



Value of real estate traded down 3.7%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The value of real estate transactions in the sultanate this year until the end of October was about RO2.03bn, a decrease of 3.7 per cent compared to the same period in 2021, when it amounted to RO2.1bn, according to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Preliminary statistics indicated that fees collected this year for legal transactions until the end of October amounted to over RO52.6mn, a decrease of 28 per cent compared the same period of 2021.

The data also showed a decrease in the traded value of sales contracts by six per cent to RO939.4mn compared to RO999.3mn in the same period of 2021. The traded value of mortgage contracts at the end of October 2022 dropped 1.5 per cent to reach RO1.77mn compared to RO1.94mn at the end of October 2021.

Initiative launched to aid local governance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To support local leaders in the governorates to achieve balanced local development in line with the directions of Oman Vision 2040, the Royal Academy of Management, in partnership with the Ministry of Interior, launched the National Initiative for Development of Local Administration (NIDLA) in various governorates on Sunday.

The launch took place under the auspices of Sayyid Hamoud al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, in the presence of Dr Ali Qasim Jawad al Lawati, chairman of Royal Academy for Management, and several ministers at W Muscat Hotel.

NIDLA was developed based on His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's belief in and commitment to the development of the governorates. The initiative re-



(Supplied photo)

flects the importance of local governments as the point of contact between the state and citizens. It is a sustainable plan for growth implemented in cooperation with executive partners who have extensive global experience and a clear understanding of the local context.

On the occasion, Sayyid Bu-

saidi said NIDLA factors in the requirements of the next stage of construction and development in all governorates. "It indicates His Majesty Sultan Haitham's interest in restructuring the state management apparatus. Royal decrees outline the future vision for the development process, thereby enabling governorates to

manage and invest their resources, and develop human resources, in various sectors as a fundamental pillar upon which the government relies for its own development process," the minister said.

According to Lawati, the launch of the initiative is in line with Royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan to develop the governorates and establish a decentralised management structure in them. The initiative aims to support governors, walis and local government officials in achieving balanced local development in accordance with the directions of Oman Vision 2040. "It will strengthen their skills in governance and economic decentralisation, and provide them with best practices in local government, which will positively affect the governorates' development and competitiveness." Continued on Page 02



(Supplied photo)

\$3bn mega steel project in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Jindal Shadeed Group, a leading steel producer in the Middle East region, will invest more than US\$3bn to develop a mega steel project in Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Slated to be the largest plant of its kind within SEZAD to produce green steel, the plant will utilise renewable energy sources in its manufacturing operations.

"Jindal Shadeed is investing more than US\$3bn to develop this mega steel project in Duqm. We have already obtained the necessary approvals to secure land for our green hydrogen ready steel project," Harssha Shetty, CEO of Jindal Shadeed Group, said in a press statement released by SEZAD.

He said the company's goal is to produce more than 5mn metric tonnes of green steel on an annual basis that will create over US\$800mn annual in-country value addition. The project is being built on an area of approximately 2sqkm in the concession zone at the Port of Duqm.

The plant will supply high quality steel products to automobile, wind energy and consumer

There is a booming demand for green steel from ESG conscious customers around the world, especially in Europe and Asia

HARSSHA SHETTY

durables sectors among others.

"There is a booming demand for green steel from ESG (environmental, social and governance) conscious customers around the world, especially in Europe and Asia, who have already committed significant reduction in Scope 3 emissions by 2030," Shetty added.

The project was announced at a ceremony that included the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and a land allocation agreement held under the auspices of H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, Chairman of Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), in the presence of a number of high-ranking government and private sector officials. Continued on Page 05

Protest-hit Iran shuts down morality police

Tehran, Iran - Iran has scrapped its morality police after more than two months of protests triggered by the arrest of Mahsa Amini for allegedly violating the country's strict female dress code, local media said on Sunday.

Women-led protests, labelled "riots" by the authorities, have swept Iran since the 22-year-old Iranian of Kurdish origin died in custody on September 16, three

days after her arrest by the morality police in Tehran.

Demonstrators have burned their mandatory hijab head coverings and shouted anti-government slogans, and since Mahsa's death, a growing number of women have failed to wear the hijab, particularly in parts of Tehran.

"Morality police have nothing to do with the judiciary and have



been abolished," Attorney General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri was quoted as saying by the ISNA news agency.

His comment came at a religious conference where he responded to a participant who asked "why the morality police were being shut down", the report said.

AFP
See also Page 09

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MUSCAT DAILY PRESENTS





CAN OMAN HOST A FIFA CUP?

FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 enters the third week with higher level of excitement and thrill gripping the region. Sports has always been of prime importance for the people in the Arab world, including Oman. From hosting international events - such as Tour of Oman, T20 Cricket, IRONMAN, Desert Marathon - to organising programmes to popularise sports, the sultanate has been striving resolutely for the past few years to make Oman a sporting nation. The country has always received support from the government, while private companies, schools and colleges joined the force to encourage sports in their respective domains. The country has successfully hosted big-ticket sports events in cycling and sailing, but is it ready for a tournament as big as the FIFA World Cup? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers had to say on the subject:



Khalid Yousuf
Sales executive

We have seen several international sporting event in the last few years and I must say that Oman definitely is prepared to host FIFA World Cup. Surely we need more time, man-power, help and guidance from international agencies; but we can make it. Most importantly we have the spirit and that is what is needed to realise a dream.

Salman Amri
Translator

Over the last few years we have witnessed several progresses; I am sure in the coming times and under the guidance and direction of our government we shall be able to host

the World Cup as well. It is an ambitious target though, but surely we can achieve it.

Ahmed Salim
Construction manager

Oman has the capability and enthusiasm to host World Cup but not immediately. It is not only the finances but the planning of many different things that needs to go along with the event. Most importantly managing the fans from different countries; then managing and understanding the culture of each side.

Mohammad Balushi
Government employee

I do not think that Oman is prepared for such a mega event; we still need lots of prepara-

tions. At least we will need ten more years to comfortably organise one. Organising a World Cup is not easy; it is not only about holding matches; it is about every industry that needs to be equipped. We need to think on so many fronts including transport, food, accommodation, managing cultural clashes. We need to plan not for one year but for at least five years.

Neha Patel
Private company employee

Oman has the potential to host this mega event but it requires time. We will need five to seven more years as preparing for an event of this magnitude needs proper planning well in advance. There needs to be good co-ordination among different agencies, besides the

help that we would need from foreign experts. Though Oman has previously hosted several mega events, we must remember that World Cup football attracts thousands of tourists and fans; and managing them itself is a huge task.

Salah al Musallami
Auditor

Oman has hosted several international events and all of them ended within some days; not one event ran for over a month. To host a mammoth event of long duration, expenses and man power requires a lot of planning and organised efforts. Also in terms of infrastructure, we need several fields in different cities. Oman has the potential but its not possible immediately.



What do you think Oman can do to encourage citizens and residents to spend their holidays in the country?

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

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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Woman injured in cooking gas explosion in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A woman has been injured in a domestic gas cylinder explosion at home in Bausher, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority

(CDAA).

In a statement, CDAA said, 'A team from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department in the Governorate of Muscat responded to a call of a sudden explosion of a cooking gas cylinder in a house in Al Ansab,

in the wilayat of Bausher, which resulted in the injury of one woman'.

Emergency medical care was provided to the woman on site before she was taken to hospital in a critical condition, the authority added.

Abalone fishing banned till 2023: MAFWR

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has banned harvesting, collecting and dealing in abalone during the 2022 and 2023 fishing seasons. The ministry issued a decision (No 241/2022) to this effect on Sunday, MAFWR said.

'With the exclusion of fishing companies and individual fishermen who possess registered quantities of abalone from the previous seasons, the decision bans the possession, sale, purchase, distribution, transport, storage and export of abalone during the two seasons in 2022-23, which means dealing in abalone will be restricted solely



to registered quantities,' the ministry said in a statement.

With their numbers dwindling, the ministry has been imposing bans on fishing abalone from time to time. It had banned harvesting, collecting and dealing in abalone even during 2020 and

2021 fishing seasons.

The ministry had lifted a two-year ban on abalone fishing in 2019 in order to replenish the stock, which had been falling during the previous years.

Abalone catch has dwindled over the years in Omani waters,

with yearly catch hovering between 50-55 tonnes. It went up to a high of 149 tonnes in 2011, when fishing of abalone reopened after a moratorium of three years.

The ministry stated that Oman's abalone stocks continue to deplete as a result of divers' malpractices during the fishing season, as well as for fishing outside the season.

The ministry surveyed abalone stocks (Abalone Survey 2020) for a month from March 15, 2020 in Dhofar governorate. The survey, conducted in Mirbat, Sadah, Haddien and Hasik, was aimed at defining biological indicators - including density, accumulation and size - of abalone and comparing the data with those of the previous surveys.

Tender Announcement



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'ayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
6/2022/PEIE/HQ-6	Mada'ayn General Insurance For 2023-2024	18-12-2022	03-01-2023	Insurance And Finance Services	First And Above	75

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

- 1 Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
- 2 eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening

Mada'ayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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Initiative launched for local governance

Continued from Page 01

Additionally, the initiative aims to boost governors' skills with fundamental leadership capabilities to carry out their roles incorporating best practices. NIDLA will provide governors with modern local government methods, which will have a positive effect on the governorates' development and competitiveness, while enhancing the governors' knowledge and competencies in the concepts of governance and economic decentralisation. It will also equip them with tools and methods for managing and promoting investment in order to enhance governorates' economic development levels.

According to Lawati, while designing the initiative, the Royal Academy of Management considered the close ties to the local legislative framework and international best practices. NIDLA

PROGRAMME MODULE

- Executive Learning Units:
 - Unit 1: Leadership competencies
 - Unit 2: Modern local governance and management
 - Unit 3: Development projects
- Specialised external field meetings; internal field meetings (Al Barza)
- Personal support sessions (integrated coaching)

- National initiative executive partners:
 - The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten)
 - The Hague Academy for Local Governance
 - Centre for Local Governance

will be implemented in phases, beginning with governors and walis in local government.

Stakeholders from the Ministry of Interior and governors were consulted in the initiative's design process to make sure it is in accordance with their actual needs and aspirations and ensures their active participation.

NIDLA has a diverse range of

tools that ensure their practical application. These tools include executive learning programmes, local and international practical field trips, one-to-one training sessions, indicators of competitiveness of services offered by governorates, and studies to monitor the current situation and forecast future scenarios of local government.

386 expats arrested for violating Omani Labour Law

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 386 expatriates were arrested recently for violating the labour law, the weekly report of the joint inspection team of the Ministry of Labour (MoL) revealed.

A statement issued by MoL said, 'The office of the Joint Labour Inspection Team in Dakhliyah governorate arrested 150 expatriates from various Royal Oman Police (ROP) stations on Sunday for violating the Omani Labour Law. The police also deported 236 labour law violators in November.'

The ministry calls on all employers to adhere to the provisions of the labour law.

RO150mn private investment to boost digital economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has attracted a consortium of local and international investors in the area of data hosting and processing in Dhofar. Green Data City is establishing a large-scale data centre for hosting, processing and mining data for various applications, such as distributed ledger technologies, blockchain and fintech as a re-



sult of partnerships between local and international digital innovation companies. MTCIT's mandate is to attract digital investments to the country in advanced technologies including data hosting and data processing. The ministry hopes through this investment opportunity to accelerate the

adoption of distributed ledger technologies, blockchain and fintech. MTCIT believes that such advanced technologies have a promising future globally and is endeavouring to localise technologies and create job opportunities for young Omani IT specialists. The investment opportunity totals more than RO150mn in the full-fledged setup of the facility and will assist in providing more than 150 job opportunities during the construction and operations of the centre.

The investment opportunities capitalise on the digital investment incentives that Oman offers and more specifically on the abundance of submarine data cables landing in the sultanate that offer high-speed worldwide connectivity. Additionally, Dhofar enjoys natural competitive advantages to provide alternative sources of energy to power the data centre, including wind, solar and deep-sea cooling. H E Saeed bin Hamoud al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Informa-

tion Technology, said that Oman is positioned as a test-bed hub for advanced technologies given the competitive advantages that the sultanate enjoys in attracting digital investments. Green Data City is one of the unique digital investments in this domain. H E Mawali also added that attracting digital investments will accelerate the objectives of the National Digital Economy Programme and help achieve the desired growth in the use of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies, and maximising the

use of submarine data cables and renewable energy opportunities to make Oman a hub for green and sustainable data centres in the region. Olivier Ohnheiser, CEO of Green Data City, stated that Dhofar is strategically positioned and has unique advantages to establish sustainable hyperscale data centres, such as a stable economy, cool weather in the Salalah region, unique access to cold deep ocean water next to the shore, and available renewable energy.

5-star beach resort Jumeirah Muscat Bay officially opened

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Built with an investment of RO60mn and spread over an area of 32,000sqm, Jumeirah Muscat Bay was officially opened on Sunday. The five-star beach resort with 206 rooms, three swimming pools, a children's club, spas and sports facilities, was inaugurated under the patronage of H E Salim bin Mohammad al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. The inauguration was attended by key government officials and senior delegates. On the occasion, Sheikh Hamood bin Sultan al Hosni, CEO of Muscat Bay, which owns Jumeirah Muscat Bay, said, "I thank our board for their continuing leadership and assistance, as well as the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for their consistent support to develop and flourish Oman's tourism sector



which, in recent years, has grown by leaps and bounds." Located within the general plan of Muscat Bay's fully integrated resort, this project is a strategic partnership between Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) and Saraya Oman Holding Company. It is the Jumeirah group's first luxury resort in the sultanate. Set between the Al Hajar mountains and the sparkling Arabian Sea nestled within the secluded Bandar al Jissah beach, the resort is located 15 minutes from Muscat. "The opening of Jumeirah Muscat Bay is a culmination of the efforts exerted by all stakeholders to enhance the tourism sector with various products that contribute to developing and growing the industry, boosting the efficiency of the tourism sector in line with the National Tourism Strategy, and enhancing its role in achieving the goals of economic diversification," H E Mahrouqi said.

FDO takes part in WAS event in Singapore

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Representatives of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) attended the World Aquaculture Society (WAS) annual conference and exhibition, an important event that discusses various blue economy industries. The conference was held in Singapore between November 30 and December 2 by Singapore Food Agency and attended by delegates from all over the world. FDO participation's aimed to introduce the fisheries sector of the sultanate and its competitive advantage in international markets, besides encouraging investments in associated industries.



Such exhibitions and conferences are an appropriate platform for exchange of international experience and for updates on the most important scientific developments and the latest technologies. The conference brings together international institutions

and organisations specialised in fisheries under one roof to discuss challenges and solutions to aquaculture industries. On the sidelines of the conference, a number of workshops and seminars hosted experts and scientists from all over the world, several aquaculture top-

ics, including dryland aquaculture, the environment, biodiversity, climate change, as well as aquaculture technologies, and discussed aquaculture sustainable development and other issues related to sustainable development and the blue economy.

