



(Supplied photo)

NBO donates 8 ambulances to MoH

Muscat - As part of a partnership between the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the private sector, the ministry received eight fully equipped ambulances for hospitals in Muscat and Salalah from National Bank of Oman (NBO).

The ambulances were handed over during a ceremony attended by Dr Thamra al Ghafri, acting director general of health services of Muscat governorate, and Abdullah bin Zahran al Hina'i, CEO of

6 ambulances will be given to Directorate General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate, two to Directorate General of Health Services of Dhofar

NBO, as part of a RO500,000 donation the bank pledged towards the cause in 2021.

Of the eight ambulances, six will be given to the Directorate General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate and two to

the Directorate General of Health Services of Dhofar.

On the occasion, Hina'i said, "The health and wellbeing of the community remains at the top of our agenda and we continue to work closely with our stakehold-

ers and authorities to ensure that our help is directed where it is needed most. Although we are starting to get over the worst throes of the pandemic, the healthcare authorities are still under pressure to treat those affected. We continue to see the incredible strength of our healthcare heroes and are both proud and honoured to continue our support of their efforts in bringing the community back to health."

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the bank has been active in contributing to the nation as it overcomes both the health impacts and the wider economic impacts. Through a series of measures including donations, vaccinations, loan deferments, and targeted SMS advice, it has reiterated its care for the community, all while encouraging its customers to bank from the safety and comfort of home.

SQU students back on campus on February 20



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) will resume on-campus studies for all students from February 20.

A statement issued by its administrative department said, 'Sultan Qaboos University has

decided to return to face-to-face classes for all students starting from February 20, 2022.'

SQU's decision follows a review of the current situation of the ongoing pandemic. The university called on everyone in its campus to get vaccinated and to adhere to the preventive health measures.

New initiative to train jobseekers in Sohar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Youth Committee of Sohar Club has launched an initiative called Tamkeen, or Empowerment.

The initiative aims to train jobseekers, and enhance their abilities and skills to enter the labour market.

Dr Issa bin Khamis al Ghaithi, head of the initiative team, said, "Tamkeen will prepare graduate students and jobseekers for the labour market through free programmes."

The programmes will include lectures and training workshops focused on self-marketing and the legal requirements and

documentation, including employment contracts.

"The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has supported the initiative financially and logistically. The programme will run for six months and the training workshops will be conducted by qualified and experienced professionals," Ghaithi said.

OVERNIGHT RAINS RESULT IN TRAFFIC CONGESTION



Traffic was disrupted on Monday due to overnight rains that continued until the wee hours. Traffic built up on the Muscat Expressway exit to Qurm, while vehicles headed for Qurm came to a standstill in Sultan Qaboos Street on Azaiba flyover. Additionally, traffic slowed to a crawl on the Amerat-Wadi Adai road due to closure of the Amerat-Bausher mountain road (Syed Fasiuddin/Muscat Daily)

1.55mn vehicles registered in 2021, down 0.3%

Muscat - The total number of registered vehicles (excluding military vehicles) in the sultanate decreased by 0.3 per cent from 1,557,453 in 2020 to 1,552,665 in 2021, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Information and Statistics (NCIS).

Commercial vehicles registered the biggest drop in numbers from 239,639 in 2020 to 232,985 in 2021. The number of government vehicles decreased from 12,695 in 2020 to 12,206 in 2021.



(Supplied photo)

Private vehicle registrations accounted for 79.4 per cent of the total number of registered vehicles, increasing by 11,807 ve-

hicles to 1,233,109 compared to 1,221,302 vehicles in 2020.

Driving school vehicles increased from 5,730 in 2020 to

5,842 in 2021.

A total of 833,155 lightweight vehicles of engine capacity 1,500cc to 3,000cc were registered in 2021.

White was the most preferred colour for vehicles (665,975), followed by silver (199,428) and gray (128,189).

Vehicles with temporary registration (temporary inspection, export and import) dropped by 50.2 per cent in 2021 to 7,645 compared to 15,351 registered in 2020.

ONA

45 shops in Seeb inspected; health violations registered against six

Muscat - Within its efforts to enforce health regulations in shops and markets and to control unauthorised vending activities, Muscat Municipality carried out inspection visits to 45 shops in Seeb and issued six fines against the facilities found violating health regulations. The municipality also directed some shops to improve the quality of services they offer to customers.

The municipality called on the public to report any substandard practices observed at business



(Supplied photo)

establishments related to public health. It can be contacted through Muscat Municipality Call

Centre's toll-free number 1111 or through its social media accounts to report any violations.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Abu Dhabi	26	16
Doha	23	13
Kuwait City	23	12
Manama	22	14
Muscat	26	17
Riyadh	24	10

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.24am
Sunrise	6.40am
Duhr	12.26pm
Asr	3.42pm
Maghrib	6.07pm
Isha	7.18pm

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RO47mn provided in housing assistance

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Nearly RO47mn was provided in housing assistance to 2,000 beneficiary families in 2021, according to H E Dr Khalfan bin Saeed bin Mubarak al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

Addressing the media to inform about the ministry's plans for 2022 on Monday, H E Shuaili, said that the ministry provided housing assistance to 328 during Cyclone Shaheen, which struck Oman in October 2021. "A team of specialists from the ministry made 40 field visits to 199 areas that were flooded."

In 2021, 7,645 plots of land were developed for various purposes (residential, commercial, agricultural, industrial and government) and more than RO8mn was collected in fees.

According to H E Shuaili, the value of real estate traded in 2021 saw an increase of four per cent to reach RO2.552bn, and revenues amounted to



(Muscat Daily)

RO72.5mn. The value of trading in real estate for the year 2020 amounted to about RO2.454bn. The minister informed that

the number of requests for residential plots registered with the ministry and the number granted until 2020 was about

1,319,000. Of the plots that have been distributed till now, 48 per cent have already been developed, while 52 per cent have

not. The number of applications for residential land plots was 509,000. He stated that 85 per cent of

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning provided housing assistance to 328 during Cyclone Shaheen. A team of specialists made 40 field visits to 199 areas that were flooded

**H E DR KHALFAN
AL SHUAILI**

the people affected by the activities of Sohar Industrial Port (Liwa City) have completed the handover of their properties. Of these, 85 per cent have got cash compensation, while 476 housing units are under construction and to be handed over to the affected.

"The ministry has completed 85 per cent of government facil-

ities and buildings, and 100 per cent of infrastructure and public services in the housing units being constructed for those affected."

Talking about compensation for the Batinah Coastal Road, H E Shuaili clarified that the route of the first phase (Barka - Al Mussanah and Liwa - Shinas) has been handed over to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. The minister confirmed that in the second phase (Suwaiq - Khabourah and Saham - Sohar), in-kind compensation for the houses has been completed for 96 per cent, while 58 per cent of the farmers were also compensated.

H E Hamad bin Ali Al Nazwani, Undersecretary for Housing in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, confirmed during the press conference that the ministry will prepare a social housing programme for which work regulatory legislation will be completed soon.

Study shows solar, wind promising alternatives to fossil fuel in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A new study has demonstrated that both solar radiation and wind can be seen as promising and substantial alternative sources of fossil fuel resources in Oman, with almost 3.2 per cent and 4.4 per cent of the Omani territory being valid for the sustainable use of wind and solar radiation, respectively.

The research 'Exploring the potential of solar, tidal and wind energy resources in Oman using an integrated climatic-socioeconomic approach' by principal investigator Dr Mohamed Eldesoky Hereher, assistant professor, Geography Department, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), was awarded in the Energy and Industry field within the PhD category at the 8th National Research Award organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

According to the results of the study, the most recommended sites for wind generation are located mainly along Al Jazir and the coast of Duqm in southeast-

ern Oman, where a promising wind energy centre can be constructed. The best locations for the development of hybrid solar radiation generation centres are in Sohar and Thumrayt, where solar intensity approaches 8.1 kWh/m², with a high frequency of occurrence throughout the year. In contrast, Oman showed



in which information from multiple climatic indicators is coupled with socioeconomic drivers of energy development. Specifically, based on a daily dataset of the National Center for Environmental Prediction Climate Forecast System Reanalysis, three climate indicators were employed to characterise the fre-

The most recommended sites for wind generation are located along Al Jazir and the coast of Duqm, where a promising wind energy centre can be constructed

DR MOHAMED ELDESOKY HEREHER

a low potential to generate tidal power, mainly due to a low tidal range (<2m) along the majority of the Oman's coastline.

For this particular research, Hereher and his team presented for the first time, a comprehensive assessment of the potential renewable energy resources in Oman, with particular focus on solar, wind and tidal energy resources. The study adopted a novel approach to assess the potential of these energy resources,

quency, intensity and duration of solar radiation and wind speed.

According to Hereher, the team then introduced a new overall assessment index based on these three climatic indicators to explore the best localities from a climatic perspective for generating solar and wind energies. The validity of the recommended sites was discussed in the context of important physiographic, environmental and socioeconomic constraints (eg population

density, urban settlements, distance to water bodies, transportation network, etc.)

Hereher said that this study has provided a solid base for national and local decision makers in Oman for reliable assessment, monitoring and sustainable exploitation of clean and renewable energy resources, es-

pecially in view of the high population growth, accelerated urbanisation and rapid economic growth over the past few decades, which can pose more challenges to future energy demand in this country.

This research project was conducted by Hereher and Dr Ahmed M El Kenawy at Sultan Qaboos University. It was published in *Renewable Energy* journal (Vol 161, pages 662-675) in December 2020.



(Supplied photo)

RO2.27mn pact inked to pave internal roads in N Sharqiyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of the efforts to boost tourism and economic development, Sheikh Ali bin Rashid al Shamsi, Governor of North Sharqiyah, has signed an agreement with a local company to pave a

number of internal roads.

The agreement will cater to paving internal roads in the wilayats of Dima and Al Tayyin.

