



Alvarez arrives as Messi's partner in crime

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2022

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Decrees issued on appointments, SAF Day

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued two Royal Decrees on Wednesday reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 92/2022 directs military appointments and promotions at the Ministry of Defence.

Article 1 appoints Maj Gen Hamid Ahmed Said Sakroon as Head of the Academy for

Strategic and Defence Studies.

Article 2 promotes Commodore Ali Abdullah Mohammed al Shidi to the rank of Rear Admiral and appoints him Commandant of the National Defence College.

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

Royal Decree No 93/2022 refers to the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Day.

Article 1 states that December 11 will be observed as Sultan's Armed Forces Day annually.

Article 2 stipulates that Sultan's Armed Forces Day will be an official holiday for all members of the Sultan's Armed

Forces in all parts of Oman.

Article 3 cancels Royal Decree No 49/76 on Armed Forces Day. It also cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article 4 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA

HONOURABLE LADY VISITS CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



Honourable Lady Sayyida Ahad bint Abdullah bin Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, visited the Association for Children with Disabilities in Azaiba on Wednesday. During the visit, the Honourable Lady inspected the facilities of the association and its equipment used for the rehabilitation and training of children with disabilities to enable them to integrate with society (ONA)

30-40mn sqm set aside for modern cities, investments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Approximately 30mn to 40mn sqm of land in wilayats of Muscat governorate, Salalah in Dhofar and Sohar in North Batinah have been allocated for investment for establishment of modern cities with integrated services, according to H E Dr Khalfan bin Saeed al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

In an interview with Oman TV, H E Shuaili said, "The ministry distributed nearly 23,000 plots of land in 2022 according to the new conditions for land distribution, which were mostly accepted positively. The ministry focused on several priorities, including granting land to families who do not own land or housing."

He informed that the ministry is currently discussing with the banking sector to find more interactive programmes in real estate financing, and is working to improve its services and efficiency, while also expediting the digital transformation programme through platforms such as Amlak.



The ministry distributed nearly 23,000 plots of land in 2022 according to the new conditions for land distribution, which were mostly accepted positively

H E DR KHALFAN AL SHUAILI

hoods project Sorouh in Barka has been completed. This phase will be ready for housing starting the middle of next year.

The Sorouh programme includes a second stage in three sites in the wilayats of Amerat and Bidbid and in the Halban region. These projects are in the final negotiation stage. The project in the wilayat of Amerat for about a thousand housing units will be signed soon.

H E Shuaili further explained that there are five projects in the third stage of Sorouh, which will be in the wilayats of Sur, Rustaq, Salalah, Sohar and Khasab, which are in the process of being offered. Projects are being considered in 30 wilayats in the next ten years.

H E Shuaili also informed about the Future Cities programme represented by five-six projects for large cities with approximately 60,000 housing units throughout the sultanate, including a project in Muscat spread over an area of 15mn sqm which will have 23,000 housing units. Eighty per cent of the design work for this has been completed and will be announced soon.

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Divers remove 200kg of fishing nets in Quriyat

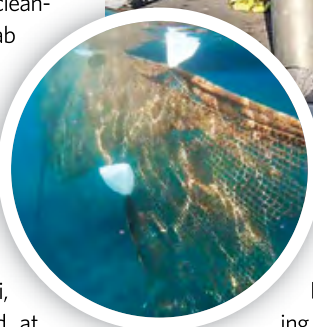
Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Quriyat Divers, in cooperation with Blue Water Company and Fisheries Development Oman, organised a coral reefs clean-up campaign in Quriyat on December 1. Five divers participated in the clean-up activity.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Juma Khamis al Amri, head of Quriyat Divers, said, "The clean-up was held in the Al Hdab area in the wilayat of Quriyat. Divers worked from 10am to 12:30pm at depths of 13m and removed 200kg of fishing nets."

Besides the clean-up activity, according to Amri, the initiative also aimed at spreading awareness on preserving coral reefs from pollutants and remnants of fishing equipment, preventing the dumping of waste, and encouraging volunteerism among communities.

"Such campaigns are ideal opportunities to make a positive change, serving the marine environment by removing marine debris that defile natural beauty. Frequent cleaning activities of the marine environment contribute to increasing fish production, and preserving endangered species," Amri said.



He added that the biggest challenge that divers face while carrying out marine cleaning activities come from discarded fishing nets, which are also responsible for the deaths of many marine creatures.

The clean-up activity on December 1 was part of Quriyat Divers' series of campaigns in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Environment Authority and the Coast Guard. To date 19 clean-up activities have

been held. On December 15 and 16, thirteen members of the team will conduct a clean-up activity in the Ashkhara area of South Sharqiyah in cooperation with Oman Fishermen's Association.

Later in the month on December 20, the Quriyat Divers will hold another coral reefs clean-up campaign in the Daymaniyat Islands in cooperation with the Environment Authority.

National Research Award winners announced

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The ninth cycle of the Annual Research Forum organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) took place on Wednesday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, in which the winners of the National Research Award and Upgrade programme were announced. The forum was held under the patronage of H E Said bin Hamood al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in presence of H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrooqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and several officials, academics and researchers.

Following an address by H E Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary for Research and Innovation in MoHERI, the forum announced the 11 winning research projects chosen from 307 projects submitted this year. The award is divided into two broad categories - best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent (senior specialist or higher in the medical field) and best published research led by a young researcher (non-PhD holder) category.

In the PhD Category, Dr Ahmed al Maashri from Sultan Qaboos University won in the Information and Communication Technologies sector. In the Cultural, Social and Basic Sciences sector, the award went to Dr Anwar al Sheyadi from University of Technology and Applied Sciences Rustaq, while the award in the Environmental and Biological Resources sector was won by Dr Mohammed al Mamun from SQU.



Dr Aisha al Harthi from SQU won the Education and Human Resources category, while Dr Fatema al Salmi from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences took the award in the Health and Social Services sector. Dr Svetlana Rudyk from SQU won the Energy and Industry sector.

The National Research Award contributes to directing research to serve national priorities

H E DR SAIF AL HADDABI

In the Young Researcher's category, Dr Mohammed al Husaini from SQU won in the Information and Communication Technologies sector. For the Environmental and Biological Resources sector, the award went to Shahad al Yaqoubi from SQU. Dr Mashael al Saiari from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences Salalah was awarded in the Education and Human Resources sector.

In the Health and Social Serv-

ices sector, the award went to Dr Mohammed al Alawi from Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, while Debasish Tikadar from SQU took the award in the Energy and Industry sector.

The Annual Research Forum also announced the nine winning teams of the latest edition of Upgrade programme, which transforms the best graduation projects into startups, given in two broad categories - Information and Communication Technology (ICT) track and the newly launched industrial track. In the ICT track, the six winning projects were by Insiya Zehra, Wadhah al Darii, Tamadher al Hosni and Safa al Baiti; Ahmed al Mazroey, Husam al Nasser and Mazin al Rubkhi; Sara al Sinani, Balqees al Ghafri and Maroa al Daiiri; Saif al Janabi, Mohammed al Shailli, Aaisha al Risi and Rahma al Waili; Dr Selvarani Murugesan and Aflah al Hajri; and Ahmed al Jabari and Fatema al Alawi.

In the industrial track, the three winning projects were by Mona al Maashani, Maryam al Balushi and Fatima al Hinai; Aisha al Wahaibi, Al Hasnaa al Adwani, Muzn al Abri and Nusiba al Kharusi; and Zainab al Hajri and Jihan al Busaidi.

RO6,000 fines imposed on 3 firms for breaking consumer law

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Court of First Instance in the wilayats of Bahla and Nizwa has issued six judicial rulings against three commercial establishments for violating the Consumer Protection Law.

A statement issued by the Consumer Protection Authority said, "The Consumer Protection Department in Dakhliyah received complaints from consumers against three commercial establishments that did not complete work agreed upon between the two

parties at the specified time, and delayed completion of repair works, which prompted consumers to submit complaints to the administration.

"The Court of First Instance in the wilayats of Bahla and Nizwa issued six judicial rulings against three commercial

establishments engaged in aluminium workshops and doors and windows detailing for violating the Consumer Protection Law and implementing its regulations. The court awarded sentences of fines of over RO6,000 on the three firms."



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First Amazon data centre of ME to be launched in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Wednesday with United States' Amazon Web Services to launch a local zone for cloud services and local data processing in Oman.

Additionally, Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) signed an MoU with Amazon Web Services to enhance its efforts to offer innovative solutions to its subscribers.

H E Said bin Hamoud al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that as per the MoU, Oman will be the first country in the Middle East to have an Amazon Web Services data centre with local area technology, after the success of this type of technology in the United States. This, he noted, qualifies Oman to be a regional hub for data centres and cloud services,



(Supplied photo)

Oman to be a regional hub for data centres and cloud services, as well as a link between Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe

H E SAID BIN HAMOUD AL MA'AWALI

as well as a link between Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe.

The minister affirmed that the ministry seeks to cooperate further with Amazon Web Services to attract foreign investment in the ICT sector, notably in hosting and processing information and

cloud services.

H E Ma'awali pointed out that this cooperation will enhance the achievements of the National Programme for the Digital Economy. Amazon Web Services is one of the largest global companies that is specialised in cloud

hosting services.

He added that this cooperation offers many economic opportunities with Amazon Web Services, the most important of which are multiple marine cables for the transfer of data among global centres, thus serving clients within Oman and abroad.

The MoU was signed by Undersecretary H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Vuychik Bagda, Amazon Web Services' Public Sector Manager for Middle East and Africa, and Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO of Omantel.



State Council discusses draft budget for 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The State Council discussed the draft of State Budget 2023 on Wednesday. The session focused on a report of the Expanded Economic Committee on the draft of the state budget for the fiscal year 2023.

The report will be returned to the Council of Ministers, along with the recommendations of the State Council and the Majlis A'Shura.

H E Sheikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of State Council, stated that this session is held in secret, as per



the provisions of Article 52 of the Law of Council of Oman.

On his part, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Harthi, Chairman of the State Council's Economic Committee, said that

drafting of this budget coincided with exceptional global events and conditions in the economic arena.

He added that the Expanded Economic Committee focused on macroeconomic policies and factored in potential risks of external variables on the national economy.

Accordingly, the panel considered the inclusion of detailed recommendations and visions on six topics - public view, public revenues, public spending, current deficit and means of funding, the financial position, and estimates of spending within State Budget 2023 - Harthi explained.

New OCCI chief welcomes decision to reduce fees of 288 govt services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Wednesday appreciated the government's measures to reduce fees of 288 government services, which will be effective starting from the first quarter of 2023.

On Tuesday, the Ministry of Finance announced that 288 government services fees will be reduced in the second phase of the implementation of the Government Services Pricing Guide, including fees of the Supreme Judicial Council, the



Reducing services fees will incentivise the facilities provided by the government to the business sector. It is an important addition to the elements of investment attraction in Oman

FAISAL AL RAWAS

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Environment Authority, the municipal councils, and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority.

Faisal al Rawas, chairman of OCCI, informed that reducing services fees will incentivise the facilities provided by the govern-

ment to the business sector and that the move represents a qualitative step to stimulate the national economy.

"It is an important addition to the elements of investment attraction in Oman," he said. "These decisions to support the private sector and attract foreign investment reflect the keen inter-

est of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. His keen interest is also reflected in Oman Vision 2040 and its pillars that empower the private sector and focus on achieving economic diversification."

Rawas stressed that the private sector appreciates these efforts at all levels; the decision represents support for the private sector to carry out its business by reducing financial and administrative burdens.

He invited the private sector and business owners to take advantage of this incentive and contribute to strengthening the national economy.



(Supplied photo)

Fire in workers' residence in Salah doused

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Firefighting teams managed to put out a fire that broke out in the Awqad Industrial Area in Salah on Wednesday.

A statement issued by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority said, "Firefighting teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department in Dhofar Governorate were able to extinguish a fire that broke out in a workers' residence in Awqad Industrial Area in the wilayat of Salah. There were no injuries."

PASI board discusses investment performance

Muscat - The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) held its second meeting of the year on Wednesday under the chairmanship of H E Dr Mahad Said BaOwain, Minister of Labour and Board

Chairman.

The meeting discussed a set of topics listed on the agenda, such as indicators for measuring PASI's institutional performance in 2022, covering the investment performance results for the same

period.