TENDER NOTICE



The Internal Tender Committee of Emdad Logistics Company SAOC., hereby announces the following Tender:

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of receiving Specifications	Date of Bid Submission	Suppliers	Tender Fee OMR (Inclusive of VAT 5%)	Place of Submission
ITC/T/013/2022	Short Term Vehicle Lease - On Need Basis Types: (4X4 Cars, Pickup 4x4 Double Cabin Vehicles, and Buses)	13th December 2022	27th December 2022	Only Specialized Companies	55/- OMR Non Refundable	Emdad Logistics Company, 3rd floor

Taking into consideration the following:
All specialized companies that wish to participate in the tender must deposit the tender amount into the bank account of the Company (details of the bank account is set out hereunder) and submit the original payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the Commercial Registration Certificate and the contact details of the authorized individual (business card) to the address presented below:
From 08:00 - 13:00 and 14:00 – 17:00 (Sunday – Thursday).

Payment Information:
Bank Transfer:

Account Name	Emdad Logistics Co SAOC
Account Number	018020025780
Bank Name	Sohar International Bank SAOG
Branch	Al Khoudh Branch
Bank ID Code	BSHROMRUXXX

Complete Tender documents should be submitted in sealed envelope with red wax with tender number and title and addressed to the "Chairman of Internal Tender Committee". The envelope should not make any reference to the bidder details. All applicants are required to submit the Tender in the Tender box in the main office of Port of Duqm Company at or before 02:00 PM on the assigned date for submission of the Tender. Tenders submitted after the above-mentioned date and time shall not be considered.

- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest offer or any other offer without any justifiable reasons.
- The company reserve the right to issue the order either in part or full for the quoted items without any justifiable reasons.
- The company reserve the right to reject the tenders not complying with the tender documentation requirement. For any clarification, please contact us through tenders@portofduqm.om

Emdad Logistics Company S.A.O.C.
PO Box: 2409, PC: 111, Sultanate of Oman,
Almashreq Building, 18 November Street, N. Azaiba
T: +968 25468666

Sultan Qaboos University TENDERS NOTICE

The Investment & Revenue Department at Sultan Qaboos University would like to invite companies to submit their quotations for:

S/N	Type of Business	Location	Date of site visit	Class	Tender #
1	Rent and operate Coffee Shop	Female complex No. (2)	12/12/2022 9:00 Am	All classes	SQU.IRD. 18/22
2	Rent and operate Coffee Shop	Female complex No. (3)	12/12/2022 9:30 Am	All classes	SQU.IRD. 19/22
3	Rent and operate a sweet corn and ice cream kiosk	Female complex No.(3)	12/12/2022 10:00 Am	All classes	SQU.IRD. 20/22
4	Rent and operate a sweet corn and ice cream kiosk	Female complex No.(5)	12/12/2022 10:30 Am	All classes	SQU.IRD. 21/22
5	Rental and operate a mobile cafe site	Administration Building Extension	13/12/2022 9:30 Am	All classes	SQU.IRD.22/22
6	Construction & rental & operation Outlet for stationery, office supplies, copying and printing services	Independent Learning Center	14/12/2022 10:00 Am	All classes	SQU.IRD.23/22
7	Electric Scooter Service	Various locations at Sultan Qaboos University	15/12/2022 10:00 Am	All classes	SQU.IRD.24/22
8	Rent and operate Coffee Shop	Family and Community Health Clinic	19/12/2022 10:00 Am	All classes	SQU.IRD.25/22

- * The priority will be for the Small and Medium Establishments (SME), which fulfils the quality requirements.
- * Tenderers who wish to participate in this Tender may collect Tender Documents from The Section of Revenue and Expenditures at the Investment & Revenue Department, Sultan Qaboos University, during the working hours for an amount of OR.25 for each tender document (non-refundable). The last date for Collecting the Document is 27/12/2022.
- * The Site Visit for the selected shop is necessary. It will be on the above-.
- * mentioned date and the assembly point will be at the Investment & Revenue Department.
- * The last date for submission of the quotations: 3/1/2023. The quotations should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Director of The Investment & Revenue Department, located on the first floor of the commercial building at Sultan Qaboos University and deposited in the Tender Box kept in the Department, before 10:00 a.m.
- * The exterior of the envelope should be marked with the name and number of the Tender being presented and should bear no identification or mark of the Tenderer.
- * The Tenderer should submit (enclose) with his tender a Bank Guarantee Document for sum of 1% of the total Duration of contract rental value quoted by the Tenderer and valid for 90 (ninety) days from the date specified for submission of Tender. Tenders submitted after the deadline or without a Bank Guarantee will be excluded.
- * The Tenderer should prepare the Site in accordance with the health requirements of Muscat Municipality and the requirements of civil defense in cooperation with the concerned authorities.
- * Sultan Qaboos University reserves the right to reject any quotation not fulfilling the requirements and does not bid itself to accept the highest rent or any other quotations.

Investment & Revenue Department
P.O BOX 50, P.C. 123, ALKHOD, SULTANATE OF OMAN
Tel: 24142691 – 24142682- 24142685- 24142684
E- mail: investment@squ.edu.om



Omantel, ETCO sign deal to provide satellite image data analysis services

Muscat – Omantel on Sunday announced the signing of a partnership agreement with the international emerging technology company ETCO aimed at providing satellite image data analysis services for the Cube Satellite (Aman Sat).

The agreement was signed by Dr Ghalib bin Saif al Hosni, chief people officer at Omantel, and Eng Abdul Aziz Jaafar, chief executive officer of ETCO.

Based on the terms of the agreement, which was signed at the Cornwall Spaceport in UK, Omantel will contribute to this project with its technical expertise in information technology and digitalisation as a technology partner to Aman Mission.

Commenting on this event, Eng Aladdin Baitfadhil, chief commercial officer at Omantel, said, "This strategic partnership with ETCO will enable Omantel to expand its digital services and support pioneering investments in the satellite image data sector, especially as Omantel owns Artificial Intelligence solutions, Internet of Things and its relevant technologies."

"Thus, satellite image analysis services come to complement these solutions and will provide a qualitative addition to the digital services we provide, especially those related to the space field, which allows data analysis and supports scientific research projects in space sciences and much more. We, at Omantel, al-



ways support national institutions and vital projects for the benefit of the national economy and society," he said.

Eng Abdul Aziz Jaafar, chief executive officer of ETCO, said, "We are pleased to sign this agreement with Omantel to complete its technical partnership in Aman mission and to expand our commercial operations in the space sector so as to provide satellite image data to customers in the Sultanate of Oman and the region. Therefore, we seek from this partnership to transfer knowledge, technologies and involve national compe-

tencies by engaging in space-related industries and technologies."

Aman Sat satellite – which is owned by the Omani company ETCO – will be launched by the American company Virgin Orbit from Cornwall Spaceport in the UK, and it will provide several services including environmental monitoring images of coasts and nature reserves, images of weather readings, tracking climatic phenomena, marine and port monitoring images, urban and structural planning maps, oil and gas infrastructure management, vegetation cover images,

water resources monitoring images, and insurance services images.

Accordingly, the importance of operating this satellite lies in the fact that it is the first national satellite in the category of cubic satellites dedicated to capturing space images through ground stations to meet the needs in Oman and the region in the space sector, along with the focus on strengthening local capabilities in analysing satellite image data and supporting national competencies in the local engineering and scientific sectors.



OPEC+ agrees to keep oil output levels unchanged

Vienna, Austria – Major oil-producing countries led by Saudi Arabia and Russia agreed Sunday to maintain their current output levels in a climate of uncertainty and ahead of fresh sanctions against Moscow coming into force next week.

The representatives of the thirteen members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) led by Riyadh, and their 10 allies headed by Moscow, decided to stick to their course agreed in October of a production cut of two million barrels per day until the end of 2023.

OPEC+ described its October decision to cut as one "which was purely driven by market considerations", adding that it had been "the necessary and the right course of action towards stabilizing global oil markets", a statement said.

The next OPEC+ ministerial meeting is scheduled for June 4, 2023.

But the alliance said it was ready to "meet at any time and take immediate additional measures" to address market developments and support the oil market if necessary.

Spotlight on Russia

On Friday, the EU, G7 and Australia agreed a \$60-per-barrel price cap on Russian oil, which will come into effect on Monday or soon after, alongside an EU embargo on maritime deliveries of Russian crude oil.

It will prevent seaborne shipments of Russian crude to the European Union, which account for two thirds of the bloc's oil imports from Russia, an attempt to deprive Moscow's war chest of billions of euros.

While Russia denounced on Saturday the incoming price cap, threatening to suspend deliveries to any country that adopted the measure, Ukraine suggested the cap should have been set even lower.

For OPEC+, the big unknown in the oil equation is how heavily sanctions will hit Russian supply.

"Uncertainty on the impact on Russian oil production coming from the EU ban... and the G7 price cap and some easing of mobility restrictions in China likely supported the decision for a rollover," UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo said.

Moscow's threat to suspend deliveries to countries abiding by the price cap will put "some in a very uncomfortable position", said OANDA analyst Craig Erlam: "Choosing between losing access to cheap Russian crude or facing G7 sanctions".

Amid economic gloom fuelled by soaring inflation and fears of China's weaker energy demand due to its Covid-related restrictions, the two global crude benchmarks remained close to their lowest level of the year, far from their March peaks.

Since the group's last meeting in early October, Brent North Sea oil and its US equivalent, WTI, have lost more than six per cent of their value.

Moving forward, OPEC+ might still feel compelled to adopt "a more aggressive stance" by cutting or threatening to cut production, UniCredit analyst Edoardo Campanella said.

"Russia might also retaliate by leveraging its influence within OPEC+ to push for more production cuts down the road, thus exacerbating the global energy crisis," he added.

AFP

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Tejarah Talks tackles next marketing frontiers

Muscat – Taking a fresh look at new trends, customer behaviour and technologies that are transforming the marketing industry at top speed, the final Tejarah Talks of 2022 has been designed specifically to provide chief marketing officers (CMOs) and other senior marketing leaders with the insights they need to build strategies, grow revenue and drive customer engagement.

Under the title 'Marketing in the New World', the final Tejarah Talks 2022 will be held on December 14 at Zain Auditorium, Omantel's Headquarters in Airports Heights.

The session will bring together a carefully curated group of thought-provoking leaders from Oman's marketing, media and advertising community to share experiences and perspectives on the issues shaping the future of marketing.

Organised by Oman Business Forum in association with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Sports & Youth, HSBC, Sohar Port and



Paul Ross

Freezone, Omantel and Oman FM, 'Marketing in the New World' will be moderated by H H Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, managing partner, The Firm, while the panel includes Luma al Saleh, partner and chief transformation officer, Identity; Paul Ross, senior consultant, former CMO, Mindberry; Maria Saif, head of marketing and digital, wealth and personal banking, HSBC; and Ahmed Sharkawy, marketing manager, Diamond Developers.

Speaking ahead of the event, MoCIIP's Oman Business Forum director Maymuna al Adawi said, "Marketing has been around for as long as trade and commerce have existed. The nature, form

and content may have altered over the years, but the objective has remained unchanged - promote and sell a service or product. This is becoming ever more complex in today's crowded marketing space, and it is clear that exceptional execution is going to be required for businesses to stand out."

"Captivating audiences and the stories Omani companies are going to have to tell across multiple platforms is very much going to be at the heart of this edition of Tejarah Talks as our panellists look at how brand awareness will be created and all-important sales generated in the years to come," she added.

Agreeing with Maymuna and setting the scene for the evenings conversation, Tejarah Talks panellist, Paul Ross added, "If I can share one lesson with Omani companies on how to tell their story, it is to think about their narrative as both an origin and a destination story, true to who you are and where you are going. Creating and articulating a bold story is critical to success. Products are part of contributing

to that story. And, if you are clear about your foundational narrative you do narrative-led strategy. Strategy is led by your story – not the other way around. Follow the narrative arc of your story and don't get distracted. But it is also important to demonstrate the other side of visionary storytelling - consistently demonstrating progress against that compelling story."

With its informed and insightful panels, Tejarah Talks 2022 has enjoyed considerable success attracting capacity audiences with online participants joining from around the world. The live events complimented by a series of publications and podcasts.

Commenting on the Tejarah Talks season, Maymuna said, "We could not be more proud of the number of people that have attended Tejarah Talks, the quality of the program and calibre of panellists. It has been a fantastic platform that has allowed us to showcase the dynamism and vibrancy of Oman's business landscape and investment environment."

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Dr. Karthik BDS, MSc, MOrth (UK) Specialist Orthodontist. 91105912

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MOH No: 558/2022

Russia denounces \$60 oil price cap agreed by EU, G7

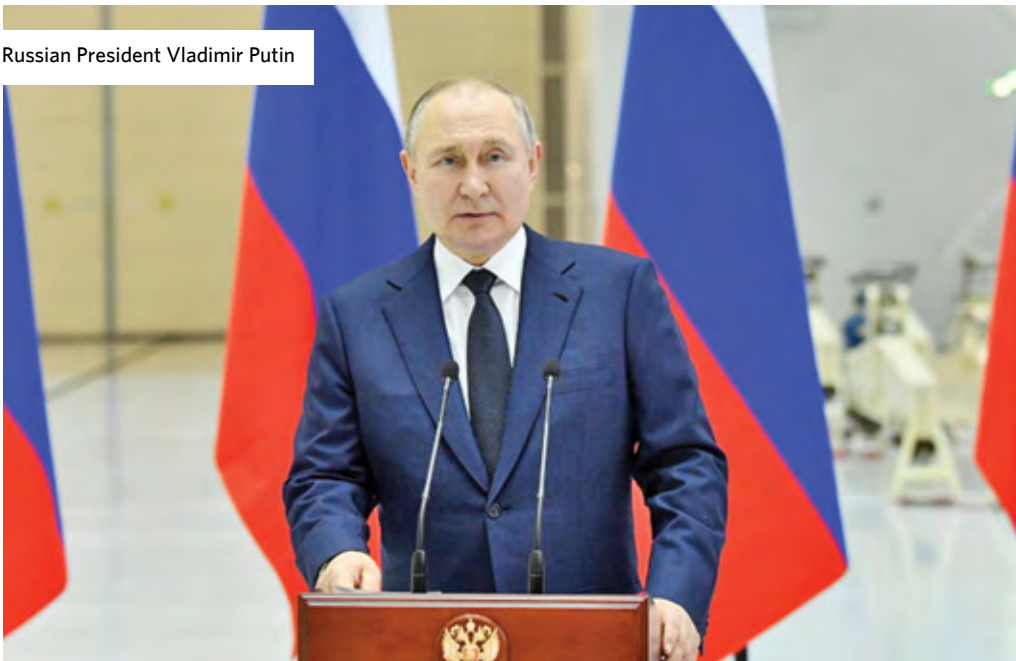
Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia denounced a US\$60 price cap on its oil agreed by the EU, G7 and Australia, even as Ukraine suggested it was not tough enough and might have to be revisited.