An official in the governor's office said the agreement aims to pave 18.8km of internal roads at a cost of around RO2.27mn.

"The agreement aims to

enrich the tourism and economic movement in the wilayats of Dima and Al Tayyin, in addition to adding aesthetic elements to roads and residential neighbourhoods. It will also facilitate movement between the villages of the wilayat," the official said.

Commerce Ministry signs investment promotion deal



Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) on Monday signed a cooperation programme with Ubar Financial Investment Company to promote available investment opportunities in the sultanate and to lure investors to the country.

The cooperation programme was inked by H E Aseela Salim al

Samsami, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion in MoCIIP, and Abdulaziz Khalifa al Saadi, CEO of Ubar Financial Investment Company.

The programme showcases Oman's economic value and targets local and international investors. It involves drafting initial feasibility studies on economic projects rated in terms of vol-

ume, type and speciality.

As part of the programme, an itinerary of visits will be organised for foreign investors, who will then be introduced to strategies suitable for their projects. The investors will be advised about how the ventures can be financed in coordination with the departments concerned.

ONA

Alcohol, tobacco seized in Dakhliyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Oman Police (ROP) seized over 4,900 bags of tobacco derivatives and alcoholic beverages in Dakhliyah governorate on Monday.

An ROP statement, said, 'The Police Command at Dakhliyah governorate arrested three Asians on charges of possession and trading in alcoholic beverages and tobacco derivatives. Over 4,900 bags of tobacco derivatives and bottles of alcoholic beverages were seized. Legal measures have been taken against them.'

Meanwhile, The Police Command of South Batinah arrested three infiltrators for trying to smuggle crystal meth in a boat.

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Pakistani Rs	455.85
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Philippines peso	133.35
Sri Lankan Rs	526.21

*Rates as on February 14
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Lockheed Martin ends takeover of Aerojet after US lawsuit

US defence company Lockheed Martin has given up its US\$4.4bn takeover of propulsion systems manufacturer Aerojet Rocketdyne after regulators sued to stop the deal.

In a statement, Lockheed Martin cited the lawsuit filed by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in January as the reason for abandoning the deal, which the FTC argued would lead to higher costs on defence systems.

"Our planned acquisition of Aerojet Rocketdyne would have benefitted the entire industry through greater efficiency, speed and significant cost reductions for the US government," James Taiclet, chairman and CEO of Lockheed Martin, said.

Oil prices climb to \$96 on Ukraine conflict fears

London, UK – Global stock markets dived Monday after the United States warned that Russia could attack Ukraine within days, while oil prices briefly hit eight-year peaks on fears of a conflict that would hit oil and gas supplies.

World oil prices paused later on Monday after climbing as high as US\$96 per barrel on deepening worries of a conflict sparked by key crude producer Russia.

"The markets are getting pummelled as everyone prepares for a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine. The threat has been apparent for weeks but the warnings of recent days make clear that diplomatic efforts are not working and there's now a very real risk of an imminent move from the Kremlin," OANDA analyst Craig Erlam told AFP.

Frankfurt and Paris stock markets each sank by as much as 3.5 per cent in late morning deals, while London lost more than 2.2 per cent at one stage. Asia also nursed heavy losses, mirroring Wall Street's sharp sell-off on Friday.

In the face of uncertainty, investors are dumping riskier as-



Betss-like equities, while key ian exports including also gas have been well supported, Erlam said.

Russia's main stock market was down more than four per cent while the ruble fell against the dollar.

US\$100 oil?

The crisis comes amid a pick-up in crude demand as economies reopen after the coronavirus pandemic and people return to a more normal life.

In earlier Asian deals, Brent had climbed as high as US\$96.16 and West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude to US\$94.94 per barrel, stoking renewed concern over elevated inflation.

"Russia is the world's second-largest exporter of crude oil and the largest exporter of natural gas," noted Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch.

"If Russia invades Ukraine, crude oil and natural gas prices can be expected to surge significantly. In this case, Brent would probably exceed US\$100 per barrel."

Europe has for months already suffered from soaring natural gas prices, which have fuelled rocketing domestic energy prices and sparked decades-high inflation.

"In the event of a Russia-Ukraine escalation we could be seeing a significant increase in domestic energy prices since

Oman crude jumps 2.7% to \$93

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman crude prices on Monday jumped by more than 2.7 per cent to reach near US\$93 per barrel.

As per the data released by the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), Oman crude contract price closed at US\$92.93 per barrel on Monday, comprising an increase of US\$2.46 from US\$90.47 per barrel recorded on Friday.

The average price of Oman crude (for February delivery) has stabilized at US\$73.14 per barrel, which is US\$7.12 per barrel lower than average January delivery price.

much of Europe is heavily reliant on Russian oil and gas supplies," said XTB analyst Walid Koudmani.

AFP



Asyad offers RO3.1mn to acquire Oman Fisheries' subsidiary

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Asyad Group – the provider of integrated logistics solutions with end-to-end services across ports, freezones and shipping – has expressed its intention to acquire 100 per cent stake of Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company from Oman Fisheries Company.

In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange, Oman Fisheries Company on Monday announced the receipt of an offer from Asyad Group to purchase Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company.

Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Oman Fisheries Company.

'Oman Fisheries Company is pleased to disclose to its re-

spected shareholders that the company has received an offer from Asyad Group to acquire 100 per cent of Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company for an amount of RO3.1mn. We will provide you with more details in due course,' Oman Fisheries Company said in the disclosure.

Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company was established in 2011 by Oman Fisheries Company. The company is mainly involved in the business of storage of fish, meat, chicken, vegetables and fruits.

Al-Ameen Stores and Refrigeration Company provides logistics services to the parent Oman Fisheries Company, as well as to other clients in Oman. It also has a trading division, that is a distributor of renowned global food brands in the sultanate.

MERCEDES-BENZ WINNER: AUTOMOTIVE (LUXURY) CATEGORY



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Mercedes-Benz has won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award in the automotive (luxury) category for the fifth straight year at an award ceremony held at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz Carlton Hotel. In an interview with Muscat Daily, Shaun Michael, CEO of Mercedes-Benz Oman, spoke about Mercedes-Benz brand's strengths in the Omani market and discussed the outlook for luxury cars segment in 2022 and beyond.

Mercedes-Benz Oman has won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award for the fifth year in a row. What are the key strengths of Mercedes-Benz that it is consistently winning trust of the Omani people?

Mercedes-Benz brand is a known and trusted brand and people have confidence in our reputation for quality. But it's about much more than the superiority of our cars, it's about the relationships we build, and we are lucky to have cultivated many in Oman that have spanned generations. Our customers and colleagues are like family, and this is exactly why we call it the Mercedes-Benz family. Together at Zawawi Trading Company we have formed a strong business partnership built on trust, and our long history in Oman continues to go from strength to strength.

How does Mercedes-Benz focus on building trust with customers and preserve the faith entrusted in its brand in Oman? How do you ensure a high-level customer satisfaction during sales and after sale services?

The quality of our vehicles is known all over the world, and we can guarantee that a Mercedes-

SHAUN MICHAEL
CEO OF MERCEDES-BENZ OMAN

Benz purchase, whether that be in a passenger car, or a fleet of commercial trucks, or just a simple car service, will be worth your time and money. At the same time, we have dedicated experts in our showrooms who are available to help customers select their dream car. Moreover, with our new digital capabilities, the whole buying experience is done to suite the customers' needs, whether online through our revamped websites or coming into our state-of-the-art showroom. It's all about making it more convenient for them.

Aftersales care remains a high priority, whether

customers are buying a new vehicle or a certified pre-owned, and with our latest digital solution, StarView, they can access personalized video updates and real-time status reports during a car service via email and SMS. It's all part of our commitment to offer the best possible driving experience to our customers.

How would you characterise Mercedes-Benz's sales performance in Oman and which are the best performing models in this market?

We achieved great sales in 2021, particularly given an uncertain market. Our best performing models included the C-Class, E-Class, and S-Class, which remain steady favourites among executives, making the everyday exceptional. Our SUVs, like the GLE, GLC, and CLA continue to be popular among families, providing them with the space and durability to drive around the city or go off to the desert or the mountains.

To ensure Mercedes-Benz continues to remain the most trusted brand in Oman, what is going be your focus and plans for 2022 and in the years to come?

We have entered 2022 with renewed vigor and purpose as we continue to build on a precedent that the brand has set for the last five decades. We will be launching some new, trend-setting vehicles, like the Mercedes-AMG GT 4-Door Coupé, the new CLS, and the C-Class. In addition, at Mercedes-Benz, our focus will remain to enhance our digitalisation and e-commerce journey, offer training and development opportunities to our employees, while ensuring our customers are fully satisfied, while delivering on our promise to offer "the best of nothing".

In your view, what have been the major chal-

lenges for luxury car segment during the pandemic years in Oman? How do you see the current trends for this segment?

The pandemic has had a huge impact on most industries, but for the luxury segment it has completely altered buying behaviour, views towards luxury cars and how people choose to purchase them. Up until recently, consumers were reluctant to make such a big investment as a car online, but due to social distancing and lockdowns, digital suddenly became a much more important part of the whole buying experience, and this is something I don't expect will change.

It has been a 180-degree change – taking the brick-and-mortar business model and turning it on its head. This means being completely focused on enabling and improving our digital capabilities, from queries, test-drive at doorstep, customisation, booking, payments, and delivery. Social media is also rising as the most popular platform for customer engagement of all kinds. These kinds of important changes in the way we do business have transformed our operations, helping us to better adapt to modern lifestyles and strengthening our relationship with our customers.

How would you describe the love-affair between Omani people and Mercedes-Benz brand?

Mercedes-Benz has a legacy in Oman that dates all the way back to the early 1970s. Today, more than 50 years later, it stands as one of its most trusted and recognisable brands. Our people, reflect the wonderful tradition of hospitality, respect for culture and genuine warmth that the country is known for throughout their work, and we are committed to nurture and develop them.