The board also approved the current and investment budget for the next year and discussed proposals related to investments and insurance.

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Chief Guest
H.E. Dr. Saeed Bin Hamed Al Rubaie
Vice Chancellor of UTAS

Guest of Honour
Dr. Zahran Salim Al Salti
Dean of CBFS

Keynote Speaker
Mr. Hilal Al Habsi
Executive Director, Global Computers

Speakers:
Mr. Nayaz Mohamed (Partner at PwC), Mr. Shri Hari Venkatesh (Director - Securado), Mr. Vibhu Swami (Enterprise Cloud Architect, Hapag-Lloyd), Ms. Laila Al Hadrami (Advisor - Resilience & Smart and Sustainable Cities), Ms. Manal Al Balushi (PMO & Compliance Specialist, PwC)

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Third term - 2022

Omani entrepreneur felicitated at UK embassy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The embassy of UK felicitated Omani entrepreneur Talal Hasan, founder and Carbon General of 44.01, for winning the Earthshot Prize 2022.

44.01 eliminates CO₂ permanently by mineralising it in peridotite, a rock found in abundance in Oman as well as in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia. Peridotite mineralisation is a natural process, but in nature it can take many years to mineralise even a small amount of CO₂.

44.01 accelerates the process by injecting carbonated water into seams of peridotite deep un-



We were inspired to set up 44.01 when we saw the very real impact of climate change here in Oman and around our region

TALAL HASAN

derground. The event was held at the residence of the British ambassador on Sunday.

Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, urged peo-

ple around the world to follow 44.01's example and take up the fight against climate change.

"We often talk rather too much about the weather in the UK, but the weather matters. Climate change will have disastrous effects internationally, so people all over the world need to take action to protect our planet earth," said Lord Tariq Ahmad.

Named after the molecular weight of carbon dioxide, 44.01 has aims to mineralise 1bn tonnes of CO₂ by 2040. The company hopes to expand its operations internationally in 2023.

"We were inspired to set up 44.01 when we saw the very real impact of climate change here in

Oman and around our region. If we are to halt, and ultimately reverse climate change, then we have to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere," said Talal.

Unlike carbon 'storage', which involves burying CO₂ underground in disused oil-wells or aquifers, mineralisation removes CO₂ forever. This means there is no requirement for long-term monitoring or insurance, and ultimately makes the process more cost-effective, scalable and safer.

For Oman having the largest concentration of peridotite in the world, carbon mineralisation could also be a boon for workers in the region. By seeking to solve global problems, 44.01 will solve

local ones too. "We will also be able to provide new employment to engineers and geologists as the world transitions to clean forms of energy," added Talal.

Founded by Prince William and The Royal Foundation in 2020, The Earthshot Prize is the most prestigious global environmental prize to discover, accelerate and scale groundbreaking solutions to repair and regenerate the planet. The Earthshot Prize aims to encourage and scale innovative solutions that can help put the world firmly on a trajectory towards a stable climate, where communities, oceans and biodiversity thrive in harmony by 2030.

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Public Announcement

With reference to the Offer Announcement dated 20th November 2022 regarding the offer made by National Life and General Insurance Company SAOG ("NLGIC") to acquire 47.5% of the issued share capital of Al Ahlia Insurance Company SAOG (the "Offer") in accordance with the Takeover & Acquisition Regulation (CMA Decision No. 2/2019) (the "Regulations").

We are pleased to disclose that NLGIC, as of 14th December 2022, has received acceptance from shareholders amounting to 95.6% of the Offer. The following is the status of the Offer acceptance:

Total no. of shares amounting to 47.5% of the issued share capital of Al Ahlia Insurance	47,500,000
Total no. of shares for which the acceptance has been received	45,409,776
Acceptance Rate (%)	95.6%

NLGIC intends to apply to the Capital Market Authority to exercise the "compulsory acquisition" as per the provisions of Articles 62 to 65 (inclusive) of the Regulations, subject to regulatory approvals and the timeline provided in the Offer Document.

Made in Oman campaign launched in Musandam

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion launched the 'Made in Oman' campaign in the wilayat of Khasab in Musandam governorate on Wednesday.

The campaign was launched under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, Governor of Musandam, in the presence of Raed bin Mohammed al Shehhi, chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (OCCI) in Musandam and private agencies in the governorate.

The inauguration witnessed the Omani craft and traditional industries corner, and a display of Omani products of all kinds, with the aim of marketing, promoting and supporting these products, and increasing the number of consumers of the national product.

The campaign is organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in partnership with Authority of Small & Medium Enterprises Development, Consumer Protection Authority, Madayn and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), as well as representatives from the business community.

It is designed to support local producers and manufacturers to encourage consumers across the sultanate to buy locally produced goods.

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Oman has largest green hydrogen project pipeline in Middle East region: IEA



Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an ambitious target of exporting one million tonnes of green hydrogen annually by 2030, Oman has the largest low-emission hydrogen project pipeline in the Middle East region, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

"Oman has opportunities for renewable-based hydrogen production. The sultanate has the largest low-emission hydrogen project pipeline in the Middle East by 2030," Dr Abdullah al Abri, consultant and Oman's representative at Paris-based IEA, said while giving a presentation at the recently held Green Hydrogen Summit Oman 2022.

As per IEA's global estimates, an estimated 12mn tonnes of low-emission hydrogen per year could be exported by 2030 based on the current export pipeline.

"Oman could be responsible for 61 per cent of the total hydrogen exports from the Middle East [by 2030]," Abri noted.

The sultanate has set an am-

Oman could be responsible for 61 per cent of the total hydrogen exports from the Middle East by 2030

DR ABDULLAH AL ABRI

bition to become one of the largest green hydrogen producers and exporters globally, targeting production of one million tonnes by 2030.

With the announcement of a clear green hydrogen strategy and growing interest from international investors, Oman's government is expecting to attract total investment worth more than US\$20bn in the green hydrogen sector by 2030.

Cost competitive

Abri noted that the cost competitiveness of green hydrogen is driven by outlook for natural gas prices. He said the cost of renewable hydrogen is expected to decrease from US\$3.5/kg in 2022

to approximately US\$1.5/kg in 2030, while the cost of fossil hydrogen could be as high as US\$4/kg due to increasingly tight gas market.

"The cost of renewable hydrogen in Oman could reach US\$1.45/kg by 2030. However, the cost of ammonia conversion and transport add significantly to the total supply cost," he said.

According to Abri, Oman's planned hydrogen exports by 2030 represent one-sixth of today's LNG export volume. "Capturing a 10-15 per cent share of the international hydrogen trade in 2040 would provide similar export volumes for Oman that LNG provides today," he noted during the presentation.

Oman's economy currently relies on fossil fuels, but the country has also abundant renewable energy resources, Abri said, adding, "Oman has made a net-zero emissions commitment by 2050 and has set ambitious targets for renewables and renewable hydrogen production."

The IEA is preparing a report on how large-scale development of green hydrogen could help

Oman to establish new revenues streams and decarbonise domestic energy use.

The report will be published in the first quarter of 2023, Abri said.

As the sultanate advances its energy transition strategy, hydrogen as a fuel can displace the use of natural gas in industrial process for high temperature heat.

As per the IEA estimates, medium and high temperature heat cover 84 per cent of the total energy needs of Oman's industrial sector, while steam and low temperature heat cover the remaining 16 per cent.

To accelerate the development of green hydrogen sector, Oman recently launched Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) - an autonomous subsidiary company of Energy Development Oman (EDO) - with a vision to position the sultanate as a leading global green hydrogen hub.

Hydrom is focusing to develop the green hydrogen sector by enabling the delivery of projects competitively and at scale for the world.

Oman Arab Bank appoints Sulaiman al Harthi as CEO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Arab Bank on Wednesday announced the appointment of Sulaiman Hamad al Harthi as the new chief executive officer of the bank.

Harthi has over 33 years of experience in the banking sector. He held several leadership positions at major local banks, including deputy chief executive officer of Oman Arab Bank and CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank.

"The board of directors of Oman Arab Bank is pleased to announce the appointment of Sulaiman Hamad al Harthi as the chief executive officer of the bank, effective from January 4, 2023," Oman Arab Bank said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock



Sulaiman al Harthi

Exchange.

Harthi holds an MBA (Finance) from Leicester University, UK. He has completed executive management programmes at Harvard Business School and INSEAD Business School, the bank said.

The board of directors of Oman Arab Bank wished Harthi

all the success in his journey with the bank.

In a separate disclosure, Oman Arab Bank - the principal shareholder of Alizz Islamic Bank - announced that Harthi has tendered his resignation from the position of the CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank. The board resolved to accept his resignation.

Ali Saif al Mani, the general manager of Alizz Islamic Bank, will take over the management of the Alizz Islamic Bank.

Mani was appointed as the general manager of Alizz Islamic Bank in October. He has over 21 years of professional experience in both Islamic and traditional banking including retail, corporate, operations, finance, project management digital solutions and management.

HSBC bank to stop funding new oil and gas fields

London, UK - Banking giant HSBC on Wednesday said it would end financing for new oil and gas fields, a decision welcomed by environmentalists who nevertheless urged greater action from banks and government.

In an annual update of its climate transition plans, the London-headquartered bank said it "will no longer provide new lending or capital markets finance for the specific purpose of projects pertaining to new oil and gas fields and related infrastructure".

HSBC added in a statement that it was "committed to supporting and financing the transition to a secure net zero future". Responding, Greenpeace UK's senior climate campaigner Charlie Kronick called the announcement "long overdue".

He added in a statement: "Banks have been funding climate chaos to the tune of billions



of pounds. Now one of the UK's biggest banks has realised that there's no place for new oil and gas in a world that is trying to tackle the climate crisis."

Kronick called the announcement "an embarrassment for the UK government", which is "pressing on with new oil and gas licences" as it looks to beef up energy security following the invasion of Ukraine by major fossil fuel producer Russia.

HSBC meanwhile said it

would continue to provide finance and advisory services to energy sector clients at the corporate level, as long as their plans were in line with the bank's targets to cut emissions.

"HSBC's announcement sends a strong signal to fossil fuel giants and governments that banks' appetite for financing new oil and gas fields is diminishing," said Jeanne Martin, head of banking programme at ShareAction.

"It sets a new minimum level of ambition for all banks committed to net zero. We urge major banks like Barclays and BNP Paribas to follow suit."

Martin meanwhile stressed that "HSBC's announcement only applies to asset financing, and doesn't deal with the much larger proportion of finance it still provides to companies that have oil and gas expansion plans".

AFP

Global oil supply falls in November

Ankara, Turkey - Global oil supply in November fell by 190,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 101.7mn bpd, breaking a five-month uptrend, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said in its monthly oil market report on Wednesday.

The supply declines were mainly driven by output cuts by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in line with lower OPEC+ output targets.

However, the IEA said the overall decline was tempered by significantly higher flows from OPEC+ members Kazakhstan, Nigeria and Russia, along with increased output from non-OPEC+ outside the alliance.

As a result, production of oil from OPEC+ decreased by 470,000 bpd in November, while non-OPEC+ volumes rose by 290,000 bpd.

The EIA predicts a steeper drop in December as an EU ban on Russian crude imports and a G-7 price cap on exports take effect and non-OPEC+ production eases.

Although the OPEC+ countries confirmed a 2mn bpd supply cut decision, the agency stated that only Saudi Arabia and its Gulf neighbours would continue to pump at or near significantly lower quotas, as the majority of the bloc

has been underproducing for some time.

Despite the OPEC+ curbs and further anticipated declines, mainly from Russia, the agency predicted that world production will overtake demand through the rest of 2022 and in the first quarter of next year.

Thus, world oil supply is forecast to rise by 770,000 bpd year over year to 100.8 million bpd in 2023.

Non-OPEC+ output is expected to increase by 1.9mn bpd, led by the US with over 970,000 bpd, Brazil with more than 300,000 bpd and Norway with around 270,000 bpd.

The IEA estimated that Russian output will fall by 1.4mn bpd under the impact of EU sanctions and the G-7 price cap.

The report said that global demand will remain firm despite macro-economic headwinds, a global economy possibly heading for recession and the European energy crisis.

After revising up its forecast from last month by 100,000 bpd, the agency said global demand will rise by 1.7mn bpd to 101.6mn bpd next year.