"We will not accept this price cap," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told domestic news agencies, adding that Russia, the world's second-largest crude exporter, was "analysing" the move. The US\$60 oil price cap will come into effect on Monday or soon after, alongside an EU embargo on maritime deliveries of Russian crude oil.

The embargo will prevent seaborne shipments of Russian crude to the European Union, which account for two thirds of the bloc's oil imports from Russia, potentially depriving Russia's war chest of billions of euros.

But while Kyiv welcomed the price cap earlier Saturday, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his evening address that the level set was not "serious" as it would not do enough damage to the Russian economy. "Russia has already caused huge losses to all countries of the world by deliberately destabilising the energy market," he argued in his nightly address, describing the decision on the price cap as "a weak position". It is "only a matter of time when stronger tools will have to be used", Zelensky added.

The G7 nations - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the



Russian President Vladimir Putin

United States - along with Australia have already said they are prepared to adjust the price ceiling if necessary.

The cap stops countries paying more than US\$60 a barrel for Russian oil deliveries by tanker vessel and is designed to make it harder for Russia to bypass EU sanctions by selling beyond the European Union at market prices.

Limit funds for the 'war machine'

Zelensky, in his speech, appeared to be backing the position that Poland had tried to hold out for before agreeing to the US\$60 ceiling late Friday. Warsaw and the Baltic states had argued for a US\$30 cap.

The market price of a barrel of

Russian Urals crude is currently around US\$65 dollars, just slightly higher than the US\$60 cap agreed, suggesting the measure may have only a limited impact in the short term.

The G7 said it was delivering on its vow "to prevent Russia from profiting from its war of aggression against Ukraine, to support stability in global energy markets and to minimise negative economic spillovers of Russia's war of aggression".

The White House described the cap as "welcome news" that would help limit Russian President Vladimir Putin's ability to fund the Kremlin's "war machine".

Russia has threatened to stop deliveries to countries adopting the measure.

Russia has earned 67bn euros (US\$71bn) from the sale of oil to the European Union since the start of the war in February.

Its annual military budget amounts to around 60bn euros, said Phuc-Vinh Nguyen, an energy expert at the Institut Jacques-Delors in Paris.

The EU embargo on seaborne deliveries follows a decision by Germany and Poland to stop taking Russian oil via pipeline by the end of 2022.

In all, more than 90 per cent of Russian deliveries to the European Union will be hit, according to the bloc.

On the ground, Russian forces carried out strikes in the east of Ukraine on Saturday, hitting a "civilian infrastructure facility" in the eastern city of Kramatorsk,

the Ukrainian army said.

After suffering humiliating defeats during what has become the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II, Russia began targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure in October.

The strikes have caused sweeping blackouts, and cut off water supplies and heating to civilians at a time when the temperature in some regions has dropped to minus five degrees Celsius (41 degrees Fahrenheit).

The authorities have introduced scheduled power cuts several times a day to keep essential infrastructure working.

In eastern Ukraine, where the fighting is still raging, the governor of Lugansk region, Sergei Gaidai, said the conflict was heavy, "because the Russians had time to prepare". Ukraine's forces were nevertheless slowly moving forward, he added.

Ukraine's presidency said the situation was also difficult in Bakhmut, in the neighbouring Donetsk region, which Russian forces have been trying to capture since summer.

On Saturday, the governor of the southern region of Mykolaiv, Vitaly Kim, urged citizens to "endure" the electricity shortages.

Putin on Friday told Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz the Russian strikes, which have destroyed close to half of the Ukrainian energy system, were an "inevitable response to Kyiv's provocative attacks on Russia's civilian infrastructure".

AFP

Disasters cost \$268bn in 2022: Swiss Re

Geneva, Switzerland - Natural and man-made catastrophes have caused US\$268bn of economic losses so far in 2022, chiefly driven by Hurricane Ian and other extreme weather disasters, reinsurance giant Swiss Re estimated.

Insured losses covered US\$122bn - less than half - of the total economic losses to date this year, said the Zurich-based group, which acts as an insurer for insurers.

"Hurricane Ian and other extreme weather events such as the winter storms in Europe, flooding in Australia and South Africa as well as hailstorms in France and in the United States resulted in an estimated US\$115bn of natural catastrophe insured losses this year to date," Swiss Re said in a statement.

There were US\$7bn of insured losses from man-made disasters.

It is the second consecutive year in which total insured losses from natural catastrophes topped US\$100bn, with the figure hitting US\$121bn last year.

"Urban development, wealth accumulation in disaster-prone areas, inflation and climate change are key factors at play, turning extreme weather into ever rising natural catastrophe losses," explained Martin Bertogg, Swiss Re's head of catastrophe perils.

"When Hurricane Andrew struck 30 years ago, a US\$20bn loss event had never occurred before; now there have been seven such hurricanes in just the past six years."

Hurricane Ian is by far the largest loss-causing event in 2022, with an estimated insured loss of US\$50-65bn, said Swiss

Re. It estimated that Hurricane Ian caused the second-costliest insured loss ever, after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Ian, a category four hurricane, caused more than 150 deaths, almost all in Florida, where it made landfall on September 28.

The reinsurer added that so-called secondary natural disasters such as floods and hailstorms - as opposed to major disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes - caused more than US\$50bn of insured losses.

Swiss Re highlighted how the

Of the total economic losses, \$260bn are from natural catastrophes and \$8bn from man-made disasters, such as industrial accidents

insurance and reinsurance industry covered roughly only 45 per cent of the economic losses so far this year.

"The protection gap remains vast," said Thierry Leger, the group's chief underwriting officer. Of the estimated US\$268bn total economic losses for property damage so far this year, US\$260bn are from natural catastrophes and US\$8bn from man-made disasters, such as industrial accidents.

The US\$268bn figure is down 12 per cent from US\$303bn last year, but above the US\$219bn average over the previous 10 years. AFP



Global food prices overall remain steady in November

Rome, Italy - The measure of changes in world food commodity prices remained largely steady in November, with declining international prices of cereals, meat and dairy products offsetting increasing quotations for vegetable oils and sugar, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported.

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of a basket of commonly-traded food commodities, averaged 135.7 points during the month of November, a fraction below its level in October. The Index is now only 0.3 per cent higher than its level in November 2021.

The FAO Cereal Price Index declined by 1.3 per cent from the previous month, but it was still up 6.3 per cent from its value a year ago. World wheat and maize prices declined in November by 2.8 per cent and 1.7 per cent, respectively, partly influenced by the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. By contrast, international rice prices moved up by 2.3 per cent.

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index increased by 2.3 per cent in November, ending seven consecutive months of decline. International palm and soy oil

prices rose, while those of rapeseed and sunflower oils dropped.

The FAO Dairy Price Index decreased by 1.2 per cent since October, with world quotations for butter, skim and whole milk powders falling, amid lower import demand, while those for cheese increased, in part due to less buoyant export availabilities from leading producing countries in Western Europe.

The FAO Meat Price Index was 0.9 per cent lower in November than the previous month, as international bovine meat prices fell, as increased export supplies from Australia added to already-high supplies from Brazil, notwithstanding China's continuing strong import demand.

The FAO Sugar Price Index rose 5.2 per cent in November, influenced by strong buying amid tight global sugar supplies due to harvest delays in key producing countries and the announcement by India of a lower sugar export quota. Higher ethanol prices in Brazil also exerted upward pressure on world sugar prices.

In the latest Cereal Supply and Demand Brief, FAO further cut its forecast for world cereal production in 2022, which now stands at 2 756mn tonnes, a 2.0 per cent drop from 2021. WAM

US economy slows amid uncertainty: Fed

Washington, US - US economic activity eased in recent weeks, while uncertainty and "increased pessimism" clouded the country's outlook amid high prices and rising interest rates, a report published by the Federal Reserve said.

The Fed's latest "beige book" survey of economic conditions comes as the US central bank pushes on with its all-out effort to cool surging inflation, although Fed chief Jerome Powell also signaled Wednesday that it was likely time to slow aggressive rate hikes soon.

"Economic activity was about flat or up slightly" since the last report in mid-October, said the latest release.

While five of the Fed's 12 districts reported small gains in activity, the rest "experienced either no change or slight-to-modest declines," added the report, which surveys firms and other contacts.

"Interest rates and inflation continued to weigh on activity, and many contacts expressed



greater uncertainty or increased pessimism concerning the outlook," the report said.

Consumer spending was mixed but eked out slight gains, with inflation nudging some buyers towards lower-priced goods, while tourism saw some improve-

ment as well.

Higher interest rates took a toll on home sales, which fell "steeply" in some districts.

In the labor market, demand weakened overall according to the report, which noted there were "scattered layoffs" in the

technology, finance and real estate sectors.

At an event in Washington on Wednesday, Powell said "the time for moderating the pace of rate increases may come as soon as the December meeting" of Fed policymakers.

Markets welcomed the news with US stocks rallying, but Powell also stressed that the Fed would "stay the course until the job is done," given that history cautions strongly against loosening policy prematurely.

AFP

Jindal Shadeed plans \$3bn mega steel project in Duqm

Continued from Page 01

The MoU was signed by Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, deputy chairman of OPAZ, and Jindal Shadeed's Harsha Shetty. The land reservation agreement was signed by the Jindal Shadeed and Reggy Vermeulen, chief executive officer of the Port of Duqm.

In line with its development efforts, Jindal Shadeed also signed an MoU with the centralised utility provider, Marafiq, to provide the plant with the utilities necessary to operate the project such as water services, seawater for cooling purposes, and other Marafiq services. The agreement was signed by Talal al Lawati, vice president of commercial op-

erations at Marafiq.

Commenting on the agreements, Dheeb expressed his delight in partnering with Jindal Shadeed to develop its manufacturing facility in Duqm. He reaffirmed that a project of this caliber would be an added value to the heavy industries cluster in SEZAD and would play a vital role in the development of Duqm as a key industrial hub.

Reggy Vermeulen said, "This is a great step for all of us, and we are thrilled to see such a project happen in Port of Duqm - a successful pairing of Jindal Shadeed's expertise in steel production and the Port of Duqm's logistical prowess."

SALE OF ASSETS

Hamad Al Sharji, Peter Mansour & Co., Advocates, Legal Consultants and Arbitrators (Law Firm Partnership), in their capacity as Liquidator of Hasan Juma Backer Trad. & Cont. Co. LLC is offering for sale the following:

- **Office Furniture** - 200 staff Work stations, Filing cabinets, Office Tables, Chairs, Meeting tables, CEO office furniture etc...
- **Gymnasium Equipment** - Treadmill, Multi Gym, Stepper, Cross Trainer, Exercise bicycle, Dumbbells, Bench press etc...
- **27 nos.Sewage pumps** - Submersible & Horizontal Centrifugal pumps of different capacities in packed unused condition.

For a list of the above materials and its inspection, please contact Mr.U.S.Tipnis (Mobile # 99327259) or by email unmesh.tipnis@gmail.com. Offers to be submitted to the Liquidator's office located in Bait Hoor Bldg, Next to First Abu Dhabi Bank, 3rd floor, CBD or by email to lawyer@sharjimansour.com no later than 28th December 2022.

Sale will be on "where is as is basis". The Liquidator is not obliged to sell to the highest bidder.

Hamad Al Sharji, Peter Mansour & Co.
Advocates, Legal Consultants and Arbitrators (Law Firm Partnership)
Tel.No. 24780333 / 24780335

beIN SPORTS’ MENA viewership over 1bn

Records are tumbling at beIN SPORTS after the official broadcaster of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 released initial numbers showing more than a billion cumulative views of the opening ceremony and first round of group stage matches on its flagship channel across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This figure amounts to a 113 per cent increase over the same 16-match period when compared to the Qatar-based network’s broadcast of the FIFA World Cup Russia 2018. As the exclusive broadcast rights holder of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 across 24 countries in MENA, beIN SPORTS is playing a central role in showcasing the historic tournament across the region.

GCET to host biggest student event of ME

As part of its continuous support and contributions towards empowering the educational sector through the various events, the Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) will host the ‘LECOQUP’ event at its premises on Thursday. The one-day competition - considered to be the biggest student event in the Middle East - comes as the third international version where it was held in Dubai in 2018, then in Ankara, Turkey in 2020. A total of 300 students representing over ten nationalities including Oman, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Ghana, India, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Pakistan, and Bangladesh will participate in the event that is being organised by the Elm al-Raqi Educational Group.

NBO spurs anti-fraud awareness campaign

Marking the annual International Fraud Awareness Week, National Bank of Oman (NBO) in collaboration with the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) joined global efforts to minimising the impact of fraud by promoting anti-fraud awareness and education. The bank conducted a workshop for the employees recently. Huda Sultan al Hinai, head of Fraud Risk Management at NBO, said, “Our fraud prevention strategies are aligned with the guidelines laid out in the Central Bank of Oman’s Master Circular about Fraud Risk Management. We are always vigilant.”

Ooredoo offers special numbers in auction

To mark the 52nd National Day of the Renaissance, Ooredoo is offering a symbolic 52 Diamond eight-digit numbers in a charity auction, from where the highest bidder will take home the prize. Registration for the auction opened on Sunday, while bidding will start on Wednesday. ‘It’s not only an exciting chance to get a special mobile number, but with all proceeds being donated to charity, it provides bidders with an opportunity to help those in need, too,’ Ooredoo said. Those interested can browse the online list to know different prices for different numbers.

NMC launches hearing awareness with Cochlear Implant programme

NMC’s hearing awareness initiative has been launched with the Cochlear Implant surgery performed on a four year old, the first such surgery to be conducted in a private sector healthcare centre in Oman.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of H H Sayyida Meyyan bint Shihab al Said and guest of honour was H E Dr Hilal al Sabti, Minister of Health, at W Hotel, Muscat. The event had the gracious presence of H H Sayyida Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said and H H Sayyida Hujajja bint Jaffer al Said.

According to WHO, by 2050 about 2.5bn people may suffer from hearing loss. Early detection and early intervention can make life better for an individual, the hospital said. The latest surgery is yet another feather in the cap of NMC, the largest private healthcare company in the UAE and third largest in Oman. It began its journey of quality healthcare in Oman five years ago.

“NMC Hospitals are pioneers in patient education initiatives and hearing awareness is one such initiative which is very important for the community. Hearing disabilities can be caused by genetic factors, malnutrition during motherhood, recurrent ear infections, lack of immunization and continuous



exposure to high noise,” said Dr Deep Makkar, General Manager and Country head of NMC Healthcare in Oman.