I think the strength of our relationship with the Omani people comes from our efforts to go beyond sales, but by also being committed to the local community.

Can you throw some light on Mercedes-Benz's plans in electric vehicle segment. Do you think EVs will capture a significant market share in the Middle East in coming years?

We already launched the hybrid model in Oman in 2021, and our new EQ models should be arriving later this year. There is certainly an interest in EV and we look forward to meeting the demand with ever-more innovative and powerful vehicles. Although Europe, China and North America are leading the world when it comes to electric vehicles, the Middle East is not far behind. In Muscat you can see by the number of EV charging stations that are cropping up all across the city, a sign of the wider transition from conventional hydrocarbon-based fuels to renewable energy.

The pandemic-induced recession badly affected Oman's automotive sector in past two years. Do you see signs of Oman's automotive market picking up now?

Oman's automotive sector certainly took a hit initially but it's made a reasonable recovery, especially the luxury segment. We know that, moving forwards, the only way to reach the largely young population is to cater to their love of technology and innovation and meet them where they are – which is mainly on social media! At the same time our cars continue to offer the most advanced safety options and best technology on the market, not to mention lavish interiors and the most options for customisation.

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Oil majors face backlash as era of big profits returns

Paris, France – Soaring energy prices have brought massive profits to oil majors – along with fierce criticism from environmentalists and politicians at a time when consumers are left with rising bills.

US firm ExxonMobil, France's TotalEnergies, and UK giants Shell and BP announced in the past week 2021 profits totalling a whopping US\$66.7bn.

It marked a huge turnaround from 2020, when they posted losses as the pandemic emerged, prompting lockdowns that brought the world economy to a grinding halt and caused crude prices to collapse.

But oil and gas prices rallied big time last year, surging to US\$70 per barrel after briefly sinking into negative territory in 2020.

The main international and US contracts rose to seven-year highs in January and now over US\$94. Gas prices, meanwhile, hit records in Europe.

"Oil companies benefited from an extraordinary alignment of the planets," said Moez Ajmi, oil industry expert at EY consultancy.

In addition to higher energy prices, energy firms "cleaned up" their assets to only keep the most profitable ones, Ajmi said.

The companies also strengthened their cost-cutting policies which started in a previous price slump in 2014. A gradual in-



crease in output by OPEC and its allies has also helped.

ExxonMobil went from a US\$22.4bn loss in 2020 to a US\$23bn profit in 2021.

Shell was US\$20.1bn in the green last year after a US\$21.7bn loss in 2020.

TotalEnergies went from a historic US\$7.2bn loss to a 15-year high profit of US\$16bn.

BP's recovery was not as big, going from US\$20.3bn in the red to US\$7.6bn in the green.

Prices at the pump and utility bills, meanwhile, have gone up for consumers.

'Slap in the face'

BP said the result would allow it to accelerate "the greening" of the company.

But the performances at the companies triggered calls for a windfall tax on the profits of energy firms in the UK.

"These profits are a slap in the face to the millions of people dreading their next energy bill," Greenpeace UK's head of climate Kate Blagojevic said in a statement.

"BP and Shell are raking in billions from the gas price crisis while enjoying one of the most favourable tax regimes in the world for offshore drillers," she said.

"And these are the same companies responsible for pushing our world closer to catastrophic climate change."

Seeking to head off a political storm, the government of Prime

Minister Boris Johnson announced last week a package of financial support after the state energy regulator lifted prices.

The opposition Labour Party said it was not enough.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak's "energy plans last week left families more worried than ever," tweeted Labour shadow minister Rachel Reeves after the oil companies published their results.

"It's time for Labour's plan for a one-off windfall tax on oil & gas producers to cut bills."

Sunak rejected the tax idea.

More profits

With a presidential election looming in France in April, Green candidate Yannick Jadot spoke out against profits made "on the

back of French men and women" while "gas and petrol bills rise for the benefit of shareholders".

TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanne said that if the company paid more to governments, "it would be at the expense of investments, workers or shareholders".

But in apparent move to fend off criticism, TotalEnergies announced this week a discount at the pump in rural areas of France along with a 100-euro voucher for people struggling to pay their gas bills.

Oil majors, however, could be in for another banner year for their bottom lines as analysts forecast prices climbing to US\$100 per barrel.

AFP



India to sell 5% of insurance giant in huge IPO

Mumbai, India – India plans to sell a five per cent stake in insurance giant LIC in what could potentially be the country's largest initial public offering, according to a regulatory filing Sunday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is desperate for proceeds from the IPO of the Life Insurance Corporation of India and the sale of other state assets to help fix its tattered public finances.

Founded in 1956 by nationalising and combining 245 insurers, LIC was synonymous with life insurance in post-independence India for decades until the entry of private companies in 2000.

Despite a steady decline in market share, LIC continues to lead the pack with 64 per cent of the life insurance market in the country of 1.4bn people.

With staff of more than 100,000 people, its vast assets under management of 36.7tn rupees (US\$491bn) equate to nearly 16 per cent of India's gross domestic product.

LIC in turn is one of India's biggest institutional investors, with significant stakes in Indian blue-chip stocks like Reliance, TCS, Infosys and ITC.

According to LIC's draft prospectus filed with the market regulator on Sunday, the government plans to sell around 316mn shares in the IPO, which is ex-

pected to take place in March.

While the pricing has not yet been set, analysts expect the IPO to dwarf that of payments firm Paytm, which raised US\$2.5bn in November in India's largest public share sale to date.

The government hopes LIC's IPO will attract legions of first-time investors to the stock market, in a country where less than five per cent of people have trading accounts.

It will be a crucial step in Modi's policy to "monetise and modernise" state-run companies and plug an estimated 16tn-rupee budget deficit this financial year in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

This puts New Delhi on course to miss its privatisation target for a third straight year despite concluding the long-delayed sale of flag carrier Air India to the Tata Group last month.

The IPO of LIC though will require additional transparency of the insurance behemoth's operations, which has more than 2,000 branches and an army of around one million "LIC agents".

LIC's real estate assets include vast offices at prime locations in different Indian cities, including a distinctively curved Art Deco building in Mumbai's financial district and a 15-storey LIC Building in Chennai that was once India's tallest building.

AFP

EU cuts eurozone growth forecast on high inflation

Brussels, Belgium – The eurozone economy will grow less than expected this year, the European Commission said, as energy prices and supply chain problems jack up inflation and delay a more sustained recovery from the pandemic.

The EU executive said GDP in the single currency bloc would

grow by 4.0 per cent this year, instead of the 4.3 per cent forecast only three months ago.

Inflation would increase to a much stronger than expected 3.5 per cent in 2022.

"Multiple headwinds have chilled Europe's economy this winter: the swift spread of Omicron, a further rise in inflation

driven by soaring energy prices and persistent supply-chain disruptions," said EU economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni.

The high prices "are likely to remain strong until the summer, after which inflation is projected to decline as growth in energy prices moderates and supply bottlenecks ease," he added.

However the former Italian prime minister underlined that "uncertainty and risks remain high" with the EU warning that "geopolitical tensions" in eastern Europe had "markedly aggravated" potential threats to the economy.

This was in reference to the more than 100,000 Russian

troops that are deployed on the border with Ukraine, raising Western fears of a possible attack. The crisis has brought major uncertainty over the supply of energy from Russia, which accounts for roughly 40 per cent of the gas that heats homes and powers factories in the EU.

AFP

AstraZeneca warns on falling COVID-19 treatment sales after record year

London, UK – British COVID-19 vaccine maker AstraZeneca has warned that coronavirus product sales and profit margins would drop this year as the pandemic recedes and after record-high group revenue in 2021.

AstraZeneca rapidly developed a successful COVID-19 jab during the pandemic that generated full-year sales of almost US\$4bn last year, the company said in a results statement.

After initially offering the vaccine at cost, Astra decided in November to begin selling Vaxzevria - developed alongside University of Oxford – for profit.

Revenue from COVID-19 medicines is set to decline by up to a quarter, AstraZeneca said Thursday.

But total group revenues would increase this year by a "high-teens percentage" thanks in part to sales of antibody treatment Evusheld.

The drug is for high-risk people who show resistance to vaccines against coronavirus.

Astra on Thursday added that its net profit tumbled last year, hit by costs arising from the vast takeover of US biotech firm Alexion.

Profit after tax slumped to US\$112mn from US\$3.2bn in 2020.

Revenues soared 41 per cent to US\$37.4bn.

"2021 was an exceptional year for AstraZeneca in terms of rev-



enue, which exceeded US\$37bn and was the highest in the company's history," noted chief executive Pascal Soriot.

"This put us well on track to deliver our promise of annual revenue of \$40 billion one year ahead of schedule."

He added that AstraZeneca's "rapidly improving financial position" had allowed it to raise its annual dividend payment the first time in a decade.

Soriot said the company last year delivered on its "promise of broad and equitable access" to its Covid-19 vaccine "with 2.5bn doses released for supply around the world".

At the same time, the group faced vast costs following its US\$39bn takeover of Alexion, while large impairment and restructuring charges also weighed.

Astra swung into a pre-tax annual loss of US\$265mn, after a US\$3.9bn profit last time around.

But its share price was up 2.1 per cent in London trading Thursday.

"The COVID vaccine has raised Astra's global profile significantly," said Hargreaves Lansdown analyst Keith Bowman.

"For now, and with further innovation and new drug successes ongoing, analyst consensus opinion continues to point to a strong buy" of its shares.

Since taking the helm at AstraZeneca in 2012, Soriot has pushed the company into lucrative treatments such as cancer therapies, and the Alexion takeover gives it more heft in areas such as treating blood disorders.

As for its Covid vaccine, "time spent developing and distributing (the jab)... has been time away from its core business", Bowman added.