Anadolu Agency

US Fed expected to slow pace of rate hikes amid easing inflation

Washington, US - US central bankers open the second day of a key policy meeting Wednesday, with mounting anticipation of a smaller hike to its benchmark lending rate as inflation showed signs of easing.

The Federal Reserve has embarked on an all-out campaign to cool demand in the world's biggest economy, raising rates six times this year with interest-sensitive sectors like housing already reeling from tightening policy.

But there have been positive signs, with consumer inflation in the United States easing in November, according to government data released Tuesday.

The consumer price index, a key gauge of inflation, logged its smallest annual increase in nearly a year, fueling optimism that the Fed could soon moderate its efforts.

Households have been squeezed by red-hot prices, with conditions worsened by surging food and energy costs after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and fallout from China's zero-Covid measures.

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



US Fed chair Jerome Powell

per cent and four per cent.

Analysts widely expect the Fed to adopt a smaller, half-point hike on Wednesday, with Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics calling it a "a done deal" in an analysis.

While this marks a step down from earlier 0.75-point increases, it would still be a steep

jump.

Shepherdson cautioned that Fed Chair Jerome Powell is "in no hurry to say what markets want to hear."

"(Powell) is unlikely to deviate from his clear line that the Fed will do whatever is necessary to squeeze out inflation, and that some pain will be necessary,"

Shepherdson added.

Recent easing in inflation data is welcome news to policymakers, but this is "not yet proof that inflation has sustainably cooled to levels consistent with the inflation target," cautioned economist Edoardo Campanella of UniCredit Bank in a note.

The Fed has a longer-term in-

flation target of two percent.

"The Fed will likely further slow the pace of rate hikes early next year to 25 basis points," Campanella added.

"However, with the labour market still very tight... and with broad financial conditions easing, the Fed will likely say that their job is not done," he said.

Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData, added that the Fed is taking a "hawkish view on inflation" and will likely conclude further tightening is needed, based on the continued strength of underlying demand in the economy.

"As much as this action may have the desired effect, it will cool the economy at a time when it is already under pressure heading into 2023," said Saunders.

The Fed's further rate hike will also mark "a new phase" in its tightening cycle, said Nationwide chief economist Kathy Bostjancic in a note Monday.

This comes as officials look to adjust policy now that it is "within the range considered restrictive."

Financial markets will be watching for signals of how high rates might go, and "the path for rates beyond that peak," she added.

AFP

'Indians played central role in Oman's economy'

Dr Calvin H Allen, Jr, a noted historian having his expertise in the Indian diaspora in Oman, highlighted the contribution of the Indian community in making Oman's economy global.

Addressing a lecture session at the Indian Embassy on Monday, Allen said, "Through its (Indian diaspora) connection with India, Eastern Europe, East and North Africa, the Indian trading diaspora in Oman played a critical role in enabling the globalisation of the Omani economy in the late 19th and 20th centuries."

From pioneering the export of Omani dates to America and with their role as contractors for important construction projects at the beginning of the Omani renaissance, Allen pointed out that the Indian diaspora families were pioneers in the transformation of the Omani economy and its diversification.

The Indian Embassy in Muscat organised this lecture session by Allen on the topic 'Beyond the Diaspora: Indian Merchants and the Globalisation of Omani Trade in the 19th and 20th Centuries'.



Allen is a professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic History and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia. His teaching experience includes full-time positions at the College of the Ozarks in Missouri, the University of Memphis in Tennessee, and visiting positions at Drury College and the University of Pittsburgh.

Allen is known for his expertise in the history of the Indian Diaspora in Oman and has

authored three books on Oman, most recently a survey of Omani history for high school-age students, and more than forty articles.

He had played a vital role in the exhibition 'India-Oman 50 years diplomatic relations and 5000 years of friendship' at the Bait al Zubair museum in 2005.

In his lecture, Allen focussed on the careers of two of Oman's most famous Indian merchants, Ratansi Purshottam and Gokaldas Khimji Ramdas, as



case studies of the globalisation of the Omani economy between 1856-1970.

Although the success of Indian merchants is often attributed to activities within the great Indian diaspora, Allen gave special attention to how Ratansi Purshottam and Gokaldas Khimji Ramdas expanded their commercial networks beyond traditional relationships and connections formed through common ethnicity, religion, and locality to ties based on shared global economic values.

Jamal al Moosavi, Secretary General of the National Museum, was the chief guest for the event. Pankaj Khimji, Foreign Trade and International Cooperation advisor at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Hon Hathim al Taie, Member of the State Council of Oman and several other high-profile dignitaries graced the occasion with their presence.

More than 100 guests, including Omani nationals, members of the Indian diaspora, and media representatives, attended the lecture, Indian embassy said.



Bank Muscat hands over new field in Suwaiq as part of Green Sports programme

Bank Muscat has recently handed over a new field to the community in the wilayat of Suwaiq as part of Green Sports programme, a press release said.

The field was handed over to the Al Kifah Sports Team in Suwaiq at a ceremony held under the auspices of Dr Hamdan bin Saba al Saadi, deputy head of the Al Suwaiq Sports and Cultural Club and in the presence of Abdul Rahman bin Abdullah al Shezawi, Regional Manager - South Batinah, Bank Muscat.

The event was attended by Darwish Salim al Hinai, the head of the Al Kifah Sports Team and a number of team members.

A large number of young people in Oman are attracted to

sports, which helps showcase and support their talents and provide opportunities for physical, emotional and mental development. Sporting activities have also traditionally played a huge role in creating a feeling of solidarity within the community and building national pride.

"Hence, Bank Muscat in keeping with its pioneering role in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Oman, has been playing a major part in harnessing the energies of the youth and local communities through its long-running Green Sports programme," the bank said in its statement.

Shezawi, the bank's regional manager for South Batinah, ex-

pressed his happiness at the completion of the project. "We are pleased to inaugurate the Al Kifah Sports Team's sports field within the Green Sports programme which is implemented by the bank as part of its strategy to enhance its leadership role in the field of corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

"On this occasion, the bank is pleased to congratulate the team's management and appreciate their efforts during the various stages of the project. We would also like to wish them further growth, development and success. The bank will be opening many more Green Sports fields across the Sultanate of Oman in the future."

On his part, Darwish Salim al Hinai, head of the Al Kifah Sports Team, expressed his happiness with the inauguration and hand over of the Al Kifah Green Sports field, which was implemented with the support of the bank. He added that this programme was providing excellent support in strengthening the sports infrastructure available for local youth teams across Oman. He called on everyone in the community to make the best use of the new facilities, adding that it would greatly add to social bonding and cohesion within the community.

Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme is one of the leading CSR programs in Oman, which provides support to local sports

teams as part of the bank's efforts to develop sports infrastructure and green spaces throughout the Sultanate of Oman. The support includes greening of football pitches, water desalination and lighting.

The facilities developed as part of the programme are often used as a venue for other social activities by local communities, leading to stronger social bonding and positive behaviour among young people as well as the development of talented Omani youth. It is a matter of great encouragement that the Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme has so far benefitted 163 teams with over 50,000 team members across Oman.

NBO, MHUP sign deal to facilitate housing



Building partnerships to connect its customers to new opportunities, National Bank of Oman (NBO) and its Islamic banking window, Muzn, have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP).

The MoU aims to facilitate the financing of property on lands made available by the Government to Omani citizens through Sorouh Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods launched by the Ministry in 2019.

The memorandum was signed by H E Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing, and Abdul-

lah bin Zahran al Hinai, NBO's Chief Executive Officer. Through this collaboration, NBO and Muzn Islamic Banking will offer competitive deals of housing finance to eligible individual as well as a range of products that meet their different needs. The packages will consist of home loans and sharia'a-compliant home financing plans at competitive interest and financing rates to purchase lands or properties.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, "By making affordable housing financing solutions available, we contribute to the overall well-being of our communities and ensure sustainable development and economic growth."

ISM's annual athletic meet held with great zeal after two years of hiatus

The much-awaited 47th annual athletic meet and Drill Display was held on Monday on the imposing Indian School Muscat (ISM) grounds, with great zeal, excitement and fanfare.

After a hiatus of two years due to the lingering fear of the COVID-19 pandemic, ISM organised one of its signature events. Amidst the display of colours created by scores of flags and decorations, the young athletes displayed their talents in the track and field events.

The chief guest of the day Said Saif al Hadi, vice president, Oman Athletics Federation and guest of honour Ashwini Sawrikar, Finance Director, Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman, and esteemed members of the school's management committee, principal Dr Rajeev Kumar Chauhan, senior vice principal administration, vice principals and assistant vice principals of various sections of Indian School Muscat graced the occasion.



The sporting festivities began with the ceremonial march past led by the head boy. The four house contingents marched majestically in unison to the beat and rhythm of the school band. The school band comprising 80 immensely talented students led

by the band master, displayed a spectacular rhythmic performance with precision, which captivated the audience.

Chief guest Said al Hadi declared the 47th annual athletic meet and drill display open. Craig Gonsalves, sports coordinator,

took the oath on behalf of all the participants. The File Formation Drill by 1200 students of classes V and VI was a splendid display showcasing coordination, synchronization and kinesthetic skills.

The drill display was followed

by the most exciting track events. The track events were a true demonstration of strength, fitness and confidence. The next in the array of events was the Kettle Bell Drill performance by 1100 students of classes VII and VIII. The beautiful drill performed by

the students bearing the Kettle Bell in the four house colours brought cheers to the field.

Enthusiastic participation of athletes from various schools, in the Inter-School athletic events highlighted the importance of healthy competition and sports-

manship. The inter-school athletic events were followed by an impressive drill display by class IX students.

On this occasion, the dignitaries were honoured with mementos and the winning athletes were presented medals and trophies. The majestic Cock House Trophy, the coveted March Past Trophy and the much sought after Athletic Championship Trophy for the year 2022-23 were all lifted by the Blue House.

The captain and vice-captains of the Blue House, along with their house master and house mistress received the trophies from the chief guest.

The Indian School Muscat management committee congratulated all the winners of the events and for the excel conduct of the programme.

With the sounding of the Last Post, the show came to an end. The school flag was lowered and handed over to the principal through the chief guest.

MHD announces special promotions on Hongqi

Hongqi, a premium luxury automotive brand, represented in Oman by MHD ACERE announces special offers on its complete model line-up - H5, H55, H57 and H9.

Along with special prices, the company is offering the latest models of high-end mobile phones, complimentary insurance, seven years of warranty and lots more. 'It's all part of the special promotional package', MHD said.

As a luxury vehicle brand, Hongqi redefines opulence in a unique way, with top-notch features, the latest technology and an unwavering focus on safety.

The Hongqi H5 is an executive sedan which has sportiness ingrained with perfect configuration and performance to match. A stylish silhouette with the 'Wing of Hongqi' greeting light, the nature-inspired panoramic sunroof and luxurious interiors make an indelible impression. Safety comes with the Adaptive Cruise Control system, blind area monitoring system and 360° visibility.

The 1.8 T engine provides high output and low fuel consumption, with acceleration that



touches 0-100km per hour in 9.7 seconds. The H5 is available at a discounted price of RO12,995. Included in this price, is a Huawei Nova 10, premium window tinting, complimentary insurance and seven years of warranty, roadside assistance and 65,000km service.

The Hongqi H55 greets the driver with unique Red Flag

wings and dons the Hongqi family's classic waterfall intake grille. Aesthetic and luxurious, this model comes with advanced interconnection technology. Safety is prime in this model with an ability to judge collisions within the speed of 75km per hour.

An enhanced driving experience is enabled by five driving modes, superb seating with aviation-class headrests and unique, active indoor air cleaning in real-time. The H55 is now available at a special price of RO14,995 with complimentary Huawei Nova 10, premium window tinting, insurance and seven years of warranty, roadside assistance and 65,000km service.

When it comes to the flagship luxury model Hongqi H57, it

boasts an encircled design of the central console for the driver, a super-large panoramic sunroof, and top-class interiors. Worth mentioning is the stability of the CDC vehicle damping system and air suspension control technology to adjust to road conditions or load.

Professional off-road performance is powered by the trac-

tion control system and exclusive Bosch all-wheel power control technology. Smart technologies, added safety systems, eight-speed AMT and eight driving modes offer an amazing driving experience and exceptional fuel economy.