“It is our prime duty as healthcare provider to spread awareness on the causes and prevention of diseases. Prevention of hearing loss can be done through strategies to avoid causative factors, however rehabilitation is equally important who are already suffering from hearing loss.”

He pointed out that assistive technologies like hearing aids can help people with mild to moderate hearing losses, whereas Cochlear Implants are the best options for profound hearing loss in children as well as adults. “We

are glad to give people an access to Cochlear Implant programme in private sector for the people in need and requires timely intervention. Unaddressed hearing loss is expensive to communities and governments and can cost up to US\$980bn annually worldwide. So, it is important we work together in spreading awareness on hearing loss and make the community a better place for everyone to live happily.”

The benefits are many and after the surgery the children are given speech therapy for one to two years. Four year old Affan has already started the process. His father said he hoped his son will begin to speak in six months.

“Cochlear is a market leader in implantable hearing solutions; we are driven by our mission to helping people hear and be heard. Hearing loss is a global challenge that remains prevalent and under treated,” noted Alain Yazbeck, Cochlear’s Middle East and Africa Regional Director.

“We are appreciative of the esteemed NMC Healthcare for organising this awareness day and excited, with our distributor Taiba Medserv LLC, to be part of this event. It is through such collaborations with the healthcare community and all influential stakeholders that we raise awareness, particularly around early detection, and

intervention. We aim to build customer confidence and offer more patients in Oman, hearing solutions best suited to their individual needs.”

Cochlear implants are not just for children but for adults as well, pointed out Ayat Adam, Cochlear’s Middle East and Africa Consumer engagement professional with more than five years’ experience in working with hearing impaired individuals and hearing care professionals.

She spoke about her difficult journey since she started losing her hearing ability from the age of 15 years. She was given hearing aids that were too loud damaging her ears further so a correct diagnosis was as important as the right treatment. She then underwent cochlear implant and her life started coming to normal. She went on to finish her master’s degree.

Dr Benaifer Billimoria, specialist ENT surgeon at NMC, who assisted principal surgeon Dr Khalil al Macki during the surgery, said, “We never knew the gift of hearing can be so precious. The lives of Affan and Ayat changed with the restoration of hearing so we can now imagine how our society would change once everyone becomes able to hear.

ahli islamic awarded for excellent Islamic banking

With a keen focus on promoting ethical banking practices, and financial inclusivity, ahli islamic has been at the forefront of setting new benchmarks in the Islamic banking industry in Oman. In recognition of the bank’s continued efforts, ahli islamic was recently conferred the prestigious title of Excellence in Islamic Retail Banking at the recently held Islamic Banking and Finance Awards 2022.

The award ceremony was co-located at the Islamic Banking and Finance Summit, which celebrated its 10th anniversary this year.

The event was held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said as its chief guest, and was attended by H E Tahir al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman as a keynote speaker sharing his invaluable industry insights, and Malik Abdullah al Mahrouqi, Advisor to the Executive President Office, Central Bank of Oman, as the summit’s guest of honour.

The summit, which elicited select banks and FinTech companies for their exceptional performance and achievements during the year, was attended by a cross-section of experts from the Islamic banking and finance industry, top officials from different sectors, and key delegates from various government bodies.

Noora Sabah Sultan, AGM - head of Retail Banking ahli islamic said, “At ahli



islamic, we are driven by our relentless pursuit of excellence to provide a comprehensive suite of Sharia-compliant solutions to our customers which deliver a superior banking experience. We are indeed pleased to have received this award which is a testament to our innate zeal that inspires us to go the extra mile and our steadfast commitment to achieving outstanding results in every area of operation.”

“ahli islamic will continue to spearhead innovation, uphold industry best practices, and remain at the forefront of advocating the benefits of modern sharia’a-compliant banking solutions in the country. This will go beyond strengthening our brand in the industry - it will also cement the sultanate’s position and increase its contribution to the Islamic economy,” she added.

Bank Muscat’s development programme helps Omani staff

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to provide comprehensive learning and development programmes for its employees in line with its pioneering role in the development of Omani human resources.

The bank announced recently that several batches of its flagship High Potential Graduate Development programme, continue to be conducted in 2022, with a view to chalk out a clear career growth path for the large pool of talented youth working at Bank Muscat.

Explaining the bank’s strategy to further develop the competencies of the national cadre, Said Salim al Aufi, General Manager - Human Resources & Administration, Bank Muscat, said, “Bank Muscat, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, has always played a key role in the training and development of Omani human resources as part of its overall strategy.

“The bank firmly believes that its diligent and highly-competent employees are the main reason for its sustained growth and position as the leading financial services provider in Oman. Hence, we ensure a world-class working environment for our employees, which automatically makes Bank Muscat a dream employer for Omani youth looking for career opportunities in the financial services sector.”

In particular the High Potential Graduate Development programme



has become the premier graduate development programme in the country as it develops the capabilities to have sound know-how of the banking business and self-leadership skills, the bank stated, adding that the programme ensures a steady flow of talented Omanis to the Bank’s leadership pipeline.

‘It enables growing and nurturing of internal talent to take up additional responsibilities in preparation for managerial roles in the future. The programme emphasises on gaining critical knowledge and skills such as corporate credit, investment banking, corporate finance, treasury and capital markets, retail banking, Islamic Banking, finance, human resources management, and assurance functions.’

The two-year programme comprises vast range of online modules that are blended ten workshops with case studies, simulations and technical and leadership assessments.

Graduates who are able to apply the newfound knowledge to better their ‘on the job performance’ can look forward to growing in their careers with the support of other programmes like the Jadara First Time Line Manager programme and the Branch Manager Development programme. Other Jadara programmes include the Middle Management Development Programme, which ensures a steady flow of talented, well-developed managers to senior and middle-management roles.

Bank Muscat also assigns resources to provide continuous development opportunities to its Top Management team through regular speeches on current trends and leadership by global leadership thinkers, executive coaching opportunities, participation in self-learning programmes and nominations to general and advanced management programmes at leading business schools.

Non-hydrogenated products fortifying health: AVOD

Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives SAOC’s (AVOD’s) transformation strategy has always put health and customers’ wellbeing at the forefront, and this has gained it the distinction of being Oman’s Most Trusted Brand year after year.

The brand’s USP is its consistent delivery of products, which offer the ideal balance of nutrition, health and wellness and taste, and encourage consumers to adopt healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families.

‘Eat Right, Live Well’ philosophy is the epicentre of the company’s product development process and has made AVOD a trustworthy specialist in refining, processing, packaging and distribution of high-quality trans fat free cooking oils, non-hydrogenated margarines, vegetable ghee, fats and mayonnaise.

The company’s continuous transformation takes a multi-pronged approach



to create health-focused products. The state-of-the-art modern factory is constantly upgraded to meet stringent quality controls.

Packing materials such as tins, cans, plastic bottles, etc are manufactured in-house and filled immediately using automatic packing machines to ensure highest standards of hygiene. The company’s commitment to safeguarding health and safety has earned it the ISO 9001 certificate for Quality Management System, ISO 14001 certificate for

Environmental Management System and ISO 22000 certificates for Food Safety Management.”

AVOD CEO Salem Bortmany said, “Every product that comes out of the AVOD stable is a testament to its commitment to offer consumers the best of health and value. After thorough research on the health risks that hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils pose to the physical well-being, which is trans-fats is converted into saturated fat.

“AVOD decided to invest in technology to ensure that all its products are non-hydrogenated and free from harmful trans-fats. All products go through a heart-friendly process which is recognized and recommended by WHO.”

AVOD is the first company in Oman to fortify and enrich its top-quality cooking oils with vitamins A & D, making them healthier choices in this category while Khafeef is the lightest frying oil, the first of its kind in the sultanate, he said.

“Our own transformation journey has mirrored that of our valued consumers. We are committed to building healthier and happier communities to ensure that our nation-building process is fortified further,” he added.

With more than three decades of successful operations in the Sultanate of Oman, AVOD has built a product portfolio that prides itself on being both high on quality and taste.

Muzn wins most innovative Islamic window award

Muzn, National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Islamic banking window, recently won the Most Innovative Islamic Window award at the Islamic Banking and Finance Summit 2022. The accolade is a tribute to Muzn’s innovative and sharia’a-compliant financial solutions and state-of-the-art digital platforms, including a mobile app and Corporate Internet Banking, as it aims to continuously create an exceptional customer experience.

Aimed to highlight the current growth of Islamic banking, the Islamic Banking and Finance event was held under the patronage of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and brought together leaders in Islamic banking.

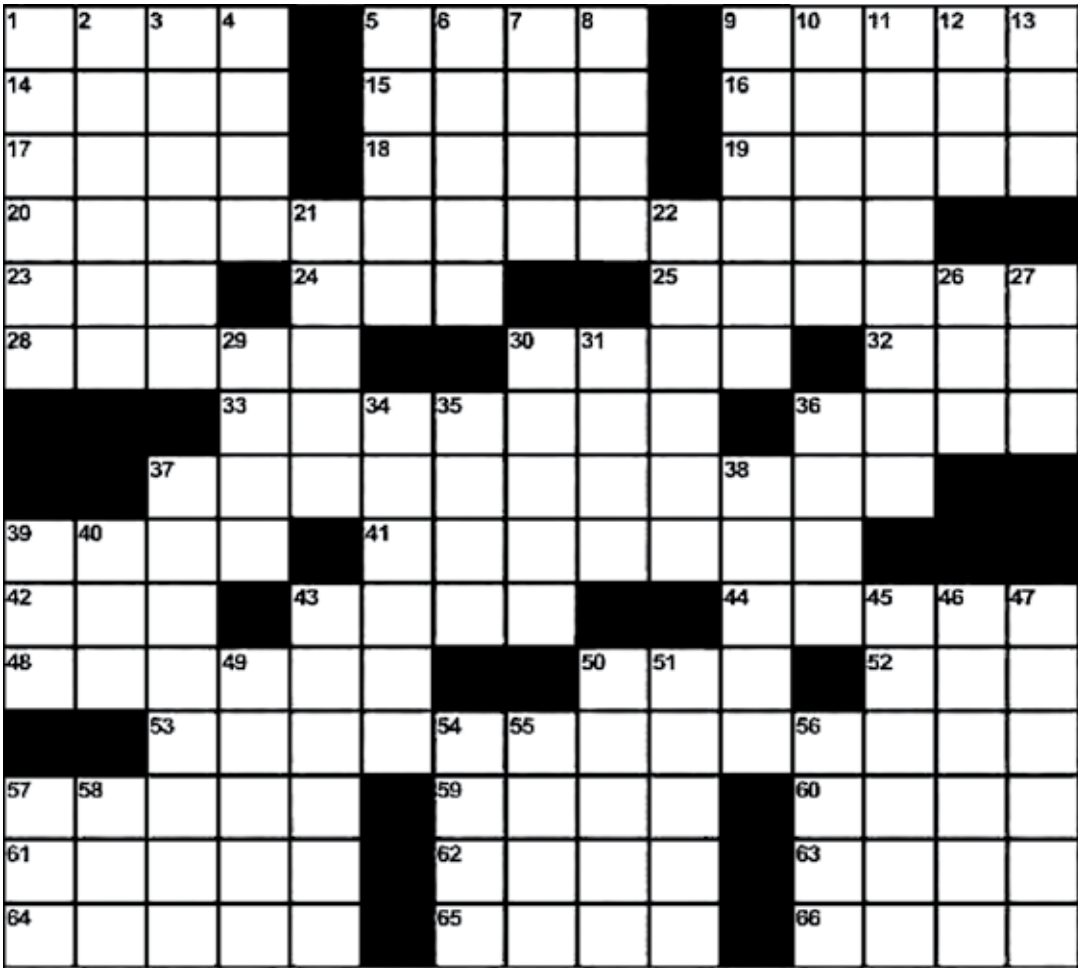
Salima al Marzouqi, Assisting General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO Muzn Islamic Banking, said, “As Oman’s first Islamic banking window, we are committed to



our customer-centric approach and digital transformation to provide the best sharia’a-compliant financial services. We continue to combine technology, innovation and analytics, while always safeguarding the principles of our customers.”

“Our industry is now playing its part in the Oman’s economic growth and diversification,” she added.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1) Quaker's "you"
5) Beansies
9) Ghana's capital
14) Didn't draw a card
15) Biblical shepherd
16) "Rain Man" director Levinson
17) Desiccated
18) "Legal" prefix
19) Make feel small
20) Place for a conductor
23) 3:00 on a sundial
24) Take unfair advantage of
25) Like Spock's nerve pinch
28) Lines man?
30) Certain Nigerians, formerly
32) Pie-mode connection
33) Wainscot again
36) Having a common ancestor
37) Airport-based business, often
39) Highlander
41) Most massive
42) Sighs of comfort
43) It won't buy much
44) Bartender on TV's Pacific

Princess
48) Light, custard-filled cake
50) How do ewe sound?
52) Biochemistry abbr.
5 3) Virus causes
57) Grab tightly
59) Shoestring
60) Germinated grain
61) "Calvin and Hobbes" girl
62) "Puppy Love" singer Paul
63) "Zip-_-Doo-Dah"
64) Change, as the Constitution
65) Minority votes, often
66) Adjusts, as a clock
DOWN
1) Comedian's Muse
2) Brave
3) Bring out
4) Taro root
5) Bars for guitars
6) Decrease
7) "Frasier" actress Gilpin
8) Sarajevo resident
9) Adding device of old
10) Band of schemers
11) Seafood dish for grouches?
12) Four Monopoly squares (Abbr.)
13) Favorable vote
21) Dye-producing gas-tropod
22) Develop by gradual changes
26) Cassius Clay, now
27) One of the Bobbsey twins
29) Face-to-face exam
30) Dead to the world
31) Arctic Ocean obstacle
34) Accumulate
35) Slippery-eel link
36) "Hamlet" has five
37) Precedent setter
38) Thomas of the Basketball Hall of Fame
39) Type of reflex
40) Opposite of "huh?"
43) Slept under the stars
45) Amusement place
46) Short sock
4 7) Social divisions in India
49) Biology lab stain
50) A Conner on "Roseanne"
51) Code and rug
54) _ Bator, Mongolia
55) Lake _ (Blue Nile source)