"The purchase of Alexion at what is considered a full price is also yet to be fully justified."

Astra's EU's Covid vaccination roll-out was extremely sluggish initially because of a big shortfall in the amount of doses the company had promised the bloc, sparking a row between the parties.

The European Union has since pivoted towards mRNA vaccines, particularly the one produced by US drugs giant Pfizer in partnership with German peer BioNTech, after rare blood-clot problems with AstraZeneca increased public hesitancy about taking it.

AFP

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Team Novo Nordisk joins Tour of Oman

The Novo Nordisk team, consisting of diabetic and professional cyclists, has joined Tour of Oman which is hosted by the sultanate in collaboration with the National Team of Oman, UCI and in which hundreds of professional cyclists from around the world participate.

Commenting on the participation, Dr Noor al Busaidi - director of National Diabetes and Endocrinology Centre in Oman, said, "Living with diabetes, as challenging as it may be, still has a very bright side as we see here today. Team Novo Nordisk of seven professional cyclists who are affected by Type I Diabetes Mellitus competing in the Tour Oman clearly demonstrates a model on how youth living with diabetes can optimise their lives and well-being and be in good control of their condition."

"Nevertheless, such achievement would not have been possible without various support from governments, private enterprises, and society. Each partner contributed to this achievement and success."

"As president of Oman Diabetes Association and a health care provider, I would like to call on our strategic partner, the Ministry of Health and all other local stakeholders to continue to work together to enhance care and



support Omanis living with diabetes, especially children and youth. From what we see today, I have a strong belief that a day

will come when we will have a diabetic champion from Sultanate of Oman," elaborated Dr Noor. "The Tour of Oman is a very

important race for us, and we are honoured to be making our first appearance here and to have the opportunity to help drive change

in diabetes at such a big event," said Vassili Davidenko Team Novo Nordisk general manager. "It's been a while since we raced

in the Middle East, but we always have a great experience racing in this part of the world. It's a perfect way to start the sea-

son in the sunshine and I'm sure that this time will be no different."

"The Tour of Oman is a beautiful race to start the season and an important one, not only for us but for all our supporters who help us inspire, educate and empower everyone affected by diabetes around the world," said Team Novo Nordisk captain Charles Planet.

"We have an important responsibility to those people and performing well in races like the Tour of Oman is the best way we can get our message across," he added.

"It is a pleasure that Team Novo Nordisk have selected Oman as a part of their annual tour, as this will be the 1st time to include a Gulf Cluster country in such a unique experience to showcase raising awareness on diabetes differently," said Venkat Kalyan P K - VP & GM of Novo Nordisk Gulf Cluster.

As of today, Tuesday, February 15th will witness the conclusion of the sixth and final round of the Tour of Oman, which covered nearly 900km over six days of racing across the governorates of Muscat, North Batinah and Sharqiya. Participants will reach the final destination in Muttrah Corniche, where the winners will be announced.

Oman Air’s Records Management Manual officially endorsed by NRAA

Oman Air received endorsement of its Records Management Manual during an official signing by National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) chairman H E Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawyani and Oman Air chief executive officer Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi. The manual was signed at Oman Air’s headquarters and is the culmination of a year-long undertaking by Oman Air’s Records Management department.

H E Dhawyani, said, "Records management is an important aspect of any organisation due to its contribution to organising information and retrieving it effectively."

"Oman Air was attentive to this by establishing a dedicated records management department and the recruitment of a specialist to oversee its functions," H E Dhawyani added.

"The adoption of a classification system and retention schedules of records aims to enable



these units and departments to circulate records, limit their duration, retrieve them easily and facilitate daily and ongoing workflow transactions."

In addition, the system facilitates identification of all impor-

tant files and records for transfer to the national memory with regard to what has been accomplished in the field of aviation and its business operations. By adopting this system, the number of institutions that have suc-

cessfully completed the process has reached 89."

Raisi, said, "We are honoured that H E Dhawyani has officially endorsed Oman Air’s Records Management Manual. The exceptional work being carried out by the National Records and Archives Authority reflects a remarkable commitment to guide organisations such as ours toward implementing effective records management processes."

"The insights and expertise they shared with Oman Air proved instrumental in our Records Management unit’s successful completion of the manual. Maintaining a national archive of essential documents is a fundamental pillar of efficient governance and one that serves both present and future generations. Oman Air is extremely proud to enhance Oman’s national memory with records from the field of aviation," he added.

Samail Industrial City localises Al Habib Food Industries

Samail Industrial City has succeeded in localising Al Habib Food Industries, which is specialised in the production of milk and its derivatives, in a record time of 30 minutes after receiving the investment application on Madayn’s website. With a capital touching RO500,000, Al Habib Food Industries will set up the project on an area of 10,000 sqm.

The investment process time required for localising projects in the industrial cities of Madayn has decreased significantly during the past years, thanks to the developed integrated electronic system and Masar Service Centre, which play a key role in facilitating the investment procedures.

It should be noted that the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn is currently executing the design and implementation of infrastructure complementary project in Samail Industrial City. This includes a



dual-lane road spanning 1.4km from the roundabout at the main entrance of Samail Industrial City to the roundabout near Al Sharqiya expressway. The project also includes designing and exe-

cuting sewage pipe linking phase 3 with phase 1 of Samail Industrial City, which has exceeded 48 per cent of completion rate and is expected to be completed next April.

MC Edition to celebrate racing as the beating heart of Maserati

MC stands for Maserati Corse: A sporty nature, fostered on the track for everyday competition. The new MC Edition celebrates Maserati’s uncompromising performance and racing spirit.

Victories, trophies, legendary cars and drivers: The world of racing immediately comes to mind when thinking of the Trident Brand, here paying tribute to its glorious history.

The focus is on the versions equipped with a V8 engine to highlight the concept of ‘uncompromising driving pleasure’: The most powerful Ghibli, Levante and Quattroporte become the stars of a new edition with a captivating aesthetic.

MC Edition epitomises performance, orientation towards victory and bold driving pleasure, echoing a story that began almost 96 years ago when the Tipo 26 – the first model to bear the Trident on the bonnet – won the 1,500 cc class at the Targa Florio with Alfieri Maserati



at the wheel.

The same racing feeling can now be found in this specific edi-

tion, available on the Ghibli, Levante and Quattroporte in two exclusive colours: Giallo Corse

and Blu Vittoria.

The exterior clearly recalls the Brand’s roots, with its exclusive

colours and powerful sporty character.

Yellow and blue are the

colours of Modena, the city that symbolises the Motor Valley and is the home of Maserati.

Giallo Corse is a three-layer yellow colour with blue mica interfering with the light in a highly sophisticated manner, for a sporty and advanced look. Conversely, Blu Vittoria is a matte three-layer blue. Extremely deep, impactful, new and contemporary, it has a notably tangible effect.

To complement the exterior, the MC Edition range features distinctive details in Piano Black and a specific badge on the rear fender and B-pillar.

The Levante MC Edition has 22" wheels, with 21" rims on the Ghibli and Quattroporte. The gloss black finish of the wheel rims and blue brake calipers complete the look.

The specs of the special series are completed with an electronic sunroof, Bowers & Wilkins surround sound system and Driver

Assistance package.

The MC Edition’s unique link with racing spirit and Modena is also evident in the interior features, including components in blue carbon fibre in the cabin. The yellow and blue stitching on the seats across the natural Nero Pienofoire black leather is juxtaposed with denim accents.

The headrest is embellished with the MC Edition logo and a dedicated badge takes over the centre of the console.

Unprecedented performance and driving pleasure require an uncompromising visual impact: taking Maserati’s roots as a starting point, MC Edition creates a perfect ‘racing style’ and celebrates the power rooted in the beating heart of racing and the DNA devoted to the competitions typical of the Motor Valley.

The new MC Edition is available in EMEA, APAC and China from February 2022.



MG confirms its Middle East car supplies are at almost full capacity

Car buyers in the Middle East can look forward to virtually unhindered access to the increasingly popular MG range in 2022, with the brand confirming it has resumed production at almost full capacity, despite the global chip shortages being experienced by many manufacturers in the automotive industry. The British-born band is one of the only car makers operating at an almost 100 per cent supply rate. Initial orders from customers across the Middle East at the beginning of 2022 stood at around 5,000 units, but the brand has already supplied 12,000 units,

with most orders prebooked. Most of those prebooked cars are MG 5, MG HS and all-new 2022 MG GT models, with the majority going to customers in Saudi Arabia. Other models, including the MG ZST, MG 6 and the MG RX5, are also free from any supply issues. On an international level, MG Motor's mother company, SAIC Motor signed a memorandum of understanding with Shanghai New Micro Technology R&D Center Co in January. SAIC will participate in the Automotive Chip Engineering Center initiated and established by Shanghai New Micro Tech-

nology R&D Center Co by way of fund investment. The preparation of the Automotive Chip Engineering Center comprises a pilot test line and a mass manufacture line for automotive-grade chips, to make up for the limitations of automotive chip design companies in process growth and engineering, and to help design companies decrease product costs. Customers continued to buy MG cars in ever-increasing numbers during 2021, with MG continuing its progress among the GCC's top ten car manufacturers to secure 6th position.

The year closed with MG securing an exceptional 3.8 per cent market share and total sales of 41,165 units, a year-on-year rise of 50 per cent, despite the challenging market conditions caused by the global pandemic. Last year, MG launched two key new models: The 2022 MG GT and a special edition of the brand's flagship seven-seater SUV - the MG RX8 Black Edition. The MG ZST has also been selling strongly since its regional launch in late 2020. Tom Lee, managing director of MG Motor's Middle East operations, said, "Through careful

planning and organisation, we are able to reassure our customers that we continue to have sufficient supply of models to ensure we can fulfill all orders. At the same time, our retail partners can push forward with their own business operations as normal, confident that the global chip shortage is having minimal impact on MG's supply chain." "This all comes at the beginning of a year when we plan to further expand our business across the Middle East and North Africa, with products that offer even better features and at even greater value for money."