The H57 is now available at just RO22,495. What makes this even sweeter, is you get a complimentary Apple iPhone 14, premium window tinting, insurance and seven years of warranty, roadside assistance and 65,000km service package.

A stunning sedan, the Hongqi H9, can take on some tough terrain with its steel cage-style chassis. From the outside, it has an imposing visage with a straight fall grille.

As for the interiors, it is plush with an intelligent, oriental artistic cabin with one-touch zero-gravity seats. It also features an electronic system for a soundless, multi-way entry to the car and a pioneering L2.5 Autonomous driving function.

The 2.0 L turbocharged Direct Injection engine together with the 48V Enhanced Recovery System guarantees powerful performance. The H9 comes at a discounted price of RO31,495. Included in this price, is an Apple iPhone 14, premium window tinting, complimentary insurance and seven years of warranty, roadside assistance and 65,000km service.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, said, "As the sole distributor of Hongqi in Oman, MHD ACERE is excited to be associated with this prestigious brand which delivers the latest technology for safe driving, complemented by awesome design and uncompromising luxury aspects. With the added advantage of the latest pricing offer, we really hope customers in Oman can experience and enjoy a truly world-class car."

HONGQI is a luxury automotive marque of FAW Group, China, which is ranked 66 among global fortune 500 companies. Hongqi strives to be an icon in the automobile industry with its pursuit of new technologies, intelligent-driving features, and absolute safety assurance - all combined with excellent design aesthetics.

MHD ACERE is the flagship dealer for Hongqi luxury marque in Oman.

Bank Nizwa ties up with MHUP to finance homebuyers in Barka

The first and most trusted Islamic bank in Oman, Bank Nizwa, has partnered with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) to offer attractive financing options to customers eligible to purchase properties in the premium Hai Al Naseem Housing Project in Barka, which falls under the 'Surouh' initiative. The ministry has implemented a national initiative to make affordable housing available to all citizens in line with Vision 2040.

Khaled al Kayed, the Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa and H E Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, signed the agreement in the presence of several senior officials from both entities.

This agreement will enable customers to own modern homes with unique specifications at Hai Al Naseem for a reduced price and with a competitive profit rate. In partnership with various government agencies and development projects, Bank Nizwa continues to provide innovative financial solutions and banking products. These offerings consider cus-



tomers' evolving needs and keep up with their aspirations.

Khaled al Kayed stressed the importance of concluding such agreements to strengthen the local economy, saying, "Bank Nizwa is committed to supporting national initiatives in collaboration with the government to achieve the goals for urban development in line with the Oman Vision 2040. We at Bank Nizwa are honoured to contribute to this initiative's success, which will be crucial to achieving social and family stability.

"This agreement aligns with the bank's strategy to support and finance various institutions. We are committed to maintain-

ing our support to meet the requirements of the next stage. Bank Nizwa will continue backing a multitude of projects in the sultanate that enhance the local economy. Furthermore, we have adopted many initiatives that address social issues and have established ourselves as a financing company that is transparent, flexible, reliable and complies with Islamic principles."

In its capacity as the sultanate's first Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has been working continuously to improve the socio-economic landscape, cooperating directly or indirectly with numerous institutions to finance critical national projects.

SMEs undergoing 'Tasees' programme eligible for ASMED's Jahiziah scheme

Reaching yet another milestone in its endeavour to enhance entrepreneurship and innovation in the sultanate, Khimji Ramdas (KR) Eshraqa's 'Tasees' pre-incubation programme has been granted 'approved' status for the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development's (ASMED) popular Jahiziah scheme.

This breakthrough makes every small medium enterprise (SME) owner undergoing the program eligible to apply for a loan with Oman Development Bank (ODB) under the Jahiziah scheme, at just two percent for ten years.

ASMED's conditions for being eligible to apply for the scheme include nationality (must be Omanis), having a project idea ready for implementation, and attending the entire length of a training program, such as that conducted by 'Tasees'.

Participants must also prepare a file on the project idea and pass an evaluation to be eligible for the ODB loan under the Jahiziah scheme.

'Tasees' pre-incubation training programmes introduce budding as well as existing SME



owners having creative and feasible ideas, to business essentials that help them transform their preliminary idea or concepts into viable product or service offerings. Eventually leading them to form real-time businesses, within specific phases.

Discussing the role played by 'Tasees' in SME development and empowerment, Nailesh Khimji, Khimji Ramdas Group Director, said, "Tasees' has helped nurture the dreams of aspiring Omani entrepreneurs and paved the way for several innovative businesses. With small businesses fast becoming the backbone of local communities and an engine for the national econ-

omy under Oman's Vision 2040, it is important to ensure that SMEs have access to the right financial resources, insights and training. Eshraqa's 'Tasees' programmes have been designed in line with this; and we are extremely pleased that the participants of the pre-incubation program now have the opportunity to avail of ASMED's renowned Jahiziah scheme."

Haitam Khalid al Qarni, assistant manager for Development and Empowerment, ASMED, said, "Our approval of Eshraqa's 'Tasees' Pre-incubation programme comes as a continuation and translation of the efforts made by ASMED to en-

hance the growth of the national economy. Eshraqa 'Tasees' Pre-Incubation have been developed keeping up with the needs of the SME sector, and aim to enable the sector to enhance their capabilities. Like Eshraqa's 'Tasees', we encourage other private sector companies to come forward and do their bit in working with SMEs as a part of their social responsibility initiatives."

Nadeem Ahmed, chief consultant - Eshraqa and Tasees Mentors, said, "Having the SMEs undergoing our pre-incubation programme become eligible for ASMED's Jahiziah scheme is a major milestone in 'Tasees' journey."

ASICS with Apparel Group to open retail stores in GCC

Japanese sports brand ASICS and leading regional conglomerate Apparel Group have partnered to launch ASICS retail stores in Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain.

Signifying the brand's commitment to the region, the franchise contract encompasses the rollout of 20 stores within the next five years and kick starts with the official opening of ASICS store in Qatar on December 5.

Located in Doha Festival City Mall, the first ASICS retail concept in Qatar features 165 square meters of space, showcasing running, tennis, padel, volleyball and kids collections. Customers can find in store the new GEL-KAYANO 29 - the running shoe that is arguably ASICS' most iconic model and that has now been improved even further through advanced technologies, as well as NOVABLAST 3 shoe - the third generation of ASICS' unique cushioning running shoe



that offers a bouncing running experience and combines Japanese origami design with technology.

The new ASICS stores will also feature ASICS' Run Analyzer, a free ASICS specialised gait analysis and foot mapping technology that helps customers find the right running shoe for their personal running style, increases running efficiency and reduces load on the foot. Trained

staff members in-store assist with fittings and diagnostic services, pronation analysis, supination and pressure distribution, creating a unique shopping experience for consumers.

"We are very proud to partner with Apparel Group for the launch of ASICS stores in the GCC. This marks a new stage of growth for the brand in the Middle East and signifies our com-

mitment to enhancing communities through sports," said ASICS Arabia GM Mano Takayuki.

The next openings in line are set to roll out in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, bringing Europe's #1 running and tennis brand's retail concept to the rest of the Middle East, spearheaded by sustainable design and usage of sustainable materials throughout the stores, as part of the brand's mission to

achieve net zero emissions by 2050, helping conserve the ability of future generations to continue experiencing the uplifting power of sport on the mind.

Neeraj Teckchandani, CEO of Apparel Group said, "As Apparel Group continues its journey to strengthen its position as one of the leading retail conglomerates in the region and globally, we are proud to announce our strategic partnership with ASICS."

"The opening of ASICS stores in the region allows us to connect further with local, grass root sports communities and share our passion for movement and Sound Mind Sound Body philosophy," said Ana Seixas, Marketing Manager, ASICS Arabia. We are witnessing unparallel growth in running, tennis and padel sports in the Middle East, and we want to ensure we help those sports enthusiasts to find the right footwear and apparel to increase their performance."

Indian embassy celebrates ITEC Day in Muscat

The Indian Embassy in Muscat on Tuesday celebrated the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Day in its premises in Muscat, a press release said.

The function was attended by more than 100 participants, which included ITEC alumni from Oman, comprising officials and professionals from diverse sectors who have participated in various training courses in India under ITEC Program during previous years, it added.

H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim bin Said al Mahrouqiayah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Sultanate of Oman was the chief guest on this occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Indian Ambassador H E Amit Narang noted that the Indian

capacity building programme ITEC showcases the traditional Indian concept of sharing knowledge for global good.

Stressing that India is a committed partner in Oman's journey to achieve objectives of 'Oman Vision 2040', Ambassador Narang expressed his happiness that over the years, ITEC program has been enthusiastically subscribed to by hundreds of Omani officials and has not only facilitated specialised training and skill upgradation but also acted as a bridge to connect Indian and Omani people. He highlighted that under India's G-20 Presidency, India has invited Oman as its special and valued guest and this will provide yet another platform for strengthening collaboration on training, skilling and capacity building.

Rolling red carpet to African leaders, US warns of ‘destabilising’ China and Russia

49 African leaders flew into the Washington cold for the summit with United States

Washington, US - The United States warned on Tuesday that China and Russia were destabilising Africa with their growing inroads as it rolled out the red carpet to the continent’s leaders and pledged billions of dollars in support.

Forty-nine African leaders flew into the Washington cold for the first continent-wide summit with the United States in eight years as President Joe Biden seeks to use personal diplomacy to win back influence.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, at a panel with several African presidents at the start of the three-day summit, charged that US rivals had a different approach. Austin said China was expanding its footprint in Africa ‘on a daily basis’ through its

growing economic influence.

“The troubling piece there is they’re not always transparent in terms of what they’re doing and that creates problems that will be eventually destabilising, if they’re not already,” Austin said.

Russia was ‘continuing to peddle cheap weapons’ and deploying ‘mercenaries across the continent’, he added.

“And that is destabilising as well.”

But the Biden administration has been careful not to present Africans with an us-or-them choice, believing it is futile to try to turn the tide on China’s massive infrastructure spending.

Health and space cooperation

Biden plans to unveil US\$55bn for Africa over three years. In one of the first announcements, the White House said the United States would invest US\$4bn by the 2025 fiscal year to train African health workers, a rising priority for Washington since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The summit also brought in NASA, with Nigeria and Rwanda becoming the first African nations to sign the Artemis accords, a US-led bid for



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (right) and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin participate in a Peace, Security and Governance Forum during the US-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, DC, on Tuesday (AFP)

international cooperation on traveling to the Moon, Mars and beyond.

The Artemis accords, which already include European allies, Japan and several Latin American powers, come as China rapidly expands its own lunar programme and as tensions with Russia threaten its post-Cold War work with the United States on space. China has rejected criticism of its role in Africa, with its

ambassador in Washington, Qin Gang, saying the continent should not be a place for ‘major powers’ competition.’

In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters on Wednesday that Washington ‘should respect the will of the African people and take concrete actions to help Africa’s development, instead of concentrating its efforts on smearing and at-

relations with Washington soured sharply over the Tigray war that broke out two years ago, paid his first visit to Washington since the conflict.

Meeting him inside central Washington’s convention center, Secretary of State Antony Blinken voiced hope over an agreement signed last month in

China has rejected criticism of its role in Africa, saying the continent should not be a place for ‘major powers’ competition

South Africa between Ethiopia’s government and Tigrayan rebels.

“We have, I think, a historic moment for the country,” Blinken told him.

Aid for Somalia

The United States also announced another US\$411mn in assistance for Somalia where a new assessment found ‘catastrophic’ hunger, even though the United Nations said aid has

averted a full-blown famine.

The Horn of Africa has been devastated by five consecutive failed rainy seasons, with Somalia already struggling after decades of turbulence and Al-Shabaab militant rebels.

“These climate shocks have weakened the society,” Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said, ahead of expected announcements by Biden on climate efforts in Africa.

Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix Tshisekedi, in talks with Blinken, blamed climate change for floods that have killed some 100 people in the capital Kinshasa.

In Somalia, Mohamud also claimed successes against the rebels, days after Somali forces seized the key town held by militants since 2016 with the help of US air strikes and an African Union force.

But he warned that military means alone were insufficient.

“I have been telling my colleagues today that engaging with the society and the community is what makes these terrorists like a fish that has run out of water; they cannot exist without a community,” he said.