56) Latin 101 verb
57) Fed. construction
overseer
58) Coke complement

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If you're itching for a big drama to come into your life, don't do anything new, because there's a doozy of a soap opera coming your way soon! Luckily, it will have an adventurous, lost-on-a-desert-island type of plot and not a teary dreary one. Be ready to roll and travel at a moment's notice. Is your passport up to date? You might not get a lot of sleep over the next few days, but you will definitely be having a heck of a lot of fun!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Exciting travel is in your near future, although it might not be the same journey you had planned. Let go of your organizational nature and try to let this new adventure unfold naturally. Give control over to fate. Things may not be too clear for quite a while, but you don't have to try to make them clear. Simply live with the uncertainty. In some circles, "uncertain" is just another word for "spontaneous." Incorporate more chance and fate into how you live your life.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You will need to prioritize all your assignments very carefully today. If you get up early, you may have some trouble getting your feet off the ground. But if you sleep in too late, you will miss out on a lot of productive time. Your energy will be released slowly as the day moves forward, so you'll have a lot of drive in the afternoon. Take care of the smaller details early on and save ambitious projects for later in the day.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Feel free to be a little self-centered today. You need a big dose of TLC, and there's nothing wrong with asking for it! Reach out to your friends and talk things over. Sharing your problems is a great way to reconnect with someone because you also enable that person to share problems with you. Restore your positive energy by treating yourself well and giving yourself the space you need. It's perfectly fine to refuse that dinner invitation.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today, despite the pressures around you, people are going to move at the pace they feel most comfortable at, and that's that. The sooner you get accustomed to this fact, the happier you'll be. Enjoy this slower route to your goal and you'll realize that what was meant to be will be. Dealing with a delay in your schedule will be easier if you focus on other projects or visit with other people, so get in touch with a few folks you miss.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

In a difficult situation today, remember that you can always rely on your secret weapon: your unfaltering creativity. If you are put on the spot by someone in power, just think fast. Grab for an idea and it will be there waiting for you. And it will be brilliant. Have faith that you've got what it takes to make the right impression and save the situation no matter how calamitous it may seem. Break the awkward silence with a zingy one-liner.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Skip the staid, business side of things today. Instead, focus on the creative aspects of your life. Listening to music, cooking up an ambitious meal, or even dancing around your bedroom is a great way to liven up the day and improve your mood. Creating something new is easier than ever, so don't be surprised if a tune pops into your head and refuses to leave, or if your mindless doodling results in some breathtaking images. All your inner ideas are itching to come out.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Are you living your life in constant motion? If you're feeling a bit stressed lately, it could be because you're doing way too many things on the go. It's time to get some things off your plate and delegate! Letting go of some of your work is not a sign that you can't handle the pressure, so don't worry what other people think. You have a reputation for being on the ball, and it won't suffer at all if you turn down the volume on what you're doing right now.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Today, a battle of wits or a humorous conversation could evolve into an awkward situation when someone steps a little too far outside the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Choose to be compassionate in this situation, and break the silence. Go for a funny gag to draw attention away from the person whose foot has become solidly stuck in their mouth. You know what it can be like to speak before you think. This gesture will earn you gratitude for a long time.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Distraction is nothing bad, although it can sometimes make you feel like you're treading water instead of plowing headfirst into the waves. Don't worry. You can still make progress even if you don't get a lot accomplished today. Just be prepared for your mind to wander, and don't fret if you can't find your car keys, decide what to have for dinner, or figure out what direction to take. It isn't a bad thing and it will all pass soon enough.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Are you ready for romance? That's not a silly question! Timing is everything when it comes to the art of love, and you need to feel one hundred percent on board for a new relationship. If it's not exactly what you want, then don't move forward with this person, no matter how great they look on paper. If you're in a relationship right now, communicate what you're feeling in greater detail. Your partner might be acting on some incorrect assumptions.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The line between you and other people is widening right now as you enter a phase of solo introspection. This is something to embrace, not worry about. Even if your social life hasn't been extremely active lately, you will relish the separation between what is going on in your own life and what is going on in the lives of the people around you. This is your chance to step back from the world and bow out of social obligations. Get used to greater freedoms.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The islands of Kos, Leros, Nisyros, Patmos and Rhodes are in what sea?

- A. Caribbean
- B. Caspian
- C. North
- D. Mediterranean

02. A club in central London called "The Night Tripper" that opened on 23 December 1966 later changed its name to what?

- A. The UFO
- B. The Ad Lib
- C. The Marquee
- D. CBGBs

03. How many ounces are there in 8 lbs?

- A. 128
- B. 108
- C. 112
- D. 120

Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

R	L	L	S
A	I	U	I
I	M	G	M
A	T	Y	M

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Indonesia's Mount Semeru volcano erupts, top alert status triggered

Lumajang, Indonesia - Indonesia's Mount Semeru erupted on Sunday spewing hot ash clouds a mile into the sky and sending rivers of lava down its side, sparking the evacuation of nearly 2,000 people exactly one year after its last major eruption killed dozens.

The eruption of the highest mountain on Indonesia's main island of Java, around 800km (500 miles) southeast of capital Jakarta, prompted authorities to raise the alert status to the highest level.

'Hot avalanches' caused by piles of lava at the tip of the 3,676-metre (12,000 feet) volcano slid down after the eruption, National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) spokesperson Abdul Muhari said in a statement.

The increased threat level 'means the danger has threatened the people's settlement and the volcano's activity has escalated', Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation Center (PVMBG) spokesperson Hendra Gunawan told broadcaster Kompas TV.

No casualties or injuries were reported immediately after the eruption but Gunawan warned nearby residents not to travel within eight kilometres (five miles) of the crater after the threat level was raised to four.

The BNPB said 1,979 people were taken to 11 shelters, with at least 6 villages affected by the eruption.

Images on local TV showed evacuees, mostly women and children, taking shelter in a school.

Videos shared with AFP by local rescue group Irannala Rescue showed a huge black cloud rising from the volcano's crater, engulfing the sky and blocking the sun in nearby villages.

The villages were being bat-



Villagers watch hot smoke from the ground following Mount Semeru's volcanic eruption in Lumajang, East Java on Sunday (AFP)

tered by monsoon rains by the afternoon and the rainfall was mixing with volcanic ash, according to Kompas.

Residents were also told to

tion Agency.

Japan's weather agency had earlier warned that a tsunami was possible in the southern islands of Miyako and Yaeyama in

because of the threat of polluted air to vulnerable residents.

As rescuer Gunawan, who has the same name as the PVMBG spokesperson, filmed clouds above him in East Java after the eruption, a video showed the sky quickly turning to black as a colossal plume of ash engulfed any light.

"I've promised you, we won't miss it again," he told residents in a local Javanese dialect, appearing to refer to last year's eruption before flicking a peace sign to the camera.

Another rescuer filmed an ominously dark scene outdoors at midday, which could have been midnight.

"It's getting dark, bro," he said to the camera, as a seismograph whistled in the background.

Mount Semeru last erupted exactly one year ago, killing at least 51 people and damaging more than 5,000 homes.

The disaster left entire streets filled with mud and ash that

swallowed houses and vehicles, with nearly 10,000 people seeking refuge.

A bridge that connects two districts in the area that was being rebuilt after last year's eruption was heavily damaged again on Sunday, according to a PVMBG media officer.

Semeru's alert status had remained at its second-highest level since its previous major eruption in December 2020, which also forced thousands to flee and left villages covered.

Indonesia sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire, where the meeting of continental plates causes high volcanic and seismic activity.

The Southeast Asian archipelago nation has nearly 130 active volcanoes.

A volcano in the strait between Java and Sumatra islands erupted in late 2018, causing an underwater landslide and tsunami that killed more than 400 people.

AFP



Colombia's President Gustavo Petro (AFP)

Colombia says pact reached with ELN rebels on displaced

Bogotá, Colombia - Colombian President Gustavo Petro said on Saturday the ELN rebel group has agreed to allow a displaced indigenous community to return to its lands in the west of the nation, the first significant achievement in 12 days of peace talks.

The ELN, or National Liberation Army, is the sole leftist insurgency yet to lay down weapons in Colombia.

"The first point of agreement that we reached with the ELN - in barely a week of these dialogues - is the return of the indigenous Embera people ... to their reservations," Petro said in a public appearance in Dabeiba, a town in northwestern Colombia.

Petro did not say when the Embera would return to their lands in the departments of Choco and Risaralda. They had fled violence between drug gangs, outlawed right-wing militias and the ELN.

Many of the displaced Embera now live in Colombia's capital and hold highly visible protests in parks, clashing frequently with police.

ELN delegates to the talks did not make any statements on Sat-

urday directly related to the humanitarian agreement on the Embera.

Talks between the government and the ELN broke off in 2019, following an attack in which 22 people were killed, but Petro, a leftist who took office in August, sent a team to resume them on November 21 in Venezuela.

No ceasefire yet

The talks continue even though there is no formal ceasefire between security forces and ELN fighters. Indepaz, a peace-building civic group, puts the number of ELN fighters at about 2,500.

Nevertheless, the ELN had pledged to allow 'humanitarian relief processes' as part of a peace talks framework its leaders signed with the government of then-president Juan Manuel Santos in 2016.

That year, Santos signed a historic peace deal with Colombia's largest and oldest insurgency, the FARC, that ended more than five decades of conflict. The FARC and ELN operated in different parts of the country.

AFP

Cuba regime has unleashed 'repressive fury': Dissident

Guadalajara, Mexico - Trailblazing blogger Yoani Sanchez said on Saturday the Cuban regime has hit any sign of discontent with 'repressive fury' and warned that a new penal code seeks to stifle independent journalists.

Sanchez, who lives in Havana, said a flareup of street protests in 2021 jolted Cuba's ruling party and led to strict controls.

"Repressive fury was unleashed. We have more than 1,000 political prisoners," Sanchez said during a panel at the International Book Fair of Guadalajara, a major annual trade and ideas forum.

Sanchez said she worried about the impact of a new penal code approved by Cuba's parliament last May that went into effect last week.

"The most harmed, the main victim (of this code) is independent journalism, information and the free flow of news," she said.

The penal code classifies as crimes a number of activities the state considers subversive or harmful to society. Human rights groups say it will serve to stifle dissent.

The code maintains the death penalty for 23 types of crime, including harming state security, terrorism, international drug trafficking and murder. Other activities also deemed subversive carry lesser sentences.

"Popular protest is criminalised under offenses such as public scandal," said Sanchez, founder of the website 14ymedio.com.

AFP

Crown to be modified for Charles III coronation

London, UK - Britain's 17th-century St Edward's Crown, the centrepiece of the Crown Jewels, has been removed from display to be altered for the coronation of King Charles III, Buckingham Palace said on Saturday.

The solid gold crown, encrusted with rubies, amethysts, sapphires, garnet, topazes and tourmalines, will undergo 'modification work' for Charles III's coronation at Westminster Abbey on May 6 next year, the palace said.

The crown is the centrepiece of the Crown Jewels, a large collection of royal regalia housed in the Tower of London that at-



St Edward's Crown, that is set to be worn by King Charles III (AFP)

tracts more than a million visitors per year.

It has a purple velvet cap with

an ermine band, is just over 30cm (one foot) tall and very heavy. It was last worn by Queen Elizabeth II, at her coronation in 1953. Charles III, 74, will be crowned along with his wife, Queen Consort Camilla.

The ceremony will be followed by a national holiday on May 8.

The crown was made for King Charles II in 1661 to replace a mediaeval crown though to date back to Edward the Confessor.

2,000 diamonds

The original had been melted down by parliamentarians after the execution of Charles I.

For hundreds of years afterwards, the crown was only carried in coronation processions because it was too heavy to wear. It was altered to make it lighter for the coronation of King George V in 1911 but still weighs 2.23kg (nearly five pounds).

Charles III will only wear it at the moment he is crowned.

When he leaves Westminster Abbey, Charles will wear the more modern Imperial State Crown, also used for occasions such as the opening of parliament. Set with over 2,000 diamonds, the Imperial State Crown was created in 1937 for the coronation of King George VI, the fa-

ther of Elizabeth II.

The coronation traditionally takes place some months after a new sovereign has ascended to the throne, following a period of national and royal mourning, and intense preparation.

Charles immediately became king when his mother died on September 8. He also took over as head of state of 14 Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Concerned about public perceptions, he has reportedly requested a less lavish ceremony than the festivities held for Elizabeth II in 1953.

AFP

Displaced Syrians fear Turkish threats spell exodus

Sandaf, Syria - Syria's grinding conflict has already uprooted Ahmed Yassin and his family several times, but now they fear a threatened Turkish offensive will force them to flee the muddy camp they call home.

The 34-year-old, his wife and two children live in Sandaf in Syria's Aleppo province - just south of the border with Turkey, and under the control of Turkish-backed rebels.

"Making a living is hard," the labourer told AFP in the impoverished camp, as sheep grazed on the roadside nearby.

"On top of everything we've gone through - the misery, the lack of job opportunities and poverty... we are now threatened with displacement yet again."

On November 20, Turkey

began air strikes on Kurdish-held areas of Syria and Iraq in response to a deadly bombing in Istanbul the previous week.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened a new ground incursion into northern Syria to take control of three Kurdish-held areas. One of them, Tal Rifaat, is less than 10km (six miles) from Sandaf.

Yassin recalled fleeing his hometown in neighbouring Idlib province after fighting flared there earlier in the civil war.

"We pray for God's help, and for us to return to our towns, our lands, our homes," he said.

'Last straw'

Since 2016, Turkey has carried out successive ground operations to expel Kurdish forces



Turkey-backed Syrian fighters stand guard in a position in al-Kraydiyeh area, near Syria's northern city of Manbij, on Friday (AFP)

from border areas of northern Syria.

Its troops and their Syrian proxies hold swathes of the border, and Erdogan has long sought to establish a 'safe zone' 30km (20 miles) deep the whole length of the frontier.

Turkey said its recent Syria air strikes have targeted the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara sees as an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Turkey said the groups were behind the Istanbul bombing, an accusation both organisations have denied.

At the Sandaf camp, children, some barefoot, played on the ground between tents.

Camp resident Mohammed Abu Ali said there was sporadic

shelling between the opposing sides even before Turkey launched its air assault last month.

The 45-year-old, who lives with his five children, one of whom uses a wheelchair, said the fighting left camp residents in 'a state of panic and fear'.

"We hope that either a military operation will allow us to return home, or that they will reach an agreement so we can stay in the camp," said Abu Ali, also originally from Idlib.

"All we want is... to live the remaining days of our lives in our homes," he said, standing by a washing line strung from his tent.

Human rights groups have warned that civilians on both sides of the front line will bear the brunt of any new flareup.

Renewed conflict in northern Syria would be 'the last straw for millions of people grappling with the dire humanitarian conditions', Save the Children and other groups warned this week.

Another surge in hostilities will potentially result 'in a new wave of displacement', they said, urging all parties to protect civilians. Any advance by Turkish-backed forces is likely to spark a mass exodus of Kurdish civilians on the other side of the front line, but any new flareup holds fears for civilians in Turkish-held areas too, with heavy exchanges likely across the front line.

Turkish-backed fighters were scattered along the front line without any heavy equipment, an AFP correspondent reported.

AFP

Protest-hit Iran abolishes morality police

Tehran, Iran - Iran has scrapped its morality police after more than two months of protests triggered by the arrest of Mahsa Amini for allegedly violating the country's strict female dress code, local media said on Sunday.

Women-led protests, labelled 'riots' by the authorities, have swept Iran since the 22-year-old Iranian of Kurdish origin died in custody on September 16, three days after her arrest by the morality police in Tehran.

Demonstrators have burned their mandatory hijab head coverings and shouted anti-government slogans, and since Amini's death, a growing number of women have failed to wear the hijab, particularly in parts of Tehran.

"Morality police have nothing to do with the judiciary and have been abolished," Attorney General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri was quoted as saying by the ISNA news agency.

His comment came at a religious conference where he responded to a participant who asked 'why the morality police were being shut down', the report said.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that overthrew Iran's US-backed monarchy, there has been some kind of official monitoring of the strict dress code for both men and women.

But under headline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the morality police - known formally as the Gasht-e Ershad or 'Guidance Patrol' - was established to 'spread the culture of modesty and hijab'.

The units were set up by Iran's Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, which is today headed by President Ebrahim



This file photo shows Iranian police officers stopping a car during a crackdown to enforce the Islamic dress code in Tehran on April 22, 2007 (AFP)

The announcement came a day after the attorney general said parliament and judiciary were working on whether the hijab law needs to be changed

Raisi.

They began their patrols in 2006 to enforce the dress code which also requires women to wear long clothes and forbids shorts, ripped jeans and other clothes deemed immodest.

The announcement of the units' abolition came a day after Montazeri said 'both parliament and the judiciary are working' on the issue of whether the law requiring women to cover their

heads needs to be changed.

Raisi said in televised comments on Saturday that Iran's republican and Islamic foundations were constitutionally entrenched 'but there are methods of implementing the constitution that can be flexible'.

'Spreading corruption'

The hijab became mandatory in 1983.

Morality police officers initially issued warnings before starting to crack down and arrest women 15 years ago.

The squads were usually made up of men in green uniforms and women clad in black chadors, garments that cover their heads and upper bodies.

The role of the units evolved, but has always been controversial even among candidates running for the presidency.

Clothing norms gradually changed, especially under former moderate president Hassan Rouhani, when it became commonplace to see women in tight jeans with loose, colourful headscarves.

But in July this year his successor, the ultra-conservative Raisi, called for the mobilisation of 'all state institutions to enforce the headscarf law'.

Raisi at the time charged that 'the enemies of Iran and Islam have targeted the cultural and religious values of society by spreading corruption'.

Iran's regional rival Saudi Arabia also employed morality police to enforce female dress codes and other rules of behaviour. Since 2016 the force there has been sidelined in a push by the Sunni Muslim kingdom to shake off its austere image.

In September, the Union of Islamic Iran People Party, the country's main reformist party, called for the hijab law to be re-

'Iran executes four over links to Israeli intelligence'

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Sunday put to death four people accused of working with Israel's intelligence service, the judiciary said.

"This morning, the sentences of four main members of the gang of mobsters related to the Zionist intelligence service were executed," the judiciary's Mizan Online website reported.

Iran carried out the sentences four days after the Islamic republic's supreme court upheld the penalty of capital punishment for 'their intelligence cooperation with the Zionist regime (Israel) and kidnapping', the Mizan Online said. There was no recourse to appeal after Wednesday's decision, it added.

Mizan identified the men as Hossein Ordoukhanzadeh, Shahin Imani Mahmoudabad, Milad Ashrafi Atbatan and Manouchehr Shahbandi Bojandi, without elaborating on their backgrounds.

Three other defendants were sentenced to between five and 10 years in prison for crimes against the country's security, complicity in kidnapping and possession of weapons, the judiciary's website said after the Wednesday ruling.

Iran and Israel have been engaged in a years-long shadow war. The Islamic republic accuses Israel of carrying out sabotage attacks against its nuclear sites and assassinations, including of scientists.

AFP

Two dead at protest in southern Syria

Beirut, Lebanon - A protester and a policeman were killed on Sunday in Syria's southern city of Sweida as security forces cracked down on a rare demonstration by hundreds against deteriorating living conditions.

Tensions were high in the regime-held city after protesters threw rocks at a government building and stormed it, removing a large picture of President Bashar al-Assad from its facade, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"At least one protester and one police officer were killed," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

The protester was shot dead when security forces opened fire after demonstrators entered the building, he said, adding that government forces have fanned out in the city, dispersing protesters.

AFP

Israel strikes sites of Hamas in Gaza Strip

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - The Israeli air force said it had carried out overnight air strikes against sites of the Islamist movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip after a rocket was fired from the Palestinian enclave towards Israeli territory.

The Israeli army reported on Saturday evening a rocket had been fired from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, the first in a month. The attack came as one of Gaza's larger armed factions, Islamic Jihad, threatened to retaliate after Israeli troops killed two of its leaders in the West Bank town of Jenin on Thursday.

"In response to the rocket fired toward Israeli territory, IDF fighter jets targeted overnight (Sunday) a weapons manufacturing site belonging to the Hamas terrorist organisation," the Israeli army said in a statement on Sunday.

The target was a site 'where the majority of the organisation's rockets in the Gaza Strip are being manufactured', it said.

Israel Defense Forces also hit 'a Hamas terrorist tunnel in the Southern Gaza Strip', it said.

The army said a few hours



A ball of fire and a plume of smoke rise above buildings in south of City Strip as Israeli warplanes target the Palestinian enclave, early on Sunday (AFP)

later it had targeted a Hamas military post in response to fire from the Gaza Strip against Israeli warplanes.

The armed wing of Hamas said it used anti-aircraft missiles during Israeli air strikes on the Gaza Strip.

Security sources in Gaza reported two strikes in the south of the enclave, one against a military training site in Khan Younis

and the other in an uninhabited area close to Rafah.

The strikes caused no injuries, according to Palestinian medical sources.

"The Zionist enemy is extending its aggression against our people by brutally bombarding the Gaza Strip, following its crime yesterday of executing the martyr Ammar Mufleh in Huwara," Hamas spokesman

Hazem Qassem said.

A surge in bloodshed in the occupied West Bank has sparked international criticism of the Israeli army for its use of lethal force against Palestinian civilians.

Criticism has focused on the killing of Ammar Hadi Mufleh, 22, in disputed circumstances in the West Bank town of Huwara, just south of Nablus, on Friday.

AFP

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Rebel commander says 65% of fighters have disengaged from Tigray frontlines

Nairobi, Kenya - The commander-in-chief of the Tigray rebel forces has said that 65 per cent of his forces have 'disengaged', a month after a ceasefire agreement over Ethiopia's war-torn northern region.

The withdrawal and disarmament of Tigray's forces is a key provision of the agreement signed early last month in South Africa to end the two-year conflict. "We have started disengagement and relocation of our forces from battlelines... out of our forces, 65 per cent of them have passed through this process, disengaging from battlelines and moved to designated places," General Tadesse Worede, chief of staff of Tigray's fighters, told reporters on Saturday.

He did not specify the battlelines he was talking about or how far fighters had been withdrawn.

AFP was not able to independently verify the claims as Tigray remains inaccessible to journalists.

Tigray's authorities had been resisting central rule for months when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed accused their leadership of attacking federal army camps and sent troops into the



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (left) meeting with Ethiopia Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed at Prime Minister's office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia last week (AFP)

region in 2020.

The conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and pro-Abiy forces - which include regional militias and the Eritrean army - has caused an untold number of deaths, forced more than two million people from their homes and driven hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine.

The two parties signed a

peace deal in South Africa on November 2 that agreed to a cessation of hostilities and unfettered aid into Tigray, as well as the disarming of TPLF fighters and re-establishment of federal authority over Tigray.

But Tadesse said there were still 'forces in the areas that don't want peace', apparently referring to Eritrean soldiers and other regional Ethiopian militia.

"The problems they are creating and the abuses they're committing on the population isn't secret, so we've paused to some extent (our disengagement) in some places (to prevent) them from entering into new areas and continuing their atrocities on the population."

His troops would not '100 per cent' disengage until the threat was reduced, he added.

The ceasefire makes no mention of the presence on Ethiopian soil or any possible withdrawal of Eritrean troops, who have backed Abiy's forces and been accused of atrocities.

Aid access

Rebel fighters have 'started collecting our heavy weaponry and putting it in one area', he said.

According to an application agreement signed in the weeks following the Pretoria accord, the restitution of heavy weapons must be carried out simultaneously with the withdrawal of foreign and non-federal forces.

"There are currently no observers on the ground as per the peace agreement, so far there is no monitoring (mission), but we're implementing the agreement as we should," Tadesse said.

"In terms of implementing the peace agreement, we have moved one step forward," he added.

The UN's health agency said on Friday that it still cannot get unfettered access to bring humanitarian aid into the war-torn region, and that just a trickle of aid had managed to get into Tigray so far.

World Health Organization officials also raised concerns for areas that are still under the control of troops from neighbouring Eritrea.

"That peace process has not yet resulted in the kinds of full access, unfettered access and the massive scale-up of medical and health assistance that the people of Tigray need," WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan told a press conference.

"We've been a long time waiting to get access to these desperate people."

Restoring aid deliveries to Tigray was a key part of the agreement to end the two-year war that has killed untold numbers of people and unleashed a humanitarian crisis.

The region was isolated from the world for over a year, and faced severe shortages of medicines and limited access to electricity, banking and communications.

The UN's World Food Programme said this week that an estimated 13.6mn people across Tigray and its neighbouring regions of Amhara and Afar were dependent on humanitarian aid as a result of the war.

AFP

IS claims attack on Pakistani envoy

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Islamic State group claimed responsibility on Saturday for an attack on Pakistan's embassy in Kabul, which Islamabad decried as an 'assassination attempt'.

A security guard was wounded in the attack on Friday in the Afghan capital.

In a statement cited by militant monitor SITE, the Islamic State's regional chapter said it had 'attacked the apostate Pakistani ambassador and his guards'. Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has called it 'an assassination attempt' on the head of the mission, and demanded an investigation.

A Kabul police spokesman said one suspect had been arrested and two light weapons seized after security forces swept a nearby building. Although Pakistan does not officially recognise Afghanistan's Taliban government, it kept its embassy open even as the headline Islamists took over last year, and maintains a full diplomatic mission.

An embassy official told AFP a lone attacker 'came behind the cover of houses and started firing', but that the ambassador and other staff were safe.

AFP

More than 500 Ukrainian localities without power

Kyiv, Ukraine - More than 500 Ukrainian localities remained without power on Sunday following weeks of Russian airstrikes on the electric grid, an interior ministry official said.

"The enemy continues to attack the country's essential infrastructure. Currently, 507 localities in eight regions of our country are cut off from electricity supplies," deputy interior minister Yevgueny Yenin told Ukrainian television. "The Kharkiv region is the worst hit with 112 isolated villages."

Another 90 villages were cut off in the Donetsk and Kherson regions, he said, with others in the regions of Mykolaiv, Zapor-

izhzhia and Lugansk.

On Saturday, Ukrainian authorities - including Mykolaiv region governor Vitali Kim - had once again urged civilians to bear up in the face of continually deteriorating early winter conditions and regular power outages.

Repeated daily power cuts have left millions of people without heat or lighting while outside temperatures have dropped below zero Celsius.

With further strikes on the network widely expected, Ukrainians fear a difficult prolonged winter as well as a flood of departures by refugees from a war now into a tenth month.

AFP

Herzog becomes first Israeli president to visit Bahrain

Manama, Bahrain - Israeli President Isaac Herzog arrived on Sunday in Bahrain, the first visit by an Israeli head of state to the small Gulf kingdom since the two countries normalised relations in 2020.

Herzog, whose role is largely ceremonial, was greeted at the airport by Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif al-Zayani, according to pictures posted to his Twitter account.

He said on Twitter he planned to meet King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, as well as Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, who is crown prince and prime minister.

Accompanied by an economic delegation, Herzog said he would discuss 'ways to strengthen our economic coop-



Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa receives a gift from Israeli President Isaac Herzog in the capital Manama, on Sunday (AFP)

eration' along with climate change and security issues.

Herzog said he would then travel to Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates.

In 2020, the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco became the first Arab states in decades to normalise relations with Israel, following negotiations spearheaded by the

I call on more states in our region to join this partnership, strengthening the Middle East. The expanding circle of peace is highly important, amid threats to global, regional stability

ISAAC HERZOG

administration of former US president Donald Trump.

The Jewish state had earlier reached peace treaties with neighbouring Egypt and Jordan.

"I call on more states in our region to join this partnership, strengthening the Middle East," Herzog tweeted on Sunday.

"The expanding circle of (Middle East) peace is highly important, especially amid threats to global and regional stability. In the face of hate, threats & terror, there is one answer: alliances with friends."

Outgoing Prime Minister Yair Lapid, then Israel's top diplomat, visited Bahrain in September last year to open the Israeli embassy there.

In February of this year, Israel signed a defence agreement with Bahrain and Naftali Bennett became the first Israeli premier to visit the country.

AFP

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ART OF NOISE



Stuart Fowkes records the sound of a passing London Underground train at Blackfriars tube station in London

SAVING OBSOLETE SOUNDS

UK project aims to save lost sounds

The mostly defunct red phone boxes no longer attract much attention in London except from tourists. But Stuart Fowkes is thrilled to stumble upon one still in working order. Its ring is one of the world's disappearing noises that his pioneering 'obsolete sounds' project is dedicated to preserving.

He whips out a hand-held recording device and swings into action, explaining, "I've always had sonic curiosity. New sounds are appearing faster than at any time in history but they are also changing and disappearing faster than ever before."

Over the past five years Fowkes' Cities and Memories website has collected and remixed more than 5,000 sounds from 100 countries which are being archived by the British Library. Now, his latest project aims to preserve sounds that are 'just on the edge of memory'.

"These sounds that we are just about forgetting are

the ones that have the "greatest emotional resonance," he told AFP. "What I have been struck by is how people have responded emotionally to some of the recordings. You've got people who heard the sound of a Super 8 film camera and this reminded them of being in their living room in 1978 with their dad showing them home movies for the first time."

The 'obsolete sounds' project features more than 150 recordings collected from around the world, and also includes remixes of those sounds by musicians and sound artists.

Billed as the biggest collection of its kind, it includes everything from Walkman personal stereo cassette players and old video game consoles, to steam trains and vintage racing cars, as well as sounds that evoke the rapidly changing natural environment, such as crumbling glaciers.

"Before the industrial revolution, our sound environment - bells and horses' hooves and manual indus-

try - would not have changed much for hundreds of years," says Fowkes. "Today, the pace of change is ridiculous. Things that are only a few years old, like ring tones on mobile phones, already sound dated."

Sound of the underground

Moving below street level down into London's Underground train network, Fowkes gets to work again. A bit like the 'trainspotters' who were once a familiar sight on the platforms of UK railway stations, Fowkes is a dedicated soundspotter.