Four winning projects in Nama Group's Wiyakum



Nama Group has announced the conclusion of the sixth edition of its internal volunteering initiative - Wiyakum - for the electricity and water sectors in Oman. Wiyakum is a key project aiming at reflecting and enhancing the volunteering activities within the group and driven by the group's efforts to realise its sustainability policy, which aims at promoting a culture of volunteering among the group's employees by focusing on the pillars of economic, social and environmental sustainability.

us great pleasure to witness the conclusion of the sixth edition of Wiyakum - our volunteer work initiative. Since its launch each version of the initiative has left a special imprint in the world of volunteering in the Sultanate of Oman. It aims to achieve the pillars of development for economic, social and environmental sustainability. We will continue to strive for volunteer work efforts to continue, and we will move forward to achieve sustainability as a common goal."

The initiative also aims to activate the volunteering leave entitled for employees by the implementation of their volunteering projects in as per the policy.

The closing ceremony was held at Kempinski Hotel - Muscat, during which the Nama group has reviewed the voluntary initiatives conducted by the group's employees.

Four winning projects out of eight which were financially empowered by the group to reach the implementation phase within predefined framework of this initiative, were honoured during the ceremony.

Eng Saleh al Rumhi, CEO, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), said, "It gives

In this edition, 32 voluntary projects were submitted by different teams and individuals. Wiyakum Application was honoured with the first place. It was proposed by different subsidiaries within the group and was merged under one umbrella with the aim of empowering the voluntary work of the group employees and to organise it within the Sultanate of Oman in general.

The environmental Playground was honoured with the second. The project aims at designing and building an environmental playground for kids by recycling unused cars tyres.

A project to support children's mental health won the third place followed by a hiking and mountain biking route project.

Eihab Travels, Sabre sign multi-year technology deal

Sabre Corporation, the leading software and technology company that powers the global travel industry, and Eihab Travels, Oman's leading IATA accredited travel agency, have announced a new multi-year technology agreement to help transform the travel experience in Oman.

While travel is showing signs of recovery in Oman, this new long-term agreement will see Eihab Travels deploy Sabre's latest technology and best solutions to drive growth, boost revenue and transform its business. The agency will now use Sabre's next-generation travel agency desktop, Sabre Red 360,



to deliver an intelligent and consultative service to travellers, create compelling shopping experiences for customers and provide an enhanced level of

expertise to respond to evolving travellers demands. "The travel landscape has evolved dramatically following the pandemic, and that required

a fresh outlook at our digital transformation and technology investments," said Dinesh Poojary, general manager, Eihab Travels. "Sabre has the technology and innovation strategy to support our goals, advance our technology and operations and enable our digital transformation to compete on a global level."

As part of its strategic plans to transform the future of travel, Sabre recently announced multiple intelligent solutions, such as Sabre Travel AI and its intelligent retailing engine, which will be infused across its technology platform to power the future of personalised travel.

"We have been working to

empower our customers to be ready for recovery," said John Mathew, Oman county manager, Sabre Travel Network Middle East. "We are excited to partner with such a committed, forward-thinking partner like Eihab Travels that clearly understands the role technology plays in travel's recovery - and we remain committed to equipping the agency with the most innovative solutions to achieve its goals"

Sabre has been working with many leading travel firms in Oman to enable them to leverage market trends and provide latest technologies that enrich the traveller's experience.

Cash prizes for 4 winners with ahli islamic credit card

ahli islamic has announced the launch of a special campaign for its Credit Card customers, which gives them the opportunity to win cash prizes monthly. The campaign is scheduled to be held for three months from February 2022.

This campaign aims to offer monthly cash prizes to four winners from ahli islamic credit card holders (RO100 for each winner). ahli islamic will announce the winners on its social media pages.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, deputy general manager and head of ahli islamic, said, "An exclusive campaign for our credit card holders exemplifies our continued commitment towards the customer experience and confidence that we aspire to build. At ahli islamic, we provide various ways of banking to our customers, catered through multiple channels. This, coupled with high level of security, ease and convenience, especially while using credit cards, is something that we consider as an important aspect to us."

He also said that by adding more interesting offers and surprises for customers, ahli islamic is keen to keep pace with its



client's lifestyle while also ensuring that these banking offers are in accordance with Sharia'a.

ahli islamic's credit cardholders are eligible to participate in the campaign when they spend at least RO100 monthly through their credit cards. There are four cash prizes every month each with a value of RO100 which will be drawn through a random draw system.

Customers can use their ahli islamic credit card, locally as well as internationally, to be eligible for the draw. ahli islamic will conduct the draw on a monthly basis and will announce the winners on the bank's official social media pages.

Saudi Expo pavilion trailblazes with 3mn visits

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Pavilion has welcomed its three millionth visitor since the opening of Expo 2020 Dubai as the popular pavilion solidifies its place as one of the six-month event's biggest hit experiences, a testament to growing interest in the country at a time when it is opening up in unprecedented ways.

Pavilion staff and volunteers marked the occasion with a special nighttime ceremony in the Open Square area against the backdrop of a countdown on the giant digital screen to the three millionth visitor to the second largest pavilion at Expo. This was followed by a reception at the pavilion's Palm Garden.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Pavilion is drawing approximately a quarter of all Expo 2020 Dubai visits, which now total just over 12mn.

Hussain Hanbazazah, Commissioner General of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Pavilion, said, "We are incredibly proud of what the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Pavilion has realised thus far and reaching three million visits is evidence of all our achievements to date as well as proof that our concept of sharing the real and authentic Saudi Arabia, driven by our limitless ambitions and efforts, is really resonating with visitors."



"In addition to its impressive five-storey building which acts as a 'window' into the country, the rich and diverse program of activities hosted at the Saudi Arabia Pavilion provides visitors with many reasons to explore as well as return to the pavilion. They can engage with our people, learn more about our heritage, experience our culture through

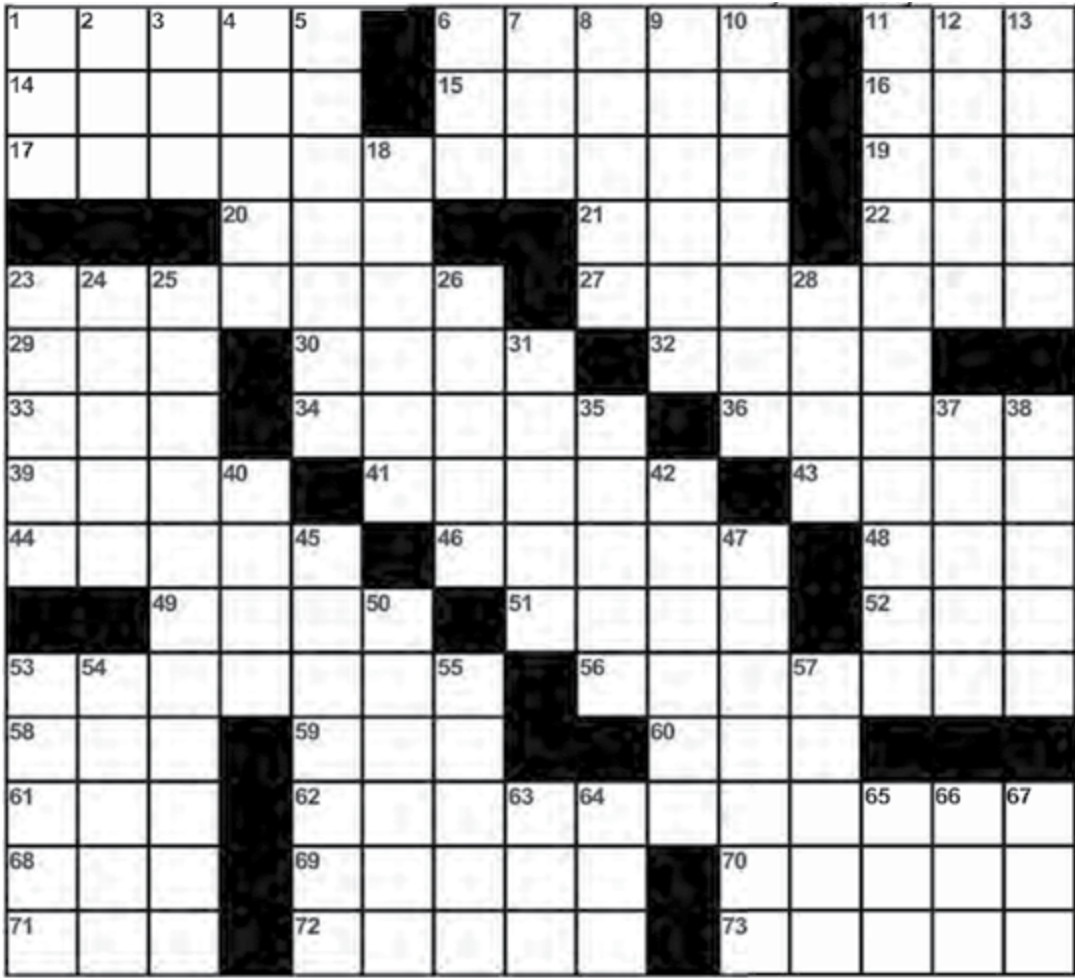
vibrant and powerful cultural shows from dance, music to poetry and art, as well as scout for future business opportunities at the Kingdom."

Saudi Arabia's participation in Expo 2020 Dubai is anchored by four key pillars: People, Opportunity, Heritage, and Nature - themes that are highly present throughout the pavilion journey.