AFP

Impossible to track COVID cases: China

Beijing, China - China’s top health body said on Wednesday the true scale of coronavirus infections in the country is now ‘impossible’ to track, with officials warning cases are rising rapidly in Beijing after the government abruptly abandoned its zero-COVID policy.

Beijing’s decision to scrap mass testing and quarantines after nearly three years of attempting to stamp out the virus has led to a corresponding drop in officially reported infections, which hit an all-time high only last month.

But those numbers no longer reflected reality because testing is no longer required for much of the country, China’s National Health Commission (NHC) acknowledged on Wednesday.

“Many asymptomatic people are no longer participating in nucleic acid testing, so it is impossible to accurately grasp the actual number of asymptomatic infected people,” the NHC said in a statement on Wednesday.

That came after Vice Premier Sun Chunlan said new infections in the capital were ‘rapidly growing’. Chinese leaders are determined to press ahead even though the country is facing a surge in cases that experts fear it is ill-equipped to manage. Millions of vulnerable elderly are still not fully vaccinated and underfunded hospitals lack the resources to deal with an influx of infected patients.

Authorities said on Wednesday they would begin allowing some vulnerable groups, including those 60 and older, to receive a second booster shot six months after their first.

A line of about 50 people stretched out the door of a fever clinic in Beijing on Wednesday, with multiple residents telling AFP they were infected with COVID. “Basically, if we are lining up here, we are all infected. We would not come here if we weren’t,” one person waiting in line said.

AFP

South African opposition vow to pursue Ramaphosa

Johannesburg, South Africa - South African opposition parties vowed on Wednesday to challenge a vote in parliament that rejected an impeachment inquiry against President Cyril Ramaphosa that could have forced his removal from office.

Ramaphosa, 70, on Tuesday easily survived a vote in the National Assembly that could have initiated proceedings to remove him from office over allegations he concealed a theft of several million dollars at his cattle and game farm in 2020.

Lawmakers voted 214 to 148 against proceeding with an inquiry that critics feared could politically destabilise Africa’s most industrialised country.

But South Africa’s opposition parties vowed not to let the case die, saying they would challenge the decision. The African Transformation Movement, which tabled the motion that led to the creation of an inquiry panel that concluded Ramaphosa may be guilty of misconduct, said it would appeal to the high court in



ANC MPs cheer following a vote in parliament, held to initiate impeachment proceedings against Cyril Ramaphosa, in Cape Town on Tuesday (AFP)

Cape Town on Monday.

“The decision by parliament not to investigate, we view that as irrational,” party leader Vuyolwethu Zungula, told AFP. “We are going to court to challenge the decision,” he added.

The Democratic Alliance, the country’s main opposition party, said it was weighing its legal and parliamentary options. “We are not prepared to allow the matter to just simply go without any further exploration,” party law-

maker Siviwe Gwarube told AFP.

Economic Freedom Fighters, a leftist group and the second largest opposition party, called for a ‘judicial review on an urgent basis’ of the parliament’s vote, dismissing the open ballot system as ‘flawed and characterised by fear’.

Ramaphosa survived Tuesday’s vote thanks to support from the African National Congress (ANC).

AFP

US launches space force unit in S Korea

Seoul, South Korea - The United States military launched a space force unit in South Korea on Wednesday that will help better detect ballistic missile launches from North Korea.

North Korea has carried out a record-breaking blitz of weapons tests this year, including its newest intercontinental ballistic missile last month.

The new unit will provide ‘near-real-time detection and warning of ballistic missile launches’, according to a statement from US Forces Korea (USFK).

“Just 48 miles (77km) north of us exists an existential threat; a threat that we must be prepared to deter, defend against, and - if required - defeat,” said Lieutenant Colonel Joshua McCullion, who will lead the new space force unit.

The new unit enhances the ‘ironclad commitment to the US-Korean alliance’, he said.

Around 28,500 US troops are stationed in the South to help protect it from the nuclear-armed North with which the South is technically still at war since the 1950-53 Korean War



US soldiers attend the activation ceremony for the US Space Forces Korea in Pyeongtaek on Wednesday (AFP)

ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

Former president Donald Trump ordered the creation of Space Force in 2018, arguing the Pentagon needed it to tackle vulnerabilities in space and assert US dominance in orbit.

The new unit in South Korea is one of the few space force units to operate outside the US mainland. Last month the US armed forces activated a space force component command at its Indo-Pacific Command in

Hawaii.

South Korea’s Air Force launched its own space squadron earlier this month as it seeks to bolster space command coordination with the US.

Pyeongyang, which is banned from testing ballistic missiles by repeated UN Security Council resolutions, has claimed its weapons tests are a legitimate response to Washington’s moves to boost the protection it offers to allies Seoul and Tokyo.

AFP

Fiji PM vows to respect result, as votes counted

Suva, Fiji - Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama on Wednesday vowed to respect an election that could end his 16-year grip on power, as his rival ex-coup leader took an early lead with a small fraction of the vote counted.

Bainimarama, 68, seized control of Fiji in a 2006 putsch, but legitimised his grip on power with election wins in 2014 and 2018.

Standing in the way of Bainimarama’s third elected term is his chief political rival, Sitiveni Rabuka, a 74-year-old former military commander nicknamed ‘Rambo’ after leading two coups in 1987.

With just 70 of the more than 2,000 voting stations reporting, Rabuka’s People’s Alliance party had registered 4,450 votes, while Bainimarama’s Fiji First party had 2,760 votes.

Fiji now faces a nervous wait



Election Commission officials prepare to open the ballot boxes for counting during Fiji’s general election in the capital city Suva on Wednesday (AFP)

for a winner to be declared - ballots must be tallied from remote islands and highland villages.

The final count is not expected for at least two days, although provisional returns will come more quickly.

The election is being seen as a

test of the nation’s fledgling democracy.

Asked whether he would accept the outcome, win or lose, Bainimarama said ‘of course’ as he cast his ballot in the capital Suva with his granddaughter in tow.

He then lashed out at reporters, suggesting they ask ‘better questions’.

Rabuka said he would readily concede defeat if beaten, and Bainimarama should do the same.

“I think he will not. So I’m hop-

ing for a flood of votes in our favour, so that it makes any attempt at that course futile,” he said.

“We cannot live forever, we cannot rule forever, so successions from an opposition party should be accepted.”

In a contested vote the military could be key. The country’s top commander has said the armed forces would respect the election result.

Blake Johnson from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute said any arguments about the result would likely be dealt with through the courts, rather than another coup. “Should Rabuka win, this will be Fiji’s first test at completing a peaceful handover of power in nearly two decades,” he told AFP on Wednesday.

“If Bainimarama refuses to accept defeat, we could see several legal challenges tie up the parlia-

mentary and judicial systems for some time.”

Rabuka - who is also a former Fijian international rugby player and Commonwealth Games hammer thrower - has signalled that Fiji could loosen its ties with China if he is elected.

Fiji has grown closer to Beijing under Bainimarama, who used a ‘look north’ policy to stabilise the economy after Australia and New Zealand hit the country with heavy trade sanctions in retaliation for his 2006 coup.

The buildup to the vote has been marked by a strict media blackout, preventing local journalists from covering any aspect of the election for 48 hours before voting day and until polls close. Suva’s distinctive open-air busses blasted reggae and dance music as they carried voters to polling centres around the city.

AFP

Court denies ex-president Castillo's appeal for release as protests rage in Peru

Lima, Peru - A court in Peru rejected on Tuesday an appeal by former president Pedro Castillo to be freed from detention on charges of rebellion and conspiracy, as officials warned protests demanding his release could spiral out of control.

Prosecutors late on Tuesday filed a request to hold Castillo in pre-trial detention for 18 months, marking the formal start of the investigation against him, a prosecution source told AFP.

Castillo, who was removed from office and arrested after attempting to dissolve parliament and rule by decree, had earlier told the court he would 'never give up' his cause.

Castillo also called on police and the military to 'stop killing' protesters who continue to demand his release and reinstatement, after violent clashes between security forces and demonstrators left seven people dead in recent days.

But Judge Cesar San Martin rejected his appeal for release following a virtual hearing.

Castillo's demise was rapid after he had attempted to sideline parliament last Wednesday just hours before it was due to hold a third impeachment vote against him. Castillo and his family were being investigated for alleged corruption.

Congress went ahead with its vote and overwhelmingly decided to impeach him for 'moral incapacity.'

He was provisionally detained for seven days.

Within hours Castillo's vice president, Dina Boluarte, a former prosecutor, was sworn in as his successor.

"I will never give up and abandon this popular cause that brought me here," the leftist Castillo said during Tuesday's hearing.



Andean peasants, supporters of former President Pedro Castillo, block the road leading to the Ilave International Bridge on the border between Peru and Bolivia in Puno, demanding the release of Castillo on Tuesday (AFP)

I will never give up and abandon this popular cause that brought me here... I am not a thief, a rapist or a thug

PEDRO CASTILLO

"From here I would like to urge the armed forces and national police to lay down their arms and stop killing these people thirsty for justice."

He said his arrest was unjust and arbitrary.

"I am not a thief, a rapist, corrupt or a thug," he added, before being interrupted by the judge who asked him to keep to legal arguments.

Seven dead

Castillo's supporters began protesting almost immediately after his arrest, with demonstrations escalating on Sunday when

two people were killed in clashes between demonstrators and security forces.

Another five people died on Monday in more violent clashes.

Six of the seven deaths have been in the Apurimac region, where Boluarte was born.

The other occurred in Peru's second largest city Arequipa as police cleared hundreds of protesters from the airport, where they had set up barricades of burning tires, logs and rocks.

"This is a very serious social convulsion, we fear that it will lead to an uprising because there are people calling for an insurrection, who are asking to take up arms," rights ombudsman Eliana Revollar told AFP. She said more than 200 people have been injured in the unrest.

Boluarte called for 'calm, peace, that we can live together as siblings' and said she would consider extending the state of emergency already declared in flashpoint areas to a national level.

On Sunday she also vowed to bring forward elections from 2026 to 2024 in a bid to ease tensions.

The government on Monday fired the 26 regional prefects who had been appointed by Castillo, accusing them of 'inciting protests'. The country's right-leaning Congress convened an emergency session on Sunday to discuss the crisis, but it was suspended after fighting broke out.

Mexico's leftist President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador gave Castillo his backing on Tuesday, insisting his country still recognises him as president.

A day earlier, the leftist governments of Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Bolivia released a joint statement saying Castillo had been 'the victim of antidemocratic harassment' since his election.

Peru's foreign ministry responded by insisting that Congress had acted in line with the constitution.

AFP

Iran pushes list of journalists in jail worldwide to record high

Paris, France - Iran's protest crackdown has helped push the number of journalists imprisoned worldwide to a record high of 533 in 2022, according to a report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published on Wednesday.

The figure is up from 488 in 2021, already a record, according to the France-based NGO.

More than half are detained in just five countries: China, which remains 'the world's biggest jailer of journalists' with 110, followed by Myanmar (62), Iran (47), Vietnam (39) and Belarus (31).

"Dictatorial and authoritarian regimes are filling their prisons faster than ever by jailing journalists," said Christophe Deloire, RSF Secretary-General, in a statement.

"This new record in the number of detained journalists confirms the pressing and urgent



Protesters stand in front of the illuminated Brandenburg Gate, in support of demonstrators in Iran, in Berlin on Tuesday (AFP)

need to resist these unscrupulous governments and to extend our active solidarity to all those who embody the ideal of journalistic freedom, independence and pluralism."

Iran is the only country that was not part of the list last year, said RSF, which has been publishing the annual tally since 1995. It said Iran had locked up an 'unprecedented' 34 media

professionals since protests broke out in September over the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who was arrested for breaching the country's strict dress code. The number of women journalists in prison is also at an all-time high worldwide, rising from 60 to 78 since 2021, largely due to greater numbers entering the profession.

AFP

Ukraine secures €1bn-aid from West 'to get through winter'

Paris, France - Ukraine's Western allies pledged an additional one billion euros (US\$1.1bn) in emergency winter aid on Tuesday, responding to pleas from President Volodymyr Zelensky to help the country withstand Russia's onslaught against its energy grid.

Around 70 countries and international organisations gathered in Paris for a meeting aimed at enabling Ukrainians 'to get through this winter,' said French President Emmanuel Macron.

In a video message, Zelensky said Ukraine needed assistance worth around €800mn in the short term for its battered energy sector.

"Of course it is a very high amount, but the cost is less than the cost of a potential blackout," Zelensky told the conference via video link.



French President Emmanuel Macron delivers a speech during the French-Ukrainian conference in Paris on Tuesday (AFP)

Pledges for the energy sector comprised €400mn of the funds raised on Tuesday, France's Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said. Ukraine needs spare parts for repairs, high-capacity generators, extra gas as well as increased electricity imports, Zelensky said.

"Generators have become as

necessary as armoured vehicles and bullet-proof jackets," he said.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said 40 to 50 per cent of the country's grid was out of action because of Russia's strikes. Many areas of the country have power for only a few hours a day.

AFP

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At least four dead in Channel boat incident

London, UK - At least four people died when a small boat apparently packed with migrants capsized in freezing temperatures in the Channel overnight, the UK government said on Wednesday.

Dozens of others were plucked from the waters of one of the world's busiest shipping lanes in a large-scale rescue operation involving UK and French emergency services.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called it a 'tragic loss of human life', just as he tries to tighten rules to prevent record numbers of migrants from attempting the crossing.

British media said earlier that 43 people were rescued, including more than 30 who had fallen overboard, with fears the death toll will rise.

Migrants have been intercepted regularly in the Channel in recent years, using small boats ill-suited for trips on the open sea.

At least 27 people drowned while attempting to cross the Channel in a dinghy on November 24 last year.



Britain's Home Secretary Suella Braverman giving a statement to MPs, in the House of Commons, in London, on Wednesday, following the sinking of a boat of migrants attempting to cross the Channel from France overnight (AFP)

The International Organization for Migration estimates that 205 migrants have been recorded as missing in the Channel since 2014.

Nikolai Posner, from the Utopia 56 group helping migrants in northern France, said they received a voice message and location notification from a

boat in distress at 2:53am local time (0153 GMT).

"We forwarded it to the French and British coastguard by phone. At 3:40am (0240 GMT), the French coastguard told us the British were handling it," he told AFP.

"The location that was sent to us was in French waters. At

2:59am the person who contacted us was no longer receiving messages on WhatsApp."

Posner, however, said he could not be sure if the message originated from the same small boat.

Lifeboats

The UK Maritime and Coast-

A small boat apparently packed with migrants capsized in freezing temperatures in the Channel overnight. Dozens of people were plucked from the waters

guard Agency (MCA) coordinated the rescue operation, which also involved Border Force, police and other emergency responders.

Lifeboats were launched from the Channel port of Dover at 3:07am British time (0307 GMT), followed by vessels from Ramsgate and Hastings along the coast, it added.

A government spokesman said: "At 0305 today, authorities were alerted to an incident in the Channel concerning a migrant small boat in distress.

"After a coordinated search and rescue operation led by HM

Coastguard, it is with regret that there have been four confirmed deaths as a result of this incident, investigations are ongoing and we will provide further information in due course."

The MCA said at least four lifeboats and three coastguard rescue teams were dispatched, as well as two coastguard helicopters. A fishing vessel in the area also helped.

French officials provided a helicopters and a navy patrol boat.

Tens of thousands of migrants now regularly attempt to cross the Channel from northern France to southern England in small boats, in a trend that has grown hugely in recent years.

More than 43,000 migrants have made the journey across the Channel so far this year - a record - creating tensions between London and Paris about preventative measures.

Wednesday's incident came the day after UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced a new deal with Albania to stem the flow of migrants crossing the

Channel from mainland Europe.

A third of all those arriving in UK waters this year - almost 13,000 - have been Albanian.

He said that, under the agreement, Albanians arriving by boat across the Channel would be immediately returned to their home country.

Freezing weather conditions in northern Europe and windy conditions on the Channel have deterred crossings in recent days.

But a drop in the wind appears to have prompted the latest attempt.

Migrant welfare charities operating in France said winter conditions posed added to the dangers of trying to cross the Channel illicitly.

"Crossings are even more difficult in winter," said Utopia 56's Posner.

"The cold makes a difference if people fall overboard, the survival time in the water is much lower." He added the risk of deadly hypothermia was 'extremely high' once people entered the water.

AFP

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Fear persists 10 years after Delhi gang rape

New Delhi, India - Ten years ago the brutal gang rape and murder of a young woman on a Delhi bus horrified the world and shone a spotlight on high rates of sexual violence in India.

Jyoti Singh, 23, and a male friend boarded a bus on the evening of December 16, 2012.

Savagely attacked, tortured with an iron rod and dumped at the roadside, Singh survived long enough to identify her attackers, earning herself the nickname 'Nirbhaya' - 'fearless'. But the student died from her injuries in a Singapore hospital 13 days later.

It sparked huge protests that forced authorities to promise to do more to protect women. In 2020 four of the six attackers - one died in jail, another was a juvenile - were hanged.

But a decade after the assault many women are still scared to travel at night in India's capital, a sprawling metropolis of 20mn people. AFP talks to the victim's mother and the chief police investigator at the time.

The mother

"Obviously the pain doesn't go,"



Women are seen travelling on a Delhi Transport Corporation bus in New Delhi on December 8 this year (AFP)

Singh's mother Asha Devi told AFP. "She was in so much pain during the 12 to 13 days that she was alive," she said in her modest two-bedroom Delhi home.

"How can anybody do this to another human being? Because my daughter struggled to even breathe." Since the attack Devi has become a prominent campaigner on women's safety, counselling survivors' families, helping their legal battles and protesting for justice.

The 57-year-old, who with her husband has set up a fund for

rape survivors, sits next to a glass cabinet full of mementos of their daughter and awards for their efforts. "My daughter's suffering gave me the strength to fight this battle," she said.

The case led to tougher punishments for rapists, more CCTV cameras and street lights, and safety marshals on some buses.

There are now also centres for rape survivors for legal and medical help.

But Devi said that sexual assaults remain all too common and that 'nothing has changed'

when it comes to seeking justice.

"If any incident happens, either the parents are blamed or the girl. No one questions the boy or talks about his mistake. "Why was the girl out at night?" they ask. "There are still so many cases, such horrific cases," Devi said. "I don't think anyone is afraid of the law."

India registered 31,677 rape cases last year, an average of 86 a day, according to the latest official criminal statistics - a near-13 per cent increase on 2020.

In a patriarchal society, daughters are often considered a burden thanks to the persistence of the dowry tradition.

In rural areas, where 70 per cent of Indians live, the problem is deeper.

Girls who wear jeans, use mobile phones or go out with boyfriends are often seen as sexually permissive. Life for lower-caste girls and women is particularly dangerous.

"The change has to come first in society and families so that daughters are considered as daughters and not a burden," Devi said.

The cop

The chief police investigator in the case - herself a woman - interviewed Singh in her hospital bed. "She understood that she had been hurt and that she would have a limited time to survive," said Chhaya Sharma, now 50. "Don't spare them," Singh, whose attackers had left 13 bite marks on her body, told her.

"The way she was interacting with me was very confident, despite the pain and trauma she was going through," Sharma said.

"She was very determined about the fact that she wanted these persons caught."

The policewoman, who has gone on to become joint commissioner of police for Delhi's eastern district, hugged her mother and promised her she would get justice for her daughter. Often, rapists and victims are known to each other. In this case, 'you're looking for a needle in the haystack'.

"Out of 370 buses, we had to find the correct bus," Sharma told AFP. "We were walking a very tight rope and a very thin line."

AFP

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IN TOWN

BADR AL SAMAA 20TH ANNIVERSARY



Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals organised a concert at the City Amphitheatre last Thursday to celebrate its 20th anniversary in Oman. Photos: V K Shafeer



'TAPAS & PAELLA' - SPANISH FOOD WEEK



The Embassy of Spain in Muscat launched 'Tapas & Paella' at the Spanish ambassador's residence to promote Spanish gastronomy. Photos: V K Shafeer

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which island was sold by Genoa to France in 1764, was ruled by Britain for two years from 1794 to 1796, and then returned to France?
- A. Crete
B. New Guinea
C. Madagascar
D. Corsica
02. Tierra del Fuego sits in the southernmost curl of which continent?
- A. Australia
B. Europe
C. South America
D. North America
03. In Charles Dickens' "Great Expectations", who or what was Abel Magwitch?
- A. 5
B. 8
C. 6
D. 7

Answers: 1.D 2.C 3.D

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

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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

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

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ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

There are some outdated ideas or habits that are holding you back right now, and today they could cause a conflict between the way your life is now and the way you want it to be in five years. There's no need to make a big decision about things right away, but you'll need to be prepared to make a sacrifice when the time comes.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

An unexpected invitation should make you think twice today. There are hidden ramifications that you should be aware of before you make any commitments or pledge any emotional alliance. Time is going to be loosening up soon, but that doesn't mean you have the right to waste it. Weigh the pros and cons of moving forward with a new partner.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your mind is going to be switching to a much more goal-oriented path soon, so today is a good day to enjoy taking life as it comes. Although you may already have a clear vision about where you want to go, who you want to get to know better, or what changes you want to create, don't try to tackle them just yet. Right now, you should save your proactive attitude for another time.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Someone close to you is moving more into their own external world right now, so don't take it personally if they cancel some together time you two had planned. Give them space to figure out whatever it is they're trying to figure out. Part of being a good friend or partner is knowing when to step back and provide space.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

One of the people in your life is going through a major transitional period, and their emotions are running high, so try to give them the space they need to work things out. Overall, there could be an excessive amount of tumultuous energy in your life right now, so try to avoid or eliminate any external conflict you don't absolutely need to deal with.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Some days (like today) you can choose your mood. So if you're ready to get active in a group project or activity, just start doing it and your energy will pick up and carry you through. Plus, if you can get most of your daily business out of the way early, you'll find it easy to turn away from purely personal worries and jump right into the fray.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Surprising connections could be popping up all over the place today. The usual places you visit are popular with some other people you know, so get ready for some unexpected meetings. Try not to stay too deep inside your own head right now. It's important to be open to making new connections with strangers or casual acquaintances.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

With your charm, compassion, and intelligence, you'll make a good keystone for a bridge between friends today. When you're in the middle, negotiating and helping everyone stay focused, there is no way to avoid making peace between warring parties. What you should keep in mind right now is that there are three sides to every story.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You have a lot of power over other people today. It might be your charm, it might be your financial influence, or it might just be dumb luck. Whatever the reason, you reign supreme right now. Use your position to feed your ego and make yourself more comfortable, but don't let this power go to your head.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You might be on a roll right now, but you still need to conserve your energy for the bigger (and better) things that are coming down the road. Try not to get too tied to the idea that progress can only be defined by how much you can get done in a specific amount of time. Life isn't a race, so slow down. Don't take on any new projects.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone who exemplifies where you want to be in life could come to you for guidance today. They want to know your ideas about what their next move should be. If you're surprised by their request, don't be. They admire you more than you realize and respect you too. Overall, you're not appreciating the value you add to your professional environment.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A youthful attitude and energy is sweeping into your life right now, perhaps fueled by the unexpected presence of children. This new influence over your way of thinking is something to embrace, because if you can let yourself be more hopeful about more things, you can find a new enthusiasm for the same old routine. Being more childlike means assuming nothing.

entertainment



SINGER BRYCE LEATHERWOOD BAGS THE VOICE '22

Bryce Leatherwood sang his heart out all the way to *The Voice* season 22 finale and walked away a winner! The 22-year-old country singer was declared the new champion of *The Voice* during the epic finale on December 13. From his Blind Audition to the top 5, Bryce stayed true to his country roots with his standout performances.



SELENA GOMEZ GOES MAKEUP-FREE

Selena Gomez showed off her natural beauty as she bundled up in a black fur coat in New York City this week. The 30-year-old actress and singer wore an all-black ensemble under her floor-length fur coat that consisted of black sweats and a turtleneck sweater. She paired the monochrome look with black platform boots and accessorised with black shades. The *Rare Beauty* founder went fresh-faced as she was greeted by eager fans along the bustling streets of the Big Apple.

ADAM SANDLER TO RECEIVE MARK TWAIN PRIZE FOR AMERICAN HUMOUR



One of comedy's highest honors is headed Adam Sandler's way. The superstar comedian has been selected to receive the Mark Twain Prize for American Humour. The *Hustle* star will receive the honour during a gala ceremony at Washington, DC's John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on March 19. The Mark Twain Prize recognises individuals who have had an impact on American society in ways similar to the distinguished 19th-century novelist and essayist Samuel Clemens, best known as Mark Twain.



'BANSHEES OF INISHERIN' TOPS GOLDEN GLOBES NOMINATIONS

Black comedy *The Banshees of Inisherin* topped the Golden Globes nominations on Monday, as the tarnished Hollywood awards show tries to rebuild its reputation following last year's boycott by A-listers and studios. The movie about the abrupt end of a friendship on a tiny Irish island during the 1920s picked up a whopping eight nods - the most for any film in almost two decades - including nominations for star Colin Farrell and director Martin McDonagh. Surreal sci-fi *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

earned six nominations, while raucous Hollywood Golden Age drama *Babylon* and Steven Spielberg's deeply personal *The Fabelmans* took five each. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which organises the Globes, has scrambled to reform itself since long-harboured criticisms of the group's practices went public in early 2021. Seen here, US actress Selenis Leyva and US actress Mayan Lopez speak during the unveiling of the nominations for the 80th Golden Globe awards, in Beverly Hills, California, on December 12.



BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: SALAAM VENKY

Genre: Family drama
Starring: Kajol, Vishal Jethwa, Prakash Raj, Rahul Bose

'DEAD INVESTMENT' WISHES

Salaam Venky is an earnest attempt in telling a story about a dying man determined to make his existence worthwhile and a mother's anguish and zest to give her son the best passing. Based on Srikanth Murthy's celebrated work inspired by the true story of K Venkatesh - *The Last Hurrah*, *Salaam Venky* is a movie about a boy (Vishal Jethwa) fighting a rare genetic disorder called Duchene Muscular Dystrophy. Living the last days of his life he conveys his dying wish to his mother, who now has the task to fulfil it. Carry enough tissues along as *Salaam*



Venky is a guaranteed tear jerker, no matter how hardhearted you are. And actor-director Revathy makes sure there's something to soften all types of audiences. The film is about 24-year-old Venkatesh, his mother Sujatha, and their fight against this

debilitating disease and a system that denies him euthanasia. While Kajol does a praiseworthy performance as Sujatha - Venkatesh's (Vishal Jethwa) mother - Vishal is destined to get noticed after his performance in this film. This true story of a boy who tried to fulfill his dying wish of donating his organs to people in need is designed to evoke an emotional response from the audience. It also indicates reality wherein people are either very good and sympathetic towards a patient like Venky, or outright distraught like his father who refers to him as a 'dead investment'. Venky is a happy, Bollywood-loving, chess-playing youngster who has a film dialogue for every occasion. The first half, rather elaborately, introduces us to the characters and their dynamics. His equation with his doctor (Rajeev Khandelwal), nurse (Mala Parvathi), sister (Ridhi Kumar), sweetheart (Aneet Padda), and even spiritual guide (Ananth Mahadevan) are commendable but the audience is kept seeking explanations. A good watch!

Rating ★★★★★

HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: VIOLENT NIGHT

Genre: Action, comedy
Starring: David Harbour, John Leguizamo, Alex Hassell, Alexis Louder



CHRISTMAS EVE HOSTAGE FIASCO

Violent Night is a 2022 American Christmas action-comedy film starring David Harbour as Santa Claus, who fights mercenaries who have taken a wealthy family hostage in their home. Directed by Tommy Wirkola, *Violent Night* delivers one of the most action-packed Christmas eve story you could imagine, albeit with good measure of humour throughout. The film is not crafted with much care as one can see through the cliched plot that relies far too heavily on shockingly graphic violence at the expense of all else. You may not get most of the jokes but overall it makes a good package of family entertainment (that is, before the teenagers fly the nest). The film centres on the Lightstones, a wealthy family that finds themselves held hostage by a group of mercenaries on Christmas eve. This team wasn't expecting an ally to arrive, which turns out to be Santa Claus (Harbour). Before continuing to deliver his presents around the world, Santa takes time to show this Nick is no saint. Josh Miller and Patrick Casey's screenplay provides enough laughs, and without the humour, the film doesn't have much to offer, since the Lightstone family is underdeveloped and unlikable. The exception to that is Trudy Lightstone (Brady), a child who just wants her parents to get back together this Christmas. Drunkenly delivering gifts, Santa arrives at the Lightstone estate, where the caterers reveal themselves to be mercenaries with Christmas-themed codenames. Led by 'Mr Scrooge', they slaughter the staff and take the family hostage. While this action-packed Christmas film doesn't offer anything groundbreaking, it's a good idea to be loaded with popcorn and cola to take you through the humour to keep you cheerful during the festive season. Worth skipping, with no regrets.

Rating ★★★★★

COMING SOON



AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER
Jake Sully lives with his newfound family formed on the planet of Pandora. Once a familiar threat returns to finish what was previously started, Jake must work with Neytiri and the army of the Na'vi race to protect their planet.
Genre: Action, fantasy
Starring: Zoe Saldana, Sam Worthington, Michelle Yeoh
Language: English





FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022

SHH...GENIUS

Messi hails Argentina character after reaching final

Doha, Qatar - A delighted Lionel Messi hailed his side's strength of character after he starred in Tuesday's 3-0 World Cup semi-final win over Croatia.

Messi scored the opener from the penalty spot and then had a hand in two goals scored by Julian Alvarez at Lusail Stadium as Argentina eased through to Sunday's final where they will face either France or Morocco.

The victory continued a remarkable turnaround from Lionel Scaloni's team after they started their campaign in Qatar with a shock 2-1 defeat at the hands of Saudi Arabia.

"I think the first match was a very tough blow for us because we had been 36 games unbeaten," said Messi, who

spoke to reporters after being named man of the match.

"To start in that way when nobody expected us to lose was a real test for this group of players. But we showed how strong we are.

"What we have done since then was really difficult because every game has been a final.

"We have played five fi-

nals, won them all, and let's hope we win the next one."

Messi added: "This group has the strength of character but is also so intelligent. We have a team that is capable of reading games, and that knows how to suffer when they have to suffer. We have a great coaching staff who don't leave anything to chance. That helps because it means we always know what we need to do."

Argentina's captain is now the joint-top scorer at the tournament with five goals as he looks to win the World Cup for the first time in his glittering career at the age of 35.

His goal that opened the scoring against Croatia was his 11th World Cup goal, allowing him to equal the Argentine record held by Gabriel Batistuta.

"I am really enjoying myself. Luckily I feel good and strong going into every game," he said.

"In the last game we were taken to extra time and today we were tired but we seem to find strength where we have none."

AFP

Argentina's Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring against Croatia in the semi-final on Tuesday (AFP)

Lionel Messi takes Argentina to World Cup final after a comfortable victory against Croatia

Doha, Qatar - An inspired Lionel Messi scored from the penalty spot and Julian Alvarez struck twice as Argentina beat

when the game showed signs of life with a low pot shot from outside the box by Enzo Fernandez but Croatia keeper Do-

Croatia 3-0 on Tuesday to reach their second World Cup final in eight years.

The two-times world champions, backed by a huge majority of the crowd at the Lusail Stadium, produced their best display of the tournament to ensure they will meet the winners of Wednesday's semi-final clash between holders France and Morocco in Sunday's final.

Messi, 35, who suffered defeat to Germany in the 2014 final, is desperate to crown his extraordinary career by winning his first World Cup and bringing Argentina a third title to add to those won in 1978 and 1986.

And after getting his team on the way to victory with a perfectly struck first-half penalty he made sure of the win by brilliantly creating the third goal.

Croatia, runners-up in Russia four years ago, paid the price for some untypically poor defending as they went out in the last four for the second time after their 1998 loss to France in their maiden tournament.

It was not until the 25th minute

minik Livakovic did well to get across and keep it out.

It was a tight affair but then a simple lofted ball over the top from Fernandez caught out the Croatian defence, Alvarez latched on to it, knocking the ball past the advancing Livakovic who collided with the striker and Italian referee Daniele Orsato pointed to the spot.

Scoring record

Livakovic guessed correctly that Messi would go to his left but his dive was in vain as the Argentine's sweetly struck drive flew high into the net to put his side 1-0 up in the 34th minute.

It was Messi's fifth goal of the tournament, making him joint top-scorer with France's Kylian Mbappe.

His 11th career goal - in a record-equalling 25th World Cup appearance - also took him past Gabriel Batistuta as Argentina's all-time World Cup top scorer.

Five minutes later, Argentina doubled their lead when, after a break from a corner, Alvarez picked the ball

MOMENT IN TIME



SUCKER PUNCH: Julian Alvarez (C) celebrates with Lionel Messi after scoring Argentina's



I am really enjoying myself. Luckily I feel good and strong going into every game. In the last game we were taken to extra time and today we were tired but we seem to find strength where we have none.

LIONEL MESSI
Argentina captain

5

The penalty against Croatia on Tuesday, his fifth goal in Qatar, took **Lionel Messi** to the top of the scoring charts alongside Kylian Mbappe



4

Julian Alvarez's double strike in the semifinal against Croatia took his tally to four, the same as Olivier Giroud of France.



S AT WORK!

Argentina into the comprehensive Croatia

up inside his own half and began a long dribble goalwards.

With the Croatian defence backing off, Alvarez rode weak challenges from Josip Juranovic and Borna Sosa and then slipped the ball past Livakovic to send the heavily Argentine crowd into delirium.

Alexis Mac Allister then went close with an angled header from a corner, forcing a fine save out of Livakovic to avoid a third.

All Croatia could muster in response, before the break, was a low Juranovic cross-shot that Emiliano Martinez reacted well to.

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic responded with a double substitution at the break, introducing Nikola Vlasic and Mislav Orsic, and five minutes later and threw on striker Bruno Petkovic.

They were positive moves but still Argentina looked the more dangerous with Messi, after a swift exchange with Fernandez, forcing a save at the near post.

Messi saved his best for last though, tormenting Josko Gvardial down the right before leaving the 20-year-old defender behind and pulling the ball back to Alvarez who coolly slotted home.

Croatia were finished but it was clear that Argentina and Messi are peaking just in time for the biggest game of their lives.



'Still one step to go' for Argentina coach Scaloni

Doha, Qatar - Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni admitted it was difficult not to get carried away after his side beat Croatia in Tuesday's World Cup semi-final but called on his side to quickly gather their focus for the final.

"The truth is that the result maybe didn't reflect the game. I think we deserved to win but maybe not by such a margin," said Scaloni.

Scaloni said he expected his side to find the going tough against a Croatian midfield inspired by Luka Modric.

"They controlled possession at first, but we knew that could happen because they have three top-class midfielders who have been playing together for years and know each other very well.

"We understood that was how the game would go, but the game opened up with the penalty.

"We celebrated because it is exciting to be in the final, but there is still one step to go.

"This is something to enjoy but it's over now, so we need to move on to the next one," said the 44-year-old.



Julian Alvarez (L) celebrates with Lionel Messi after scoring against Croatia

ALVAREZ ARRIVES AS MESSI'S PARTNER IN CRIME

Doha, Qatar - The bad news for whoever faces Argentina in Sunday's World Cup final is that Lionel Messi now has a partner in crime.

Holders France face Morocco in the other semi-final on Wednesday and as they watched from their hotels as Julian Alvarez scored twice in Tuesday's 3-0 semi-final win over Croatia, they must have had a sinking feeling. Having earned the penalty which allowed Messi to open the scoring, Alvarez then exposed Croatia's defence, running with the ball from inside his own half to make it 2-0.

The number nine then wrapped

up the win, in the second half, with a clinical finish from inside the box after being set up by some genius wing-play from Messi.

The 22-year-old Man City forward now has four goals, placing him just one behind joint top scorers Messi and France's Kylian Mbappe.

"We deserved this. We played a great game today. We're in the final, which is what we wanted and now we need to rest and hope for a great game on Sunday," said Alvarez after his greatest night in the famous light blue and white striped shirt.

CROATIA'S DALIC RUES ARGENTINA PENALTY

Doha, Qatar - Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic said the disputed decision to award Argentina a penalty changed the complexion of Tuesday's World Cup semi-final after his side lost 3-0.

Lionel Messi blasted home the opening goal from the spot after Croatia goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic collided with Julian Alvarez, who also struck twice for Argentina at Lusail Stadium.

"Everything was in our hands. We played well for half an hour and had possession. We were not a threat but did have control," said Dalic, who claimed his side should have been awarded a corner just before the penalty.

"We conceded a goal, which was very suspicious. The situation leading to the penalty... it was a little too cheap, a bit too easy to be honest."

"Our goalkeeper did what he did and these are the new rules," he added. "This goal took the match in a different direction."

Dalic also bemoaned his team's lack of a genuine goalscorer.

Croatia created few openings of note and had only two attempts on target in the entire game.

"I congratulate Argentina on the victory," said Dalic. "We have to pull ourselves together, raise our heads. I can't blame the boys for anything - we are going into the fight for third place.

"We don't have much to complain about."



Dalic said his team created "good situations" but failed to produce clear-cut chances.

"We have prepared everything but we missed a real, genuine attacker," he said.

"We lost the match. I have nothing to complain about regarding the boys. They gave their best during this whole tournament.... It is a deserved defeat."

A number of Croatia players have likely played their final World Cup matches including 37-year-old Luka Modric, Ivan Perisic and Dejan Lovren - all of whom started the 2018 final against France, which they lost 4-2.

"Perhaps this is the end of the World Cup generation for a couple of them who have reached a certain age. We'll have to see for the 2026 World Cup," said Dalic.

"I believe this generation will slowly finish off their career at Euro 2024.



Argentina's second goal against Croatia in their semi-final match at Lusail Stadium on Tuesday (AFP)



We conceded a goal, which was very suspicious. The situation leading to the penalty... it was a little too cheap, a bit too easy to be honest. Our goalkeeper did what he did and these are the new rules

ZLATKO DALIC
Croatia coach



Croatia controlled possession at first, but we knew that could happen because they have three top-class midfielders who have been playing together for years and know each other very well.

LIONEL SCALONI
Argentina coach

Argentina delirious as Messi inspires run to World Cup final

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Argentines broke out into song and celebrations after the country's hero Lionel Messi inspired the team to a 3-0 victory over Croatia in Qatar on Tuesday, sending them to the World Cup final.

"We won! I love you Argentina," cried pensioner Pablo Cardozo, 74, as he stood in front of a television screen at a cafe in Buenos Aires, as younger customers cheered him on.

Dozens of people in the cafe broke from their seats and broke out into Argentina's hit World Cup song: "Muchachos, ahora nos volvimos a ilusionar" (which translates as "Lads, now we get excited again") sung by ska band La Mosca.

Cardozo shouted himself almost hoarse with each of Argentina's three goals: first a Messi penalty and then a brace from young forward Julian Alvarez, the second of which came after a mazy run by his captain and the team's talisman.

"I love Julian!" exclaimed Emilia Salvo, 23, as Gabriela Perdiguez, 26, added: "I can't take any more of this excitement, it's a dream!"

Students celebrated in the university neighbourhood of Barrio Clinicas.

Delfina Yacoy, 22, a student of medicine, was another marvelling at

Alvarez's contribution but added that "it was a really tough match, they are two great teams."

"This seemed more difficult than other times, Croatia had just knocked out Brazil," said Clara Cerdeira 20, another student at a pizzeria terrace watching the game on an outdoor screen.

For supermarket employee Rodrigo Sarcino, 24, watching the match at an ice cream shop terrace, centre-back pairing "Nico Otamendi and Cuti (Cristian) Romero are two lions!"

Throughout the country hoards of fans crowded around giant screens to watch the match and let their emotions run wild.

Thousands descended on the popular Punta Mogotes beach in the southern Mar del Plata seaside resort, the home of goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez, waving flags and little harlequin hats. The greatest affection was of course reserved for Messi, the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner who has achieved almost everything possible in the game - except emulating his predecessor as Argentina's idol, Diego Maradona, who inspired the South Americans to World Cup glory in 1986.

AFP



RESCUE ACT

Cheteshwar Pujara, Shreyas Iyer pull India out of trouble on the opening day of Chittagong Test

Chittagong, Bangladesh - Cheteshwar Pujara and Shreyas Iyer pulled India out a hole on Wednesday to put their side in a strong position at 278-6 on the opening day of the first Test against Bangladesh.

India made a brisk start in Chittagong but a double strike by Taijul Islam including Shubman Gill for 20 and danger man Virat Kohli for one left the visitors on the back foot on 48-3.

In between stand-in captain KL Rahul had played on off Khaled Ahmed for 22.

A gutsy 46 by Rishabh Pant including six fours and two sixes helped steady the ship before Mehidy Hasan bowled the wicket-keeper-batsman after lunch.

Pujara and Iyer then came together with India on 112-4 and made the bowlers pay despite signs of spin in the first-day track at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Rock-steady Pujara was bowled by Taijul for his third

wicket of the day but not before the Sussex star had grounded out a workmanlike 90 that included 11 fours.

Wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan dropped Pujara off Ebadot Hos-sain on 12 in the second ball of the second session.

Iyer remained unbeaten at the close on 82, while Axar Patel was out on the last ball of the day for 14, trapped leg-before as the second of off-spinner Mehidy's two wickets.

Catches dropped

Iyer was also dropped on 67 and miraculously survived being bowled by Ebadot on 77 when the bails failed to dislodge, leaving the hosts ruing their missed chances.

"I don't think we are in too much bad position considering the first day of a Test match," Taijul said.

"We are in good position. Maybe we could have been in a better position if the catches



India's Shreyas Iyer (R) and Cheteshwar Pujara run between the wickets during the first day of the first Test against Bangladesh in Chittagong on Wednesday (AFP)

The way I was batting, and looking at the pitch, it's not an easy pitch to bat on, So I am really happy with the way I batted today

CHETESHWAR PUJARA

were taken."

"It happened," he said of Iyer's bails mishap. "The way I was batting, and looking at the pitch, it's

not an easy pitch to bat on. So I am really happy with the way I batted today."

Pujara added: "My partner-

put a decent total."

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan passed a fitness test to lead the home side, with opening batsman Zakir Hasan making his Test debut.

India have been hit by injuries, with captain Rohit Sharma out for at least the first match of the two-Test series. Fast bowler Mohammed Shami and all-rounder

Ravindra Jadeja will play no part in proceedings.

The two-match series forms part of the ICC World Test Championship. India are fourth, having won six of their 12 matches. Bangladesh, who have never beaten India in a Test match, are in last place with eight defeats from 10 matches.

AFP



Gianluca Vialli

Vialli takes break from Italy duties in cancer battle

Milan, Italy - Gianluca Vialli said Wednesday that he was taking a break from his role within the Italy national team set-up as he continues a long-standing battle with pancreatic cancer.

"After a long discussion with my brilliant team of oncologists I have decided to suspend, I hope only temporarily, my current and future professional engagements," Vialli said in an Italian Football Federation statement.

"My goal is to use all my mental and physical energy to help my body overcome this stage of the illness so that I be ready as soon as possible to face new ad-

ventures with you all."

Vialli was first diagnosed with the illness two years before becoming Italy's delegation chief, providing support to old friend Roberto Mancini with whom he terrorised opposition defences in Serie A during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Nicknamed "the goal twins", strikers Vialli and Mancini won the 1991 league title, the Cup Winners' Cup, and three Italian Cups with Sampdoria.

Samp also came close to winning the European Cup in 1992, narrowly losing 1-0 to Johan Cruyff's Barcelona at Wembley.

Flintoff 'lucky to be alive' after accident

London, United Kingdom: England cricket legend Andrew Flintoff is "lucky to be alive" after he was injured in an accident while filming the popular BBC television show Top Gear.

Flintoff was hurt at Top Gear's test track at Dunsfold Aerodrome in Surrey, southern England, with the BBC confirming he was taken to hospital for treatment.

Flintoff's 16-year-old son Corey told the Daily Mail that his father was fortunate to have survived the incident.

"He's OK. I'm not too sure what happened but he is lucky to be alive," he said. "It was a pretty nasty crash. It is shocking. We are all shocked but just hope he's going to be OK."

Flintoff, a celebrated all-rounder better known as

"Freddie", played 79 Tests and 148 one-day internationals for England before retiring from cricket aged 32.

The 45-year-old has gone on to have a successful career in television, including co-presenting the hit motor-ing show Top Gear.

During his cricket career, Flintoff played a pivotal role in England winning the Ashes in 2005 and 2009.

It was his influential performances during the unforgettable Test series victory against Australia in 2005 that transformed Flintoff into one of the sport's biggest stars.

Former England captain Nasser Hussain, said the current national team, at present on tour in Pakistan, had been keeping Flintoff in their thoughts since the accident.

AFP



Fabio Quagliarella

Veteran Samp striker Quagliarella suffers knee ligament injury

Milan, Italy - Former Italy forward Fabio Quagliarella will miss the restart to Sampdoria's season after the Serie A club announced on Wednesday that the veteran had suffered knee ligament damage.

In a statement Samp said Quagliarella, 39, injured his left knee while at a team training camp in Turkey and will be assessed by club doctors in Genoa.

Italian media report the injury could end his season and as a result his long career as one of Italy's most respected marksmen. Quagliarella blossomed in his 30s after much of his earlier

career was blighted by a harrowing ordeal involving a stalker.

He was Serie A's top scorer with 26 goals in the 2018-19 season, netting five more than Cristiano Ronaldo.

However he is yet to score this term for a Sampdoria team sat in the relegation zone who face Sassuolo on January 4.

Chelsea's Broja to miss rest of season

Chelsea striker Armando Broja will miss the rest of the season after suffering a serious knee injury during a recent friendly.

Broja ruptured his anterior

cruciate ligament in a collision with Aston Villa's Ezri Konsa in the first half of a 1-0 defeat in Abu Dhabi on Sunday.

The 21-year-old Albania international screamed in pain and clutched his right knee before being taken off on a stretcher.

Chelsea on Wednesday confirmed the extent of the injury, ruling out Broja for the rest of the campaign.

"Scan results have unfortunately confirmed an anterior cruciate ligament rupture and that surgery will be required," a Blues statement said.

AFP



Jayson Tatum of the Boston Celtics scores on a jumper over LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers during their NBA game on Tuesday (AFP)

Celtics edge Lakers in overtime, Bucks pile road misery on Warriors

Los Angeles, United States - Jayson Tatum and the NBA-leading Boston Celtics thwarted a furious late rally by the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday to win 122-118 in overtime and snap a two-game skid.

The Celtics bounced back from defeats to the Golden State Warriors in San Francisco and the Clippers in Los Angeles, but they needed every ounce of energy and will to avoid their first three-game losing streak this season.

"Oh, man, last game of the road trip, we've been going for, like, 13 days, second night of a back-to-back," Tatum said. "But we found a way."

"We needed that," added Tatum, whose 44 points included a game-tying turnaround jumper over LeBron James that sent the contest to overtime. "We found a way to get back on track."

Jaylen Brown added 25 points and grabbed 15 rebounds and Marcus Smart scored 18 points for the Celtics, who appeared

headed to victory when they took a 20-point lead on Tatum's floater with 6:57 left in the third quarter.

But the Lakers, with 37 points from Anthony Davis and 33 from James, roared back, putting together an 18-0 run from late in the third that was capped by a James three-pointer that put Los Angeles up by four with 8:55 remaining in the fourth quarter.

The Lakers pushed their lead to 13 points before the weary Celtics were able to respond.

Russell Westbrook put the Lakers up by four with two quick baskets to open overtime, but the Celtics scored on four straight possessions to take the lead for good.

"It was big," Tatum said of the win, which pushed Boston's league-best record to 22-7.

The Milwaukee Bucks stayed on the Celtics' heels atop the East, improving to 20-7 with a 128-111 victory over reigning champions Golden State.

The Warriors, coming off their

convincing victory over the Celtics, again found themselves inexplicably struggling on the road. Milwaukee, led by 30 points and 12 rebounds from Antetokounmpo, out-scored the Warriors 48-30 in the paint and out-rebounded them 55-37.

Elsewhere, Joel Embiid scored 31 points and James Harden and Tobias Harris added 21 apiece as the 76ers thumped the Sacramento Kings 123-103 in Philadelphia.

AFP