To him, however, there is nothing dull or uninteresting about the screeching of the train's wheels scraping against the curves in the metal tracks or the clunk of the doors opening and closing.

"I've always been someone who listens to the world. As soon as I have a recording device in my hand I start to listen to the world kind of differently and hear things that other people wouldn't necessarily notice or listen to," he says.

The digital consultant launched Cities and Memories in 2015 and has drawn in some 1,000 collabora-

As soon as I have a recording device in my hand I start to listen to the world kind of differently and hear things that other people wouldn't necessarily notice or listen to

STUART FOWKES

tors across the globe.

"Every morning, I wake up to emails with recordings from unexpected sources, like a beach in Bali or even the metro in Pyongyang," he says.

Field recordings are having a moment, he adds, with artists such as ethereal Icelandic singer Bjork using them in their music. "It used to be seen as very niche, even trainspotter-like behaviour, but now anyone can make a decent recording on their phone and it's becoming increasingly mainstream."

Fowkes has been thrilled by the response to his project - but is keen to receive more, especially from African cities.

Anyone can contribute, he says, just by sticking their mobile phone out of the window and then visiting citiesandmemories.com.

In the meantime, he'll keep on adding his own recordings, while admitting his dedication can sometimes be a source of mild irritation for his wife.

"Whenever we go to a new holiday destination... I often say, 'have you heard that pedestrian crossing? I have to go and record it'."

AFP

STAINS GONE BRIGHTNESS ON



CREATIVE MESSAGE

Students perform a 'murmuration' dance that mimics the motion of a flock of birds at Bird College in Sidcup, southeast of London

Murmuration

UK groups hope creative biodiversity message takes flight

A human 'murmuration' using dance techniques previously showcased by French choreographer Sadeck Waff at the Tokyo Paralympics will deliver a powerful message of hope to next week's United Nations biodiversity talks.

The COP15 talks organisers are preparing for multiple protests, with security measures including a three-metre high fence around the venue in Montreal, Canada. But a coalition of Britain's leading conservation charities has chosen a more creative approach to highlight its call for urgent targets to end biodiversity loss.

Spearheaded by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), they have joined forces with Waff and 80 young British dancers to create a video of one of his trademark 'murmuration' dances that mimics the motion of a flock of birds.

Paris-based Waff says the latest in his dance series, which draws its name from the collective noun for a flock of starlings, is about 'recovery and hope'.

"I hope that the dance inspires everyone to appreciate the power and beauty of cooperation as well as the urgency of the conversation that needs to take place, in order to save and protect the nature that we all rely on," he told AFP.

It is hoped a new global biodiversity framework will be agreed at the Montreal talks, which run from December 7 to 19.

The UN has said world leaders will not attend the gathering but the RSPB is asking British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to be present.

Synchronicity

The conservation charity wants Sunak to push for a global deal that gives bio-

diversity its 'Paris moment' like the agreement reached at the 2015 climate conference in the French capital.

Naturalist and BBC nature series presenter Chris Packham told AFP it was a 'once in a decade opportunity' for world leaders to set targets that ensure "biodiversity is restored for generations to come".

He said the dance was a vital means of communicating the need to reverse biodiversity loss to everyone - not just those already signed up to the message.

"The RSPB has an audience. I have an audience. But it's not big enough. We need to spread it by using other aspects of our culture," Packham said.

"The idea that it is mimicking a murmuration - which is a flock of birds working in synchronicity together to achieve a purpose - sends the kind of message that we all need to be working with that synchronicity."

Waff's hand ballets have been variously described as mesmerising, hypnotic and beautifully expressive.

His previous video to round off the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics -- held in 2021 due to the pandemic -- and hand

over to the 2024 games in Paris featured over 120 amateur and professional wheelchair-using performers.

To a stirring composition by French singer-songwriter and music video producer Woodkid, the troupe drawn from people of all ethnicities, genders and physical abilities moved as one in time to the music.

A clip of the video immediately went viral and has since generated millions of views.

Performers

Waff's latest 'murmuration' dance was performed by students from Britain's Bird College of Dance and Musical Theatre near London.

All dressed in black, only the performers' heads, hands and forearms are clearly visible, while Waff, also in black, stands in front leading the performance.

Dancer Rex Boadu, 22, said it had



been an incredible experience to work with Waff, who has previously choreographed Grammy winners Shakira and Chris Brown.

"It's hard to look away from it once you start looking at it and digesting and interpreting the message," he said adding that he hoped the video would make people think and research the issue for themselves.

AFP

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FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022



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I'M UNSTOPPABLE!

Mbappe scores a stunning double to guide France past Poland and into quarter-finals

Doha, Qatar - Kylian Mbappe set up a history-making goal for Olivier Giroud and then scored two himself as holders France eased into the quarter-finals of the World Cup with a 3-1 win over Poland on Sunday.

Giroud's opening goal a minute before half-time was his 52nd for his country, allowing him to pass Thierry Henry and become France's all-time record marksman.

Mbappe's lethal strike in the 74th minute killed off any prospect of a Poland comeback and he netted again at the death to move to nine goals in just 11 World Cup appearances, the second-most for a French player at the tournament.

At the other end the threat of Robert Lewandowski was snuffed out by the French defence although the 34-year-old Poland captain did get the consolation of scoring a stoppage-time penalty.

France, though, march on to the quarter-finals and remain on



France's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring against Poland in their round-of-16 match at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha on Sunday

ROUND OF 16		
	FRANCE	3
	POLAND	1

course to become the first team to successfully defend the World Cup since Brazil 60 years ago.

France were overwhelming favourites against a Poland side who had limped through the group stage, but the memory of their exit from Euro 2020 served as a warning.

France had been 3-1 up and cruising in that last-16 tie against Switzerland only to concede two late goals and end up losing on penalties, with Mbappe missing the crucial spot-kick.

Mbappe returned on Sunday as one of nine changes following their inconsequential defeat by Tunisia, with goalkeeper and captain Hugo Lloris also returning to win his 142nd cap.

That saw him equal the record for most France appearances held by Lilian Thuram, whose son Marcus came off the bench here.

It was a history-making occasion for France but what coach Didier Deschamps wanted above all was a routine victory and progression to the quarter-finals.

AFP

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Brazil's Neymar (L) talks to his team-mates after their defeat to Cameroon in their Group G match on Friday

Brazil coach Tite hopeful on Neymar return in last-16 tie against Korea

Doha, Qatar - Neymar is in line to return from injury for Brazil's last-16 World Cup clash with South Korea on Monday but will need to prove his fitness first, coach Tite said.

The 30-year-old superstar forward suffered an ankle injury in Brazil's opening win in Qatar over Serbia and then missed the last two group matches.

"Regarding Neymar, he's going to train this afternoon and if he's OK, he will play tomorrow," said

Tite on Sunday. It is not the news Korea's Portuguese coach Paulo Bento was hoping for.

"We would be hypocrites if we said we prefer playing against Neymar," said Bento.

"That would be a lie, we prefer him not to play but honestly speaking, I always prefer the best players to play."

Bento complained about the quick turnaround between the last group stage match on Friday and Monday's last 16 clash.

Unlike Brazil who rested most of their first choice players having already qualified after two games, Korea had to fight to the last minute of their 2-1 win over Portugal to make it into the knockout.

"After the physical tiredness from the previous games there is also the emotional fatigue after the Portugal game," said Bento.

"I decided to let the players rest yesterday and we only trained this morning."

AFP

Playmaker Fernandes is Portugal's real heartbeat

Doha, Qatar - Cristiano Ronaldo's shadow looms large over Portugal at the World Cup, but away from the flash of camera phones and rolling headlines, Bruno Fernandes has taken the reins.

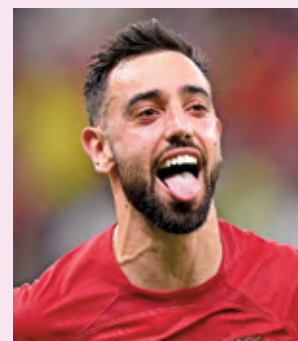
Fernando Santos' team are synonymous with their leading man, a black hole for media attention and fan admiration, reducing his colleagues to a supporting cast, inadvertently or not.

However in Qatar playmaker Fernandes is emerging as the team's true creative leader, sealing qualification for the last 16 with a game to spare.

With several changes but Ronaldo still leading the side, Portugal fell to a 2-1 defeat by South Korea on Friday but finished top of their group and face Switzerland.

Fernandes was rested, wrapped in cotton wool, and without him Portugal failed to create many clear chances.

Still, supporters swooned over veteran striker Ronaldo - save some Korea fans who instead chanted for "Messi" - even as the all-time record in-



Without Bruno Fernandes in the side Portugal failed to create many clear chances against South Korea

ternational goal scorer floundered up front.

Instead it is Fernandes, no longer a club team-mate of Ronaldo after his dramatic departure by mutual consent ahead of the World Cup, who has been the beating heart of the side this year.

It was Fernandes who picked up the pieces in Portugal's

press conference ahead of their opening game against Ghana, fielding questions on the Ronaldo drama.

Then on the pitch he was a quiet mastermind, providing two assists in the 3-2 win, even as Ronaldo basked in the lime-light after winning a soft penalty and dispatching it to open the scoring.

But Portugal have a lot of younger, dynamic talent, itching for a chance to break through.

Rafael Leao, Andre Silva and Goncalo Ramos are all interesting, young attacking options but started on the bench against Korea, with Ronaldo failing to make an impact.

Manchester City midfielder Bernardo Silva is another underrated, smooth presence but at the 2022 World Cup it is Fernandes who has taken on the role of floor manager, the man running the show at the tip of the midfield.

In Portugal's 2-0 win over Uruguay Fernandes' brace clinched qualification, with only the post denying him a hat-trick.

AFP

FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Lionel Messi magic helps Argentina march into last eight



Argentina's Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring against Australia in their round-of-16 match on Saturday (AFP)

169

It was Lionel Messi's 169th appearance in the Argentina colours

94

The beautiful goal he scored on Saturday was his 94th for Argentina.

9

The goal against Australia was Messi's ninth in the World Cup, and it helped him surpass the late Diego Maradona. Only Gabriel Batistuta is ahead of him with 10 goals for Argentina in the World Cup.

Doha, Qatar - Lionel Messi produced a moment of trademark quality to score the opener in a 2-1 win over Australia and help send Argentina into the quarter-finals of the World Cup on Saturday.

Messi's 789th goal in his 1,000th career appearance - but first in the knockout rounds of the World Cup - helped set up a last-eight clash with the unbeaten Netherlands on Friday.

Julian Alvarez scored the other in the 57th minute after some calamitous Australian defending, before Enzo Fernandez's 77th-minute deflected own goal set up an unexpectedly nervy finale.

Argentina's players celebrated wildly in front of their massed ranks of fans and man-of-the-match Messi paid tribute to them for dragging the team across the line.

"Amazing feelings and I am really happy to share these beautiful and happy moments with them all," said the 35-year-old, who is trying to win the World Cup for the first time in what will surely be his last attempt.

"I know the effort they are making to be here with us and I know how much they enjoyed it.

"There is a bond we have - it is something beautiful, it is what the national team should be."

Messi's classy first-half goal, bending the ball into the bottom corner, broke the resistance and ultimately the hearts of a gutsy Australian side that defied all expectations in Qatar and went down fighting.

Messi strikes

Australia's yellow-shirted fans were vastly outnumbered among the packed crowd at the 45,000-capacity Ahmad bin Ali Stadium and were drowned out by Argentina's boisterous and bouncing supporters.

The Socceroos were huge underdogs but this has been a World Cup of shocks.

Two-time champions Argentina were the victim of arguably the biggest in Qatar when they went down 2-1 to Saudi Arabia in their opening match.

ROUND OF 16		
	AUSTRALIA	1
	ARGENTINA	2

Argentina had Australia pinned back but coach Graham Arnold's men were resolute and growing in confidence as an uninspiring first half wore on.

Argentina badly needed something special and in Messi they got it 10 minutes from the break.

Alexis Mac Allister fed defender Nicolas Otamendi, who was still in the box for an Argentina free-kick, and he miscontrolled it into the path of Messi who bent the ball left-footed along the ground into the corner.

Australia had only got this far once before, in 2006, and they needed to attack in the second half.

Instead, they self-destructed. Goalkeeper and captain Mathew Ryan tried to play out under fierce pressure in his box from hard-running Rodrigo De Paul just before the hour and was dispossessed by Alvarez.

The Manchester City striker, 22, nipped in, stole the ball from Ryan and swivelled to slot into an empty net for his second goal in as many games.

The Socceroos looked dead and buried but substitute Craig Goodwin latched onto a loose clearance and his shot hit Fernandez and ricocheted in with 13 minutes left.

Aziz Behich then went on a superb mazy run from left-back, beating three Argentina players before Lisandro Martinez made a vital last-ditch challenge.

Both sides had chances in the last 10 minutes, the last falling to Australian teenager Garang Kuol deep in injury time, but goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez made a desperate save.

Arnold, who assembled a team full of hard work and defensive clout, said he was immensely proud of their surprise run to the last 16.

MOMENT IN TIME



TOP SAVE: Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez saves a shot by Australia's Garang Kuol

Scaloni excited to take on his idol Van Gaal

Doha, Qatar - Lionel Scaloni said he was looking forward to taking on Netherlands coach Louis van Gaal in the World Cup quarter-finals after his Argentina side beat Australia 2-1 on Saturday.

Goals from Lionel Messi and Julian Alvarez gave Argentina a winning cushion at the Ahmad bin Ali stadium in Qatar before an Enzo Fernandez own goal set up a frantic finish.

Argentina will face the Dutch in the last eight on Friday after the Netherlands beat the United States 3-1 earlier in the day.

It will give Scaloni, 44, the chance to come up against a coach he already idolised when he was still a player.

"I was at Deportivo La Coruna when he was Barcelona coach and he was already a leading figure, I'm proud to take him on, everyone knows what he's done for football," said Scaloni of the 71-year-old Van Gaal.

Scaloni was actually part of the Deportivo side that pipped Van Gaal's Barcelona to the La Liga title in 2000.

He said this Dutch side is not as talented as previous generations but will nonetheless provide Argentina with a stern test.

"It's not as brilliant as previous Dutch teams, but they are very clear on what they do," said Scaloni.

"It will be a great match between two historic teams. One will be knocked out, we hope we go through."

The Argentina coach paid tribute to a plucky Socceroos side who pushed their more illustrious opponents all the way, even forcing goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez into a late save to prevent the tie from heading into extra time. "We're satisfied, above all because today's match was very difficult, their pressing was asphyxiating," said Scaloni, who felt Argentina should have put the game to bed and saved themselves the nervy finale.

"The team didn't deserve those closing minutes because we had chances to increase the lead," he added.

And he paid tribute to Argentine fans who once again took over the majority of the stadium in Qatar and created a vibrant atmosphere throughout the game.

AFP



TODAY'S MATCHES

JAPAN
VS
CROATIA
7 PM

BRAZIL
VS
SOUTH KOREA
11 PM

1000

Lionel Messi made his 1000th career appearance in Argentina's 2-1 win over Australia in the World Cup last 16 match on Saturday.



Australia's Garang Kuol during their round-of-16 match at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan, west of Doha, on Saturday (AFP)



Netherlands players celebrate after defeating the US in their round-of-16 match at Khalifa International Stadium on Saturday

Pragmatic style pays off for Van Gaal's Netherlands

Doha, Qatar - Louis van Gaal's Netherlands have been repeatedly criticised for being "too boring" but a clinical counter-attacking display on Saturday saw them pick off the United States to reach the quarter-finals of the World Cup.

The veteran coach suggested a reporter should "go home" if he thought the Dutch were not entertaining enough after a 2-0 win over Qatar in the group stage. The Netherlands' 3-1 victory on Saturday will silence some of the critics, with many of Van Gaal's big decisions paying off.

His side sat back in the first half against the USA and cut through them

ROUND OF 16		
	NETHERLANDS	3
	USA	1

with a wonderful move of 20 passes to score the opening goal through Memphis Depay, exposing the wide spaces left in behind the American defence.

"It was a great goal... It was the perfect goal I think," said midfielder Davy Klaassen.

When Daley Blind swept home their second shot on target on the

stroke of half-time, the United States had a mountain to climb.

Haji Wright pulled one back late on, but the Netherlands, who did not qualify in 2018 but have only conceded six goals in 11 World Cup games under Van Gaal, secured progression through Denzel Dumfries.

In truth, a comeback was never likely against the well-organised Netherlands, traditionally known for expansive football.

"Of course, we want to (play in a 'Dutch style'), but in the end, you want to win and this is the most important (thing)," added Klaassen.

AFP

Now show us the money, says Arnold as gutsy Australia exit World Cup

Doha, Qatar - Coach Graham Arnold made an impassioned plea to the Australian government for money and "a home" after his Socceroos exited the World Cup with a fighting 2-1 loss to Argentina in the last 16 on Saturday.

The Australians defied low expectations at home to reach the knockout rounds in Qatar for only the second time in their history.

They came up narrowly short against a Lionel Messi-inspired Argentina, but Arnold's side gave one of the pre-tournament favourites several real frights in the closing moments.

The 59-year-old Arnold hopes this Australian team will inspire a future generation.



Australia coach Graham Arnold shouts instructions to his players from the touchline during their round-of-16 match against Argentina on Saturday (AFP)

But he also said the government needs to do more if the Socceroos are to perform well again at future World Cups, starting with investment.

"There's an expectation that it should just happen every time," he said, adding: "We've got to look at Australian football."

"We need to spend money and get help from the government to put money into the game and help develop kids."

Arnold also wants somewhere that can be a centre for Australian football.

"The government need to build us a house," he said.

"We need a home, something that the government can help fund

for the development of the national team and the good of Australian football."

Arnold, who could now step away from his post, was immensely proud of his players. They beat Denmark and Tunisia on the way to a surprise spot in the knockout phase.

But he was frustrated too after their defensive solidity deserted them against Argentina, especially for the second goal.

"I felt like we failed tonight because I wanted to win so bad," he said.

"The last 16 wasn't enough, I wanted more. I know a lot of people will be happy with it, but that's just the way I am."

AFP

Tireless Modric leading by example at World Cup as Croatia face Japan

Doha, Qatar - Croatia's squad features only a few of the players who led them to the World Cup final in 2018, runners-up to France, but Luka Modric is defying time to be one of those few constants.

The 37-year-old Real Madrid midfielder worked tirelessly across the full 90 minutes of the 0-0 draw with Belgium on Thursday to book Croatia's place in the last 16, where they face Japan on Monday.

The captain leads by example, showing the younger players what is possible and how much effort achieving it takes.

If the 2018 Ballon d'Or winner, with five Champions League titles to his name, still toils selflessly in midfield, there can be no excuses for anyone else not to follow suit.

Croatia defender Josip Juranovic believes Modric is setting an example to the squad's younger players to fend off World Cup fatigue.



Luka Modric

"In my tank, my reservoir (of gas) is full," the Celtic defender said.

"It is a World Cup - we may only get (to be part of) this once in our lifetime.

"I can't wait for the game to start. When you see people like Luka Modric running and dying on the pitch, it gives us younger players extra energy to run. We have a great combination of experience and younger players in the team."

Croatia finished second in Group F and Juranovic, 27, played 90 minutes in all three games, while Modric also played 90 minutes against Morocco in the goalless opener, and 86 against Canada, in the team's 4-1 win.

In the Belgium and Morocco games, Modric was awarded man of the match.

Even though some of his contributions are subtle, and thankless at times, they have been rewarded in Qatar, not that his team-mates need any reminders of his quality.

Asked about Croatia's winning mentality, midfielder Lovro Majer said it was innate, but also down to older players like Modric offering years of experience to the team.

"We have a winning mentality in our blood," said Majer on Saturday.

"I think we have an excellent mix of experienced players who have done excellent things in their careers and younger players with new energy.

"A combination of something that's innate and that mix of experience and youth." Sitting beside him at Croatia's training hub in Doha, Juranovic agreed.

"When you have world-class players playing at the highest level for 10 years, that helps a lot, so we believe we can turn around any situation on the pitch," said the defender.

Modric is among the tournament's best passers, driving Croatia up the pitch with clever balls, while maintaining his defensive discipline.

AFP

We came here with one goal and that's to become world champions and we have to win every game and that's what we're trying to do.

CODY GAKPO
NETHERLANDS



A BANGLA THRILLER

Mehidy powers Bangladesh to sensational ODI win against India after Shakib bags five wickets

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Mehidy Hasan Miraz hit an unbeaten 38 and put on a record tenth-wicket stand as Bangladesh edged out India by one wicket in a thrilling opening one-day international on Sunday.

Chasing 187 for victory, the hosts fell to 136-9 before Mehidy and Mustafizur Rahman put together a 51 run partnership - Bangladesh's best ever for the final wicket in a successful run chase - to achieve their target with 24 balls to spare in Dhaka.

Bangladesh lead the three-match series 1-0 with the second match on Wednesday at the same venue.

Mehidy, coming in to bat at number eight, hit four fours and two sixes and survived a dropped catch by wicketkeeper KL Rahul on 15 to turn the match on its head. Mehidy hit the winning runs in his 39-ball knock to trigger wild celebrations as the players came running onto the field and the home crowd erupted.

"This performance is really memorable for me," said man of the match Mehidy.

Skipper Liton Das said he has "no words to describe this feeling" and congratulated Mehidy after he made a winning debut as ODI captain in the absence of the injured Tamim Iqbal.

Mustafizur scored 10 off 11 balls as he and Mehidy stood firm in the fourth-highest 10th wicket partnership in a successful ODI chase to record a famous win.

Shakib Al Hasan set up victory after his impressive bowling figures of 5-36 helped bowl out



Mehidy Hasan Miraz celebrates after steering Bangladesh to victory in the first ODI against India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka on Sunday (AFP)

India for 186 in 41.2 overs despite Rahul's 73 after Bangladesh elected to field first.

'Genes are there'
Bangladesh collapsed after a few good partnerships including a 48-

run stand between Das and Shakib.
Spinner Washington Sundar

got Das out for 41 and then Shakib to a stunning one-handed catch at extra cover by Virat

Kohli. Bangladesh suffered a double blow in successive balls when Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim fell after a 33-run stand for the fifth wicket.

Bangladesh looked to be cruising at 128-4 in the 35th over, but lost their way after Mahmudullah fell lbw to Shardul Thakur and then Mohammed Siraj bowled Mushfiqur.

Debutant fast bowler Kuldeep Sen came back to pick up two wickets in the first over of his second spell to send back Afif Hossain and Ebadot Hosain.

Siraj snapped up Hasan Mahmud for his third wicket but Mehidy, who also got one wicket with his off spin, did the unthinkable with Mustafizur for company.

"We bowled pretty well and kept them under pressure till the end. They held their nerves in the backend," said India skipper Rohit Sharma.

"The genes are there, these guys grew up playing in such conditions. It is all about handling pressure. Hopefully, we change things around in the next game."

Rahul stood out for India with his 70-ball knock but the rest of the tourists batting disappointed.

Rahul, who came in as wicketkeeper-batsman after regular glovesman Rishabh Pant was ruled out of the series due to injury, smashed five fours and four sixes.

AFP



Sarit Suwannarat

Thailand's supreme Sarit secures first Asian Tour title in Indonesia

Jakarta, Indonesia - Thailand's Sarit Suwannarat secured his first Asian Tour golf title with a sweeping four-shot win at a weather-delayed BNI Indonesian Masters on Sunday.

The 24-year-old rising star bagged \$1.5m in prize money after a last-round 68 at the Royale Jakarta Golf Club left him 20 under par and well clear of his rivals.

"I think I almost cried coming down the 18th," said Sarit. "I just can't put into words how I feel. I am just happy. I didn't feel the pressure that much, I was just enjoying my game."

The tournament, which has become the flagship event of the Asian Tour, was delayed several times because of bad weather.

India's Anirban Lahiri, who won the tournament in 2014, finished second with a last-round 66 while Taiwan's Chan Shih-chang and Northern Ireland's Graeme McDowell both finished five back of Sarit to tie for third.

AFP

Lyon takes six as Australia win first Test against West Indies

Perth, Australia - Spin king Nathan Lyon bagged six wickets, including century-maker Kraigg Brathwaite, as Australia ground down a gutsy West Indies to win the first Test in Perth by 164 runs on Sunday.

Skipper Brathwaite, who took the match into a final day with a defiant overnight 101 after Australia declared their second innings at 182-2 on day four, couldn't keep the momentum going against Lyon and was bowled for 110.

The Caribbean team resumed on 192-3, needing to bat through 90 overs for a draw after gamely rebuffing an attack missing the injured Pat Cummins for two sessions on Saturday.

But they were all out for 333 after some plucky late resistance.

Lyon ended with 6-128, in the process surpassing India's Ravichandran Ashwin to become



Australia's Nathan Lyon (3rd R) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of West Indies' Kraigg Brathwaite in Perth on Sunday (AFP)

the eighth-highest wicket-taker in Test history with 446.

"The batters did their job, the quicks stood up, it was a fantastic all-round performance," said Australian skipper Pat Cummins.

"Lyon is the most important bowler in our team, he keeps taking wickets. There wasn't much on offer for the spinners, but he found out a way and kept picking wickets."

It extended the West Indies' 25-year run of failing to win a Test on Australian soil, with the hosts retaining the Frank Worrell Trophy ahead of the second, and final, Test in Adelaide starting Thursday.

"Obviously disappointed with the loss. We gave away the wickets in the first innings, but it was a good fight as a team and as a bowling unit," said Brathwaite.

"It's good to see the fight from the batters, but still a lot of improvement to be done."

Brathwaite said after his day four exploits that the opening overs would be "very, very crucial", and in front of a spartan crowd, it was Australia who prevailed. Kyle Mayers, who has been ruled out of any further bowling in the two-Test series with a shoulder strain, added just 10 runs to his overnight nought.

AFP



England's Harry Brook plays a shot during the fourth day of the first Test against Pakistan on Sunday (AFP)

Fiery Brook leads England charge in first Test against Pakistan

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - England grabbed a couple of quick wickets Sunday after setting Pakistan a daunting target of 343 for victory with one day to play in a high-scoring first Test at Rawalpindi.

Pakistan lost Abdullah Shafique (six) and skipper Babar Azam (four) in their second innings before Imam-ul-Haq (43) and Saud Shakeel (24) ended day four at the crease on 80-2.

Earlier, Harry Brook struck a fiery 87 as England batted aggressively in their second innings before declaring at 264-7.

Debutant spinner Will Jacks took a career-best 6-161 as England finally dismissed Pakistan for 579 in response to their mammoth first innings score of 657.

Seeking ten Pakistan wickets in a maximum 130 overs, England showed their intent early and Ollie Robinson soon bounced out opener Shafique - who scored a century in the first innings.

In the same over he struck

Azhar Ali with a sharp, rising delivery, forcing him to retire with an injured finger.

Then Stokes got the prized wicket of Pakistan skipper Azam by forcing an edge off a rising delivery that landed safely in keeper Ollie Pope's hands - shocking the holiday crowd of 14,200.

The boys have shown that they'll come up with different plans and different ways to try to get there

PAUL COLLINGWOOD

But Haq - who also scored a century in the first innings - steadied the ship with Shakeel with a 55-run third-wicket stand.

England's assistant coach Paul Collingwood said the match was "well balanced".

"We're confident we can do it.

The boys have shown that they'll come up with different plans and different ways to try to get there," he said.

"If Pakistan knock off the runs, they deserve to win."

Pakistan's Agha Salman also put forward a positive mindset.

"Our aim is to win the match, no matter how the pitch plays," he said.

The second session belonged to England, who added 218 runs before declaring when Brook was bowled in Naseem Shah's last over before tea.

Brook smashed 11 boundaries and three sixes in a swashbuckling knock, coming after his 153 in England's first innings.

Root also played a part in a 96-run partnership with Brook, scoring his 55th Test half-century.

Leg-spinner Zahid Mahmood dismissed Root and Stokes (nought) in the same over to finish with figures of 2-84, while Naseem took 2-66 and Mohammad Ali 2-64.

AFP

Kiptum and Beriso light up Valencia Marathon

Valencia, Spain - Kenya's Kelvin Kiptum became the third fastest man in history in his first marathon in Valencia on Sunday, while Amane Beriso of Ethiopia became the third woman to run under two hours and 15 minutes.

Kiptum, who turned 23 on Friday, timed two hours, one minute and 53 seconds.

Only Kenya's world record holder Eliud Kipchoge and Ethiopian legend Kenenisa Bekele have run faster.

"This is great. I was very well prepared," said Kiptum.

Beriso, 31, smashed her own personal record, crossing the line in 2hr 14min 58sec.

She tired in the final few kilometres, having been on track to break Kenyan Brigid Kosgei's



Kelvin Kiptum wins the Valencia Marathon on Sunday

world record of 2hr 14min 04sec set in Chicago in 2019.

Kosgei's compatriot Ruth Chepngetich is the only other woman to break the 2hr 15min mark, timing 2hr 14min 18sec, also in Chicago, this year.

"I am more than happy. Con-

ditions were perfect for me," said Beriso.

Beriso's compatriot, 10,000 metres world champion Letesenbet Gidey, had been the favourite and was also eyeing the world record.

However, the 24-year-old

was dropped by Beriso at the 35km mark.

Gidey -- who set the 10,000m and half marathon world records previously in Valencia -- finished second in a distressed state and had to be helped away.

AFP