Located at the Opportunity District at Expo 2020 Dubai, the state-of-the-art pavilion is Platinum LEED certified and fuses architecture with highly immersive digital technology. A record-breaking structure, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Pavilion welcomes visitors daily from 10am to 10pm during which time they can participate in various excit-

ing activities and events at different areas of the pavilion. These include Saudi crafts, sustainability workshops for the entire family, the chance to catch Saudi folklore performances, mesmerising shows in the Open Square or savour authentic Saudi flavours at Sard Café, which features unique food experiences from the kingdom's 13 regions.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) No longer original
6) Good-will agreements
11) Sun, moon or sphere
14) Bird with a curved neck
15) Cancel, as a rocket launch
16) Positive sign?
17) It starts after 40 hours, for many
19) Mendes of Hollywood
20) Get what you bask for
21) Coke's alcoholic partner
22) Bleed in the wash
23) Crossword constructor's activity
27) States of friendliness
29) Did 22-Across
30) Catchy tune
32) One billion years (var.)
33) Make sense (with "up")
34) Snobbish expression
36) Original sin city
39) Slope slider
41) Rubbernecked
43) Correct the pitch of
44) Calligrapher's stroke

46) More friendly
48) Order's counterpart
49) Difficult expedition
51) Spreadsheet contents
52) Gerard of "Buck Rogers"
53) Tries anew
56) Some children at kidfriendly zoos
58) Pub order, often
59) One little piggy
60) _Lanka
61) Eggy Christmas libation
62) They have grave responsibilities
68) Brains of a PC
69) "The Canterbury Tales" character
70) Virtual certainty
71) Barnyard figure
72) Committed a faux pas
73) Student's composition

DOWN

1) However, in short
2) Gun, as an engine
3) More than vexation
4) Bakery sweet
5) Involves
6) Mindy portrayed of TV
7) Bart's animated granddad
8) Dried coconut meat
9) Emergency room concern
10) Hinders the progress of
11) Not stop when one should
12) Musical show
13) They may be refried
18) Unit of six outs
23) Boorish
24) Big dipper
25) Feeling great pressure
26) Gather little by little
28) Harbor sound
31) Not too hot
35) Closing news segment
37) How the euphoric walk
38) Cries weakly
40) Desperate, as circumstances
42) Can't stand
45) Highlight
47) Stressful corporate routine
50) Danish coins
53) Dressing option
54) Run away to wed
55) Exodus commemoration

57) Hawaiian lights
63) First mate
64) One side in checkers
65) Printer's widths

66) Zenith competitor of old
67) A verse to first moves

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

That obstacle you've been battering away at just isn't budging, but luckily now is the perfect time to try a new tack. A fresh idea could come to you from out of the blue, maybe a way to get around what's been holding you back instead of continuing to pound your head against it, and it's even more likely to happen if you do a little brainstorming. Suddenly since there are several options now, what seemed so difficult can be easy as pie.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Feeling like you're at a bit of a dead end in the work department isn't the most pleasant thing, but a discussion of your long-term dreams in this area gives you a sense of hope. You're open to new ideas and possibly even to the idea of taking a rather big risk. However, feeling like you have to make a decision about it immediately is a little too much pressure. Engage your brain and a creative solution will emerge.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Maintain focus in the early part of the day, and you should be able to polish off a surprising number of little tasks with lots of aplomb. By this afternoon or evening, you'll be itching for something a little more intellectually and socially stimulating. There's a lot going on beyond blockbuster movies, so find something suitably interesting to keep you busy. If someone asks you to go somewhere random, say yes!

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Some intense energy surrounding relationships is definitely in the air now, and romance, flirtation, and flattery are all a part of the mix. The chitchat in the workplace might be supercharged between you and a certain someone, or maybe you're spending time messaging with a distinctly non-work-related contact. Whatever it is, you're usual work ethic is a little lacking, but probably so is everyone else's.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The resolution to a work issue could be much closer than you think. Some lightning-fast reasoning on your part, in addition to the longer-term analysis you've been conducting, could lead to a real breakthrough. The way you communicate about it is key, however. Rather than introducing your big idea right off the bat, engage the parties involved in open-ended conversation. Asking a question is better than making a statement.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Mood swings are one thing, but yours aren't just going back and forth: They're zigging and zagging wildly. If you think it's nutty, just imagine what it's like for those around you who are used to your usually steady state. You might have a tendency to talk on and on about something now or say things in fits of passion that you might not really mean. Try to set aside the extraneous stuff, quiet down and see where all this is coming from.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Rather than beating yourself up about what you said or did or failed to say or failed to do, how about getting yourself in the position to have a productive conversation about it? Your powers of observation are on point, you've diagnosed the situation (if not overdiagnosed it), and now is the time for some action in the form of words. Luckily you're able to make yourself clear and simultaneously convey a little of your trademark charm.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your synapses are crackling, and the sharing of information and ideas is flowing in an almost unprecedented way. It's as if the cosmos is coordinating it all in exactly the way that suits you. Take advantage of this opportunity to discuss lots of new things. Anything that occurs to you is fair game. And communicate on a level that's distinctly deeper than usual. You'll find an audience in an unexpected place.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Lots of unique astral energy is coming your way, creating plenty of possibilities for change, excitement, and even hot romance. You're able to get your message across in an unusual way now, whether it's an innovative work presentation or a love-related bulletin delivered rather unconventionally. And don't be surprised if something or someone that gets your synapses snapping has the rest of you all worked up too.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

The temptation to quash a certain rumor going around the office or among your circle of friends is definitely there, but then you'd have to lower yourself to the level of gossip, not to mention let on what you really know. The argument you're having in your head about it might be taken as an indicator that it's not what you actually want to do. In addition, there's the probability that what you say now could be misinterpreted anyway.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're sensing what's to come, and you're generally right about such matters. Why hesitate when you can make a smart move? While going way out on a limb isn't advisable, using your finely tuned instinct definitely is. Just make sure you explore some pertinent background information and get a sense of the details involved. As long as you're not acting on impulse, what you do should work out very much to your advantage.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your quest for interpersonal clarity has definitely been taking one step back for every two steps forward, but the fact that there's movement at all is a good sign. Your intuition has a message about how to proceed today. Some kind of gentle, empathetic communication might be in order. By later in the day, you'll want to watch your step because everyone, including you, is liable to be a bit overly sensitive.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. When Dartmoor Prison first opened in 1809 what was its purpose?

A. To house prisoners-of-war
B. To house serious offenders
C. A correctional house for young offenders
D. A workhouse

2. Which of these describes a boisterous, knockabout style of humour?

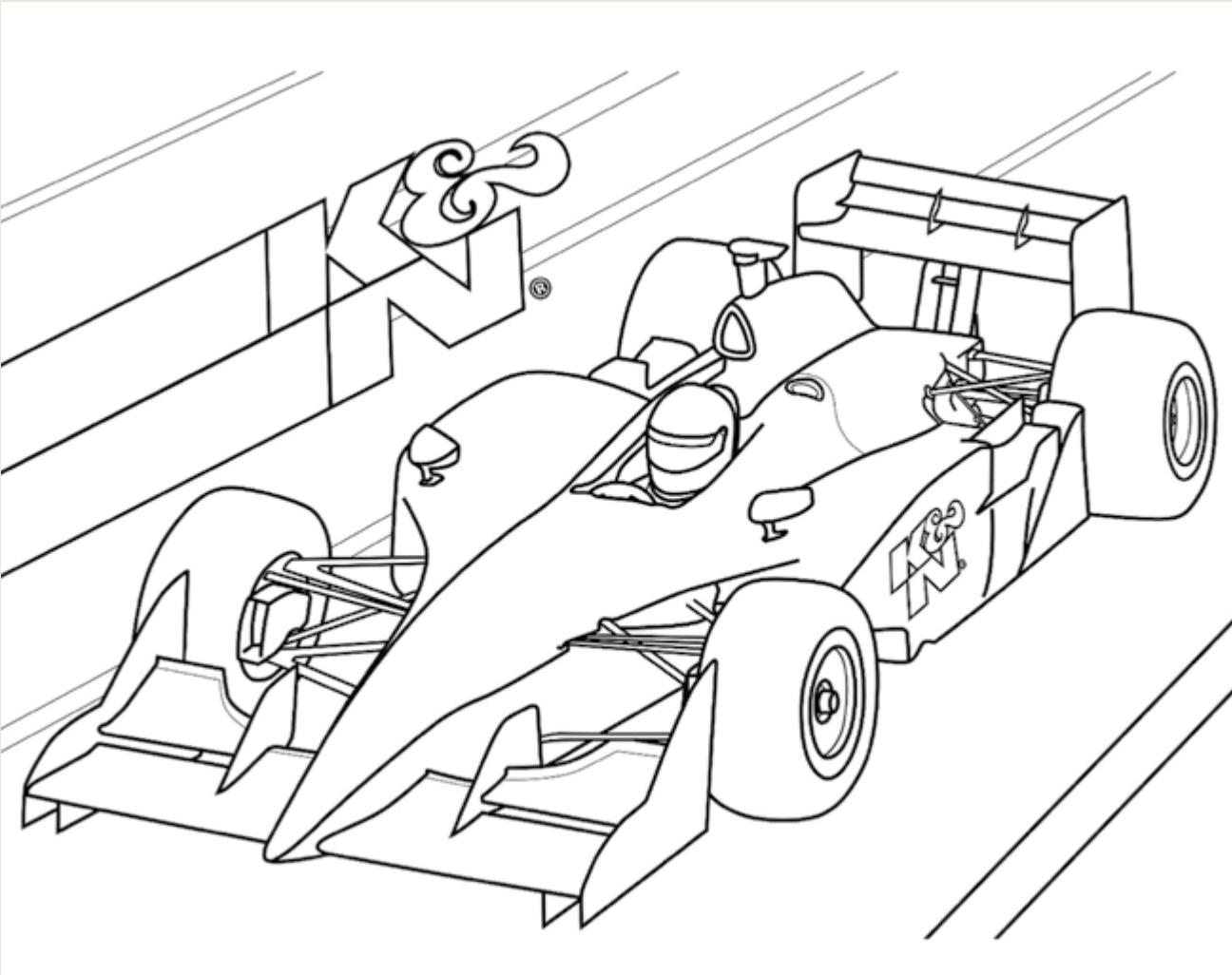
A. Bostick
B. Yardstick
C. Slapstick
D. Chapstick

3. Who was the first British monarch of the House of Windsor?

A. George V
B. Victoria
C. Edward VII
D. Stephen

Answers: 1. a 2. c 3. a

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

Y	E	E	E
E	I	R	D
F	I	S	J
B	D	A	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

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

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

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

Israeli forces kill Palestinian teen in West Bank clashes

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian teenager in West Bank clashes, during what the army on Monday described as an operation to demolish the home of a suspected 'terrorist'.

The Palestinian health ministry identified the youth as Mohammed Abu Salah, 17, who was killed after Israeli forces entered the village of Silat al-Harithiya near the flashpoint town of Jenin in the occupied West Bank.

Soldiers and border police had entered the village 'to demolish the floor of the residence in which the terrorist Muhammad Jaradat resided', the army said in a statement.

Israel has blamed Jaradat and others for the fatal shooting of a Jewish settler in the illegal West Bank outpost of Homesh in December.

The army said 'violent riots' broke out ahead of the planned demolition, 'with the participation of hundreds of Palestinians', some of whom hurled explosives at Israeli troops.

"The troops identified a number of armed rioters, and fired towards them in order to neutralise the threat," the army said without commenting directly on the teen's death.

Abu Salah's body, draped in a white sheet, was hoisted by mourners ahead of his funeral



Relatives mourn during the funeral of the Palestinian teenager in the village of Silat al-Harithiya in the occupied West Bank, on Monday (AFP)

later on Monday. Silat al-Harithiya was shuttered early on Monday, as commands to attend the burial rang out from the mosque's loudspeakers.

Demolitions

Israel's army, which said it had completed the demolition and withdrawn from the village, regularly destroys the homes of individuals it blames for attacks on Israelis.

The practice, which often

fuels tensions, has been condemned by critics as a form of collective punishment. Israel insists it deters attacks.

The army said Jaradat was responsible for the death of Yehuda Dimentman, killed when gunmen sprayed a settler car with roughly a dozen bullets as it drove out of Homesh in December. Two others were injured in the attack.

A married father, Dimentman was studying at a religious

school in the Homesh, which has remained open despite Israel not recognising the settlement.

Homesh had been evacuated by Israeli forces in 2005 but settlers have nevertheless continued to operate there, fuelling tensions with Palestinians.

Israel arrested four people days after the December shooting. Around 475,000 Jewish settlers live in the West Bank, alongside some 2.9mn Palestinians, in communities widely re-

garded as illegal under international law.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is the former head of a settler lobbying council who opposes Palestinian statehood.

He has ruled out any formal peace talks with Palestinians during his tenure but said he will work to improve economic conditions in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since the 1967 Six Day War.

AFP



Yemenis inspect the damage following overnight airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition targeting the rebel-held capital Sanaa, on Monday (AFP)

Saudi coalition hits Yemen capital after drone attack

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The Saudi-led coalition fighting Iran-backed rebels in Yemen destroyed a communications system on Monday used for drone attacks and located near the telecoms ministry in Sanaa, it said in a statement.

Riyadh intervened in the Yemeni civil war in 2015 to support the government against the Houthi rebels, who control a large part of northern Yemen, including the capital Sanaa.

"We have destroyed a communication system used to operate drone control stations," the coalition was quoted as saying by the official Saudi news agency SPA.

"The Houthis are using the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology in Sanaa for hostile operations," it added. An AFP correspondent in Sanaa confirmed coalition air strikes had targeted several areas of the capital around the ministry.

It was not immediately possible to determine if there were any casualties.

It was the first time the coalition has targeted a civilian ministry, having so far only attacked the defence ministry.

The coalition said the raids were in response to a drone attack on Thursday on a Saudi air-

port near the border which left 12 injured by falling debris after the Saudi military blew up the 'bomb-laden' projectile.

The coalition had warned it would strike positions from which the Houthis launch drones in Sanaa and asked civilians to leave civilian areas used for military purposes.

"The Houthis are using state ministries to launch hostile operations," the coalition said.

Yemen's Houthis have frequently launched drone attacks at targets in the kingdom including airports and oil installations.

The conflict has seen an escalation in recent months as the coalition has stepped up anti-Houthi offensives.

For their part, the Houthi rebels have also increased attacks on Saudi Arabia and its fellow coalition member the United Arab Emirates.

Yemen's civil war broke out in 2014 when the Houthis seized Sanaa, prompting the Saudi-led coalition to intervene the following year to prop up the internationally recognised government.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed directly or indirectly in the conflict, while millions have been displaced in what the UN calls the world's biggest humanitarian crisis.

AFP

Police kill knife-wielding man at Paris train station

Paris, France - French police shot dead a man who lunged at them early on Monday with a long-blade knife at Paris' Gare du Nord train station, police sources said.

The man attacked two police officers on patrol at the station, one of Europe's busiest, with a 30cm knife, said one police source, who asked not to be named.

"The police used their firearms, thus eliminating all danger, both for themselves and for travellers," Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin wrote in a tweet.

The attack occurred around



A file photo of the Gare du Nord train station in Paris (AFP)

7:00 am (0600 GMT), he said.

The station is the hub for Eurostar trains to and from London

and Thalys trains that link France with Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as high-speed

trains to the French north.

A France Television journalist who was at the train station at the time posted a video of the incident on social media, in which two gunshots can be heard.

"It was an individual known to the police as someone who wandered around in the station," Transport Minister Jean-Baptiste Djebbari told RMC TV.

"He appears to have attacked the police with a knife, forcing them to use their weapon."

France is still on edge after hundreds were killed in terror attacks in 2015 and a spate of isolated strikes at the end of 2020. Authorities have not

however linked Monday's incident to terror. National anti-Terror Prosecutors told AFP that they had not been asked to open an investigation.

Security is set to be a crucial theme in the April 2022 presidential election, where President Emmanuel Macron is expected to seek a new term. His main challengers are on the right and far-right.

Police representatives have for months been calling on the government to ensure better protection for police, who themselves have been under fire over allegations of racism.

AFP

Deepfake democracy: S Korean candidate goes virtual for votes

Seoul, South Korea - In a crowded campaign office in Seoul, young, trendy staffers are using deepfake technology to try to achieve the near-impossible: make a middle-aged, establishment South Korean presidential candidate cool.

Armed with hours of specially-recorded footage of opposition People Power Party candidate Yoon Suk-yeol, the team has created a digital avatar of the frontrunner - and set 'AI Yoon' loose on the campaign trail ahead of a March 9 election.

From a deepfake video of Barack Obama insulting Donald Trump to failed New York mayoral candidate Andrew Yang campaigning in the metaverse, AI technology has been used in elections before.

But AI Yoon's creators believe he is the world's first official deepfake candidate - a concept gaining traction in South Korea, which has the world's fastest average internet speeds.

With neatly-combed black hair and a smart suit, the avatar looks near-identical to the real South Korean candidate but uses salty language and meme-ready quips in a bid to engage younger voters who get their



Baik Kyeong-hoon making a video clip using 'AI Yoon', at an election campaign office in Seoul on February 7 (AFP)

news online.

It's been a huge hit. AI Yoon has attracted millions of views since making his debut January 1. Tens of thousands of people have asked questions, but it's not the usual policy-related fare.

"President Moon Jae-in and (rival presidential candidate) Lee

Jae-myung are drowning. Who do you save?" one user asks AI Yoon.

"I'd wish them both good luck," the avatar snaps back.

Meta-snark

At first glance, AI Yoon could pass for an actual candidate - an

apt demonstration of how far artificially generated videos, known as deepfakes, have come in the last few years.

The real Yoon recorded more than 3,000 sentences - 20 hours of audio and video - to provide enough data for a local deepfake technology company to create

the avatar.

"Words that are often spoken by Yoon are better reflected in AI Yoon," said Baik Kyeong-hoon, the director of the AI Yoon team.

What the avatar actually says is written by his campaign team, not by the candidate himself.

"We try to come up with humorous and satirical answers," Baik told AFP.

The approach has paid off. AI Yoon's pronouncements have made headlines in South Korean media, and seven million people have visited the 'Wiki Yoon' website to question the avatar.

"If we had only produced politically correct statements, we would not have this reaction," Baik said.

"The political establishment has been too slow in the face of a fast-changing society," he added. When answering questions posed by users, AI Yoon mockingly refers to President Moon and his rival Lee as 'Moon Ding Dong' and 'Lee Ding Dong'.

"I want to ask Moon Ding Dong this question: Who is our real enemy?" AI Yoon says, in a thinly-veiled swipe at what his critics say is the president's more conciliatory approach towards Pyongyang.

North and South Korea remain technically at war and Moon has met with Pyongyang's leader Kim Jong Un four times since taking office - an approach candidate Yoon rejects as too soft. The avatar politician has also used humour to try and deflect attention from Yoon's past scandals, for example claims he received inappropriate fruit gifts from a construction company when he was a senior prosecutor. "I am not beholden to persimmons and melons. I am only beholden to the people," AI Yoon said - although his campaign was later forced to acknowledge he had accepted some gifts.

The kind of script used by the campaign for AI Yoon draws on the language used in the online gaming world, Kim Myuhng-joo, professor of information security at Seoul Women's University, told local media.

"AI Yoon reads off the scripts compiled by its creators, who do not mince words," Kim said.

Ko Sam-seog, a staffer for Yoon's main opponent Lee, accuses the cyber-candidate of 'downgrading political decorum'.

But the snark is working: while polling for the March 9 election remains neck-and-neck, Yoon

has pulled ahead of rival Lee Jae-myung with voters in their 20s.

AI future

Tech-savvy Baik and his two other team members - all in their 20s and 30s - are some of the youngest staffers in the sprawling Yoon campaign.

They come with AI Yoon's responses in rapid-fire brainstorming sessions, which can take as little as 30 minutes, in contrast to the carefully-honed rhetoric usually found in public policy debates. South Korea's election monitor allows AI candidates to campaign on the condition it is clearly identified as deepfake technology, and does not spread misinformation.

The technology has more often been flagged as harmful - the 2018 deepfake video of Obama was produced by Oscar-winning filmmaker Jordan Peele to warn viewers about trusting material they encounter online. But Baik thinks AI is the future of election campaigns.

"It's so easy to create huge amounts of content with deepfake technology," he told AFP.

"It is inevitable that this will be used more and more."

AFP

Russia sees solution to standoff with West

Moscow, Russia - Russia said on Monday that a diplomatic solution to Moscow's standoff with the West was still possible and that some of its military drills were ending, after tensions over Ukraine reached fever pitch.

The comments came after German Chancellor Olaf Scholz landed in Kyiv for crisis talks ahead of a visit to Moscow to head off what Berlin said was the 'very critical' threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

During a televised meeting with President Vladimir Putin, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said 'there is always a chance' to reach an agreement with Western countries over the standoff.

He told Putin that dialogue with leaders in European capitals and Washington should continue and that 'opportunities are far from exhausted' for a resolution.

"I would suggest continuing" talks, Lavrov said.

On his arrival in Ukraine, the German leader headed directly to see President Volodymyr Zelensky, whose government has demanded an urgent meeting with Russia to explain why it has deployed more than 100,000 soldiers to Ukraine's borders.

European leaders warn that the troop build-up is the worst threat to the continent's security since the Cold War, as Putin demands a rollback of Western influence in eastern Europe and a ban on Ukraine joining NATO.

'Critical' threat

Western allies have prepared what they warn would be a crippling package of economic sanctions in response.

Earlier, a German government source had said: "We assess the situation as very critical, very dangerous."

Western alarm over Ukraine has been fuelled by recent Russian military exercises, including Belarus, where the US said Moscow had dispatched 30,000 troops for more than a week of drills.

Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told Putin in a meeting on Monday that some of the drills were 'ending' and that some would end 'in the near future'.

In Kyiv, Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov hailed 'positive' talks with his Belarusian counterpart. He said he had been assured 'there are no threats to Ukraine from Belarus'.

US intelligence officials worry



Volodymyr Zelensky (right) speaking with Olaf Scholz ahead of their meeting in Kyiv on Monday (AFP)

that weeks of crisis talks have given Russia the time to prepare a major offensive should Putin make the ultimate decision to attack Ukraine.

"We are digging trenches that Ukrainian soldiers could quickly jump into and defend in case the Russians attack," 15-year-old Mykhailo Anopa told AFP.

He was speaking near the frontline separating Kyiv-held territory from that under the control of Moscow-backed insurgents in the separatist east.

Ukraine demands answers

Washington reaffirmed its warning on Sunday that Russia was now ready to strike at 'any moment'. It said the assault was likely to start with 'a significant barrage of missiles and bomb attacks'.

Ukraine requested a formal

readout of the 50-minute call.

The United States on Saturday ordered all non-emergency staff to leave its embassy in Kyiv.

Tough trip

Germany plays a central role in efforts to mediate in eastern Ukraine, where a gruelling conflict with Russian-backed separatists has claimed more than 14,000 lives.

But Germany's close business relations with Moscow and heavy reliance on Russian natural gas imports have been a source of lingering concern for Kyiv's pro-Western leaders and Biden's team.

Scholz has warned Russia it should 'not underestimate our unity and determination' but also hedged against unequivocally backing Biden's pledge to 'bring an end' to Russia's new Nord Stream 2 gas link to Germany.

Kyiv is also upset with Berlin for not having joined some of its NATO allies in starting to send weapons to Ukraine.

Ukraine's ambassador to Berlin, Andriy Melnik, fumed at 'German hypocrisy' in a tweet on Sunday, saying Germany was exporting 'dual-use goods to Russia' but offering 'no weapons for Ukraine's self-defence'.

Scholz's visit to Moscow on Tuesday follows tit-for-tat closures of the German-language service of Russia's RT network and the Moscow bureau of Germany's Deutsche Welle.

Airline worries

A growing number of Western countries are withdrawing staff from their Kyiv embassies and urging their citizens to leave Ukraine immediately.

But departures may be complicated by the looming threat of the skies over Ukraine closing due to rising risks for airlines.

Dutch carrier KLM became the first major airline over the weekend to suspend flights to Kyiv indefinitely.

On Monday morning, ahead of the potential shutdown, Kiev's international airport was busy but there were no signs of panic despite long queues to depart.

Ukraine's budget airline SkyUp said European leasing companies were demanding that Ukrainian carriers return their planes to EU airspace within 48 hours. Industry analysts believe other international airlines may soon also ban flights into Ukraine because of the growing cost to insurers.

AFP



Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) being welcomed by Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan (centre) in Abu Dhabi on Monday (AFP)

Turkey's Erdogan arrives in UAE to revive strained ties

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was in the United Arab Emirates on Monday for the first time in nearly a decade, to revive relations that were long strained by regional disputes.

Erdogan arrived in the capital Abu Dhabi, where he was greeted by Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, reported the official WAM news agency.

Turkey and the oil-rich Emirates have backed opposing sides in the Libyan civil war and in a Gulf diplomatic crisis, and they have sparred over issues such as gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean.

But those tensions eased after Sheikh Mohammed, the de facto ruler of the UAE, travelled to Ankara in November, the first high-level visit to Turkey since 2012. That trip 'marked the beginning of a new era in relations', Erdogan told journalists at Istanbul airport before leaving for his two-day trip.

The Turkish president's visit to the UAE, meanwhile, is his first since 2013, when he was prime minister, and it is his first as head of state. "We are planning to take steps that will bring relations back to the level they deserve," Erdogan said, adding that Turkey-UAE dialogue and cooperation are 'important to the peace and stability in our region'.

His trip comes as the Emirates face a growing threat from Yemen's Houthi rebels, who have launched several drone and missile attacks on the Gulf country, prompting stepped up UAE defence cooperation with the United States and France. To greet Erdogan on his trip, which

will take him to the Expo 2020 Dubai world fair on Tuesday, the host country was lighting up the world's tallest building, Burj Khalifa, in the colours of the Emirati and Turkish flags.

Following Sheikh Mohammed's visit in November, the UAE announced a US\$10bn fund for investments in Turkey, where the economy has been reeling and inflation last month surged to a near 20-year high.

'Peace and prosperity'

During this week's visit, Erdogan was expected to sign 12 agreements with UAE partners, ranging from media and communications to economic and defence deals, Turkish media reports said.

His trip 'will open a new, positive page in bilateral relations', Anwar Gargash, advisor to the UAE president, said in a tweet.

Erdogan said in a weekend op-ed in the Emirati English-language daily *Khaleej Times* that 'Turkey and the UAE together can contribute to regional peace, stability and prosperity'.

"As Turkey, we do not separate the security and stability of the UAE and our other brothers in the Gulf region from the security and stability of our own country. "We believe wholeheartedly in the importance of deepening our cooperation in this context in the future."

Turkey-UAE relations were particularly tense after Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Bahrain in 2017 cut all links with Qatar, a close ally of Ankara. Those relations were restored in January 2021.

AFP

'Ghostbusters' director Ivan Reitman dies

Los Angeles, US - Ivan Reitman, the acclaimed producer and director of comedies such as *Ghostbusters* and *Animal House* which influenced a generation of movie-goers, has died aged 75, with Sony Pictures paying tribute on Monday to 'a great talent and even finer man'.

"Tonight, the lady with the torch weeps, as do all of us at Columbia, and film lovers around the world. Ivan Reitman was an inseparable part of this studio's legacy, but more than that he was a friend," Sony Pictures CEO Tom Rothman said in a statement posted to the studio's Twitter account. "A great talent and an even finer man; he will be dearly missed. We send his family all our condolences." AFP has reached out to Reitman's family for further information.

The news ignited a wave of tributes, including from some of the stars of 1984's *Ghostbusters*, one of the most popular comedies ever made.



Ivan Reitman (AFP)

"I am deeply saddened by the loss of Ivan Reitman. Truly a great man and filmmaker who I had honour and privilege of knowing and working with. Deepest condolences to Jason and the entire family," tweeted actor Ernie Hudson, who played Ghostbuster Winston Zeddemore in the original and its 1989 sequel, and had a cameo in the 2016 reboot.

He was referring to Reitman's son Jason, himself a popular director of films such as *Juno* and *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*.

"I'm in absolute shock," tweeted Paul Feig, who directed the 2016 reboot with an all-female cast of *Ghostbusters*.

"I had the honour of working so closely with Ivan and it was always such a learning experience. He directed some of my favourite comedies of all time. All of us in comedy owe him so very much. Thank you for everything, Ivan. Truly."

"Ivan Reitman was old school in the best way, and kind. I loved working with him. It's sad he's gone, it makes me feel older and like my childhood movies are more faraway than ever. RIP," tweeted actress Mindy Kaling.

In his decades-long career Reitman produced and directed films which helped establish major comedic stars such as Bill Murray, who as well as starring in *Ghostbusters* also starred in Reitman hits *Meatballs* and *Stripes*.

Reitman produced the 1978 hit *National Lampoon's Animal House*, which became one of the

most beloved and chaotic depictions of the system of fraternities and sororities in US colleges.

But it was *Ghostbusters* which launched a Hollywood dynasty, with the story of four men dressed in a version of firefighting gear tackling marshmallow monsters and slