opened up on Tuesday about overcoming 'anxiety' and 'fears of failing' on court.

The Belarusian, who won back-to-back Australian Opens in 2012 and 2013, knocked out third seed Jessica Pegula 6-4, 6-1 on Tuesday.

The 24th seed outlasted her American opponent in a marathon 64-minute first set before running away with the second to set up a last-four encounter against Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina at Melbourne Park.

Asked about her battles with

nerves and anxiety, Azarenka detailed what she had been through in recent years and how it had held her back from winning another major.

"I don't think you recognise it right away. I think it builds up until you hit kind of a pretty bad spot where nothing kind of makes sense," she told reporters.

"You feel kind of lost. I was at the point where I couldn't find anything that I feel good about myself, not like even one sentence."

Asked what her biggest worries were, Azarenka gave a blunt answer. "Fears of failing is a big one. To not be able to do what I want to do," she said. "I've had panic attacks before."



Belarus' Victoria Azarenka hits a return against Jessica Pegula of the US during their match on Tuesday (AFP)

I'm pretty happy that the process that I'm going through makes me feel confident

VICTORIA AZARENKA

The Belarusian said she now has a process to cope when the nerves rear up, and she has cut a noticeably calmer figure at Melbourne Park this year. "I kind of tried to take it more simple. Kind of working through it," said the 33-year-old Azarenka.

"I'm pretty happy that the

process that I'm going through makes me feel confident about myself, happy about myself, and helps me to be more open, be more accepting, be compassionate. 'Compassionate' was a very hard word for me to understand."

Pegula was in her third Australian Open quarter-final and had never reached the semi-finals of a Slam in four previous attempts, failing to win a set in any of them.

It was a sorry statistic that was to be extended under the roof at Rod Laver Arena.

"Well, it hurts to beat her because I always want her to do well," said Azarenka, who is close friends with Pegula.

AFP

KANE AGAIN FOR SPURS

Spurs captain sinks Fulham to become the team’s joint record scorer

London, United Kingdom - Harry Kane moved level with Jimmy Greaves as Tottenham’s record scorer as his 266th goal for the club sealed a vital 1-0 win against Fulham on Monday.

England captain Kane netted on the stroke of half-time with a clinical strike from the edge of the penalty area at Craven Cottage.

Greaves’ Tottenham record had stood since 1970, but Kane’s first goal in his last three appearances gave him a share of the historic milestone.

“I was just trying to get myself into a position where I can get half a yard. I used the defender to bend it around him. It was a nice goal,” Kane said.

“I have been playing football long enough now to know where the goal is. It is just instinct.”

Kane could break Greaves’ record in Tottenham’s next match in the FA Cup fourth round at second tier Preston on Saturday.

It is only a matter of time before Kane takes sole possession of Tottenham’s most hallowed



Tottenham Hotspur’s scores against Fulham in their English Premier League match at Craven Cottage in London on Monday (AFP)

record.

That remarkable achievement would have seemed impossible during a difficult start to his career that featured several failed loan spells before he finally emerged as a star.

Greaves, who died aged 81 in 2021, is regarded as one of the most natural goal scorers in football history.

A member of England’s 1966 World Cup-winning squad, who netted 44 times for his country, Greaves is the highest scorer in English top-flight history with 357 goals.

For Kane to be alongside such a legendary player is a tribute to his predatory instincts and his perseverance.

The 29-year-old is now one

short of becoming the third player to net 200 Premier League goals, after Alan Shearer (260) and Wayne Rooney (208).

Kane also drew level with Rooney as England’s joint record goalscorer after bagging his 53rd international goal in the World Cup quarter-final defeat against France in December.

“We are talking about Harry Kane as a special player and special person. In this situation, you can see the human respect which is very important,” Tottenham manager Antonio Conte said. “The important thing is to have a good man because in difficulty, Kane will help you to overcome a difficult situation.”

Thanks to Kane’s 18th goal in

all competitions this season, fifth placed Tottenham closed the gap on fourth placed Manchester United to three points.

It was a much-needed result after successive defeats against Manchester City and Arsenal damaged Tottenham’s bid to qualify for next season’s Champions League via a top four finish.

Conte’s team had conceded 21 goals in their previous 10 league matches. So, while Kane rightly took the spotlight, Conte was just as pleased by his players’ defensive resilience.

“It was a big win. I had a good answer from my players. I asked them for solidity of the last season and the will and desire to fight and to be resilient,” Conte said.

Arsenal sign Poland defender Jakub Kiwior from Spezia

London, United Kingdom - Premier League leaders Arsenal signed Poland defender Jakub Kiwior from Italian side Spezia in a deal worth a reported £12 million (\$27 million) on Monday.

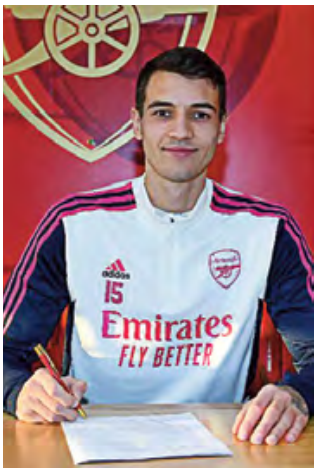
Kiwior agreed a “long-term contract” with the north Londoners, according to the club.

The 22-year-old, who featured for Poland at the World Cup in Qatar, was in the stands at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday to watch the Gunners’ 3-2 win against Manchester United.

Kiwior, who had a spell in Belgium with Anderlecht earlier in his career, moved to Spezia from MSK Zilina in 2021.

He made 43 appearances during his time with the Serie A club, catching the eye of Gunners boss Mikel Arteta.

“It’s great that Jakub is joining us. He’s a young versatile defender who has shown huge potential and qualities with Spezia in Serie A and also at interna-



Jakub Kiwior

tional level with Poland,” Arteta said.

“Jakub is a player who will give us strength and quality to our defensive unit. We welcome Jakub and his family to Arsenal and look forward to working with him.”

Arsenal sporting director Edu added: “We’re delighted to have completed the signing of Jakub Kiwior. He’s a young talent who

we’ve been monitoring for a while now.”

Man City sign Perrone

Manchester City signed promising Velez Sarsfield midfielder Maximo Perrone in a deal worth a reported £8 million (\$9.9 million) on Monday.

Argentina Under-20 international Perrone agreed a five-and-a-half-year contract with the Premier League champions.

The 20-year-old is currently playing at the South American Under-20 Championship in Colombia and will link up with City after the tournament ends.

He will train with Pep Guardiola’s first-team squad for the remainder of the season, but has been signed with an eye on the future and is not expected to be involved this term.

Perrone has made 33 appearances for Velez since his debut in March last year, scoring three goals.

Portugal’s former boss Santos named Poland coach

Warsaw, Poland - Fernando Santos, who was the Portuguese national team’s manager until last month, was on Tuesday named as Poland’s new coach.

“From today, I am Polish,” Santos declared at the official ceremony in Warsaw. “It is an honour to continue my work as a trainer here,” he added.

Santos, 68, succeeds Czeslaw Michniewicz, who was sacked last month following a last-16 appearance at the World Cup in Qatar. Poland finished second in their group, beating Saudi Arabia, drawing with Mexico and losing to eventual champions Argentina.

In the last 16 for the first time in 36 years, they went out after a tame 3-1 defeat at the hands of France. Lisbon-born Santos quit as Portugal coach in December, following the team’s shock World Cup quarter-final loss to Morocco.

Lampard sacked as boss of troubled Everton

London, United Kingdom - Frank Lampard was sacked as Everton manager on Monday after less than a year in charge at the struggling Premier League club.

Lampard was hired by Everton to replace Rafael Benitez in January 2022, but the former Chelsea boss leaves with the team languishing 19th in the table.

Everton fell to a damaging 2-0 defeat at relegation rivals West Ham on Saturday - a ninth loss in their past 12 Premier League matches which left them level on points with bottom club Southampton.

Everton owner Farhad Moshiri had previously offered public backing for Lampard.

But the tame surrender at West Ham proved the final straw for Moshiri, who was at the game to watch Everton for the first time in 14 months.



Frank Lampard

After several hours of reports that Lampard had been sacked, Everton finally confirmed the 44-year-old’s departure on Monday evening.

“Everton Football Club can confirm that Frank Lampard has left his post as senior men’s first team manager today,” a club statement said.

“Everyone at Everton would like to thank Frank and his coaching staff for their service during what has been a challenging 12 months.

“Frank and his team’s commitment and dedication have been exemplary throughout their time at the club, but recent results and the current league position meant this difficult decision had to be taken.

“We wish Frank and all his backroom team well for their future in the game. The club has started the process to secure a new manager and will provide updates on the ap-

The club has started the process to secure a new manager and will provide updates on the appointment in due course.

EVERTON

pointment in due course.”

Paul Tait and Leighton Baines will take training until a new manager is appointed, with Everton’s next game against Premier League leaders Arsenal on February 4.

Everton felt compelled to act over Lampard’s future as they fight to avoid playing outside the top flight for the first time since 1954.

Lampard arrived at Everton 12 months ago with the team languishing in 16th place and the former Chelsea and England midfielder initially looked a shrewd appointment, helping the Merseyside club avoid relegation.

Fan fury

Fuelled by fervent backing from their fans at Goodison Park, the Toffees beat the drop by winning three of their last six league matches, including a dramatic 3-2 success against Crystal Palace that preserved their top-tier status.

But Everton are now looking for their eighth permanent manager in less than seven years after Lampard failed to build on the momentum from that successful end to last term.

AFP

Ten-man Inter slip to defeat against Empoli

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan missed the chance to go second in Serie A when they slipped to a 1-0 defeat at home to Empoli on Monday.

Inter, who had won their last nine league games against Empoli, began the day in third but their hopes of climbing above city rivals AC Milan into second were hampered five minutes before half-time when Milan Skriniar was dismissed for a second yellow card.

The Slovak defender, who has been linked with a move to Paris Saint-Germain, was booked for obstruction in the 25th minute before being shown the red card for a nasty tackle.

The only goal came after 66 minutes when Nedim Bajrami provided the assist for 19-year-old Tommaso Baldanzi to fire



Empoli’s Tommaso Baldanzi celebrates after scoring against Inter in their Italian Serie A match in Milan on Monday (AFP)

home off his left foot for his third goal of the season.

Inter battled hard to retrieve the game with Simone Inzaghi throwing both Edin Dzeko and Romelu Lukaku into the fray.

They came close on several occasions and had a header rebound off the bar but less than a week after lifting the Italian Super Cup in style with a 3-0 win over AC Milan, Inter may have kissed

goodbye to the Scudetto.

Inter remain third, a point behind AC Milan who play at Lazio on Tuesday, and level on points with Roma.

Napoli are the runaway leaders, 12 points clear at the top.

In Monday’s other game Bologna were held to a 1-1 draw by bottom side Cremonese.

The visitors took the lead through a David Okereke penalty five minutes after the break. But Cremonese were denied their first win of the season when Vlad Chiriches scored an own goal five minutes later.

On Sunday, Juventus played out a thrilling 3-3 draw with Atalanta in their first match since being slapped with a massive points deduction for illicit transfer activity.

AFP



India's captain Rohit Sharma (right) pats teammate Shubman Gill during the third and final one-day international cricket match against New Zealand at the Holkar Cricket Stadium in Indore on Tuesday (AFP)

OPENING BLITZ

Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill hit centuries as India sweep New Zealand to top ODI rankings

Indore, India - Blazing centuries from skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill powered India to a 3-0 series sweep of New Zealand and go top of the one-day international rankings on Tuesday.

The hosts hammered the Kiwis by 90 runs in the third match in Indore after Rohit (101) and Gill (112) put on 212 for the opening wicket to guide the hosts to 385-9 in Indore.

In reply, Devon Conway's 138 was in vain as India bowled out New Zealand for 295 in 41.2 overs for their second successive white-wash.

The victory takes India to the top of the ODI rankings ahead of World Cup holders England and New Zealand who slip from second to fourth behind Australia.

Qualification for the World Cup in India later in the year is unaffected, however, as the Kiwis have already qualified.

But Rohit, who recorded his first ODI century since January 2020, and Gill stood out in the highest opening partnership by any team against the Kiwis in the 50-over format, surpassing the 201-run stand of Virender Sehwag and Gautam Gambhir in



In the last six games we've done most things right in ODIs. We're consistent in our approach with the bat and ball

ROHIT SHARMA

2009.

"In the last six games we've done most things right in ODIs," said Rohit, whose side white-washed Sri Lanka in three matches before this.

"We're consistent in our approach with the bat and ball."

Fast bowler Shardul Thakur was named man of the match for his three wickets and crucial 25 runs batting down the order.

"Shardul has been doing it for a while," said Rohit. "People call him magician in the squad and he came and delivered."

New Zealand's bowlers hit

back after the pair's departure as India slipped to 293-5 before Hardik Pandya took charge, boosting the total with a 38-ball 54.

It all started with Gill smashing Lockie Ferguson for four fours and a six in a 22-run eighth over and Rohit joined the party with a few big hits over the fence.

Gill recorded his third 100-plus score in his last four ODI innings, taking off his helmet and basking in applause from the stands when he reached the milestone.

Michael Bracewell bowled

Rohit and Blair Tuckner sent back Gill in the next over and India soon lost regular wickets, despite a brisk 36 from Virat Kohli.

The left-handed Ishan Kishan was run out after a mix-up with Kohli, who soon fell to Jacob Duffy. Pandya put on 54 for the seventh wicket with Thakur.

Eye on World Cup

In reply, New Zealand lost Finn Allen on the second delivery of their chase after Pandya bowled the opener for nought.

Conway stood firm to add 106 for the second wicket with Henry Nicholls, who hit 42, and 78 for the third with Daryl Mitchell (24). The left-handed Conway fought hard as wickets fell at the other end as he raised his third ODI hundred with a six off leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal.

Thakur dented New Zealand's chase when he struck twice with successive deliveries, Mitchell caught behind and then skipper Tom Latham caught at mid-off.

Conway, who smashed 12 fours and eight sixes in his 100-ball blitz, looked unstoppable until tearaway quick Umran Malik got the batsman caught at mid-wicket.

Mbappe scores five in PSG French Cup rout of amateur minnows Pays de Cassel

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe became the first Paris Saint-Germain player to score five times in one match as the Ligue 1 giants crushed sixth-tier amateur minnows Pays de Cassel 7-0 in the French Cup on Monday.

Mbappe, who scored a hat-trick in France's defeat by Argentina in the World Cup final just over a month ago, netted a hat-trick in the first half here as PSG led 4-0 at the break against their regional league opponents.

He struck twice more after the restart, with Neymar and Carlos Soler scoring PSG's other goals in the last-32 tie.

The Qatar-owned club, who have won the French Cup 14 times, more than any other team, will now play away to bitter rivals Marseille in the last 16 early next month.

That match is scheduled for the week beginning February 6, just a week before PSG host Bayern Munich in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie.



Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe scores a goal against Pays de Cassel, in Lens, France (AFP)

"Once we scored the first goal it became harder for our opponents," PSG boss Christophe Galtier told reporters. "The opponents we'll face over the next

weeks are of a different quality." Mbappe was given the captain's armband while Neymar also started, but Lionel Messi was rested, allowed to sit out this

tie played before a full house at the 38,000-seat Stade Bollaert-Delelis in Lens.

Pays de Cassel are a tiny club representing a handful of villages

inland from the port town of Dunkirk in France's far north, but their remarkable run to this stage of the tournament stoked the interest of the whole region.

They performed admirably in the early stages against the Ligue 1 leaders, but their resistance was broken just before the half-hour mark when Mbappe turned in a Nuno Mendes cutback, the ball taking a crucial deflection on its way in. Mbappe then set up Neymar for the Brazilian to score his first goal since the World Cup, before the France star lobbed in his team's third and then completed a 12-minute hat-trick from a Vitinha pass.

Mbappe's fourth, and PSG's fifth, followed a goalkeeping mistake in the 56th minute.

Neymar set up Soler to back-heel in for 6-0 before Mbappe completed the rout, his fifth of the game allowing him to equal the all-time record for most French Cup goals.

AFP

Mickey Arthur set to rejoin as Pakistan cricket head coach

Karachi, Pakistan - Pakistan are set to appoint experienced South African Mickey Arthur for a second stint as head coach, a top cricket board official said on Monday.

The 54-year-old will replace Saqlain Mushtaq, whose contract expires next month.

"I am in negotiations with Mickey personally and we have covered 90 percent of the issues," Najam Sethi, chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board's management committee, said. "Hopefully, very soon we may give you the news that Mickey will be joining us," he told a press conference in Lahore.

Sethi said Arthur will have his own team of support staff.

"I think the issues will be

solved in the next two to three days and Mickey will come with support staff," added Sethi.

Under Arthur's tenure as head coach between 2016 and 2019, Pakistan won the Champions Trophy and became number one in the Twenty20 international rankings. But his contract was not renewed after Pakistan failed to reach the semi-finals of the 2019 World Cup.

Arthur is currently serving as head coach of Derbyshire in England on a three-year contract.

He has vast experience, having also coached his native South Africa, Australia and Sri Lanka.

Pakistan cricket is going through a number of changes after PCB chairman Ramiz Raja was removed last month.

AFP



Ten Hag intent on ending Man Utd's trophy drought

London, UK - Erik ten Hag has pledged to do everything in his power to end Manchester United's worst trophy drought in 40 years ahead of their League Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest on Wednesday.

United have not won any silverware since the League Cup and Europa League in 2017, when Jose Mourinho was in charge at Old Trafford.

The English giants have

reached at least the semi-final stage of various competitions on six occasions since then, losing the 2018 FA Cup final and 2021 Europa League final.

Ten Hag said United's six-year wait for a trophy - a relative drought last experienced between 1977 and 1983 - was 'too long'.

"It's the best feeling you can have winning a trophy," said the Dutch manager, who won the

Eredivisie with Ajax last season.

"I had the luck in my career to win some trophies and it's magnificent, especially for the fans. It's so great and I think the fans here have some experience, especially the older ones.

"But now it is a period Manchester United didn't win trophies and it is too long ago. We are aware of that fact and we have to do everything to bring a trophy in."

United are looking to get back to winning ways in the first leg of the tie at Forest's City Ground after two frustrating Premier League trips to London.

Michael Olise's late free-kick rescued a 1-1 draw for Crystal Palace last week and Eddie Nketiah struck at the death as table-topping Arsenal triumphed 3-2 on Sunday.

"We left it behind," Ten Hag said of the Emirates Stadium loss

that led him to criticise some aspects of his side's defending.

The United coach said defence was not an area of concern in general, pointing to the number of clean sheets his team had kept in recent weeks. But he added, "When you concede three goals in a top game, then it's really difficult to win a game. That's what happens so that is one of the conclusions."

AFP



ManU Dutch manager Erik ten Hag during the match against Arsenal

THE SECRET WORKSHOP OF TOP FRENCH FASHION

Sitting in a lotus position, four men weave glittering beads through gold thread on an organza sheet, carefully constructing a wedding dress that will soon wow crowds at Paris Fashion Week.

For once, the French couturier behind the design, Julien Fournie, is determined to put these craftsmen in the spotlight: his new collection, showing in Paris on Tuesday, is entirely made with fabrics from Mumbai.

He says a sort of 'design imperialism' means that French fashion houses often play down the fact that their fabrics are made outside France.

"The houses which don't admit it are perhaps afraid of losing their clientele," Fournie told AFP.

But that is absurd, he continued.

"India is number one in the world in embroidery. It's ancestral. They've been dressing maharajas in gold-embroidered outfits since the 16th century."

Fournie works with a company called Cre-



THE MUMBAI ATELIER

ations By Shanagar (meaning 'to adorn' in Sanskrit), housed in a non-descript beige building near Mumbai's international airport.

Dozens of men in grey polo shirts sit cross-legged on cushions, heads bent over large sheaths of fabric. There is silence but for the clicking of needles and beads, the whirl of ceiling fans, and the occasional plane overhead.

'A lot of fantasy'

For decades, they have played an essential but unsung role in the fashion industries of Europe, Japan and the United States.

"I like working with Julien because he is another master craftsman who knows his sub-

French fashion designer Julien Fournie works on an embroidered dress at his studio, ahead of the Spring-Summer 2023 Haute Couture Fashion Week, in Paris (AFP)

ject very well," said director Chetan Desai (55). "He has a lot of fantasy. He comes up with his own concepts and I have to translate those ideas into embroidery.

"It has been a very challenging experience and at the same time, it has been very fruitful," he added.

Back in France, Fournie sends the compliments back.

"What they know how to do better than anyone is to embroider with degraded gold thread, passing it through transparent beads to create colour gradients. It's unprecedented," he said.

It gives silk an aged, elegant look for wedding dresses that 'shine, but not too much'.

"Haute couture customers don't want to look like a Christmas tree," he added.

"I've worked with great French embroiderers and each time it's complicated. Everyone wants to put in their own ideas and you never get exactly what you want."

Star clients

Desai's father set up Creations By Shanagar in the 1960s as a workshop for handloomed and embroidered saris.

In the 1990s, Desai looked further afield to France, partnering with Franco-Tunisian designer Azzedine Alaïa on dresses that ultimately graced the likes of Naomi Campbell.

He does not divulge the current clients on his books but his past roster gives a sense of the high demand. They include Jean Paul Gaultier, Yohji Yamamoto and Donna Karan.

Even Hollywood came knocking, with Shanagar helping design Nicole Kidman's costumes for the 2001 hit 'Moulin Rouge!'

The atelier attracts workers from across India, such as Biswajit Patra (31), who has been working here since he was 16.

"I learned the trade in my village near Kolkata because my father was doing the same job and my brother and sister are also doing this job," he said.

Among their unique ideas is a way of rolling up pieces of tulle to make embroidered flowers.

"They have a range of techniques that we don't have here," said Jean-Paul Cauvin, director of Fournie's house in France.

One of the most delicate jobs is preparing the fabric once it arrives from India and heads for the workshop where it will be assembled into the dresses.

It is Fournie himself who irons out the fabric.

"Sixty per cent of haute couture is ironing," he said with a smile.

AFP



Embroiderers of Shanagar, a luxury Mumbai-based hand-embroidery atelier, work on a design for Julien Fournie, at a production facility in Mumbai

India is number one in the world in embroidery. It's ancestral. They've been dressing maharajas in gold-embroidered outfits since the 16th century

JULIEN FOURNIE



Julien Fournie gets a close look at an embroidered dress at his studio (AFP)



Employees work on an embroidered dress for Julien Fournie (AFP)

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INDIAN
DESIGNER
EVOKES
MYSTERIES

For a man with seemingly infinite creative ambitions, it is fitting that Indian designer Rahul Mishra's latest Paris haute couture collection attempts to encapsulate the entire universe.

Monday's Fashion Week debut of 'Cosmos' became the latest showcase for one of Asia's leading stylists, whose works have been modelled by Michelle Yeoh, Viola Davis and other top film stars.

Mishra invited AFP to tour his frenetic workshop on the urban fringes of New Delhi several times over the collection's production, from its initial sketch-book concepts to his last-minute agonies over sudden revisions.

His long and laborious journey reflects a desire to evoke the boundless mysteries of life, told through his trademark embroidered flourishes of animal contours and luminous details.

"This is actually the true cosmos in its ultimate manifestation," Mishra (43) told AFP this month while proudly unveiling one of the more than two dozen gowns he was about to send to Paris.

"It justifies the name of the collection."

The gown's flowing pleated silhouette is alive with intricately embroidered depictions of the animal kingdom, where schools of fish rub shoulders with the night sky's constellations.

Mishra has spent months engrossed in every microscopic detail of the piece, but even in the frenzied final week before its Paris debut, he was compelled to make a major conceptual change.

"It looks dramatic, it takes too much attention," he says as he agonises over a bold decision to pin two giant golden fish ornaments to the gown's bust, wondering if it up-

'COSMOS' IN PARIS



Indian fashion designer Rahul Mishra looks at his new collection at his workshop in Noida

It has to be spectacular, otherwise why would you create something? There are already so many beautiful clothes in the world

RAHUL MISHRA



A woman showcases a dress from the 2022 'Tree of Life' haute couture collection at Indian Fashion designer Rahul Mishra's store in New Delhi



sets the delicate harmony he has cultivated.

Mishra often defers to the expertise of his team and solicits their opinion but they share his taste for the flamboyant and give a resounding vote of approval to the new look.

'It has to be spectacular'

"The more we try to know about cosmos, the less we know; the more we try to know

about ourselves, the more remains to discover - this is the true meaning of cosmos," Mishra said of his artistic vision.

The theme is well-suited to a designer whose creations fuse together as many materials, textures and patterns as the laws of physics allow.

"We work like an art studio that tries to mix mediums, to assemble ideas, to create a new expression that is not necessarily just fashion," he said.

"Our dresses are full of life - they are growing, expanding, they are reaching for something in an ever-expanding universe."

The collection's more extravagant pieces reflect Mishra's preoccupation with the natural world and include a sequined gown with translucent veils, modelled on the pulsing movements of a jellyfish.

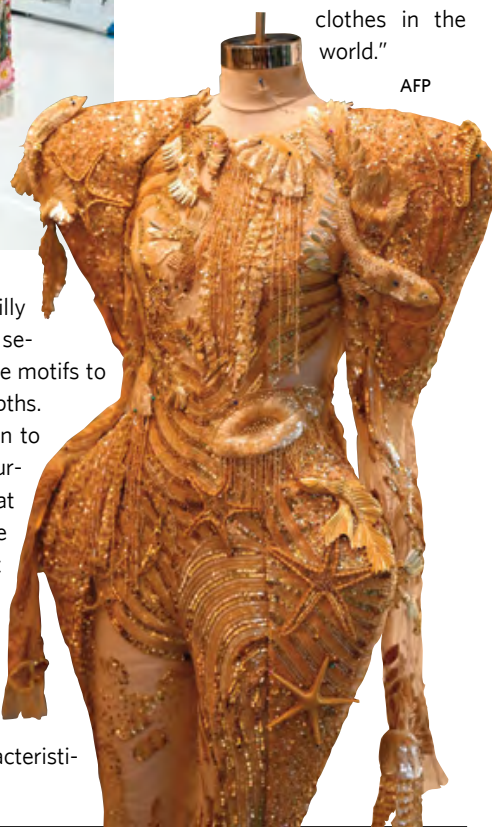
Other eye-catching works feature elegant embroidery of pink-tinged leaves, golden lady-

cally monochrome against the designer's usual colour bursts, skyscrapers float upside down on a ruffled hem against speckled silver stars to channel the magic of cities at night.

Flamboyant even by the standards of the Parisian runway, Mishra abhors any suggestion of aesthetic restraint.

"It has to be spectacular, otherwise why would you create something?" he said. "There are already so many beautiful clothes in the world."

AFP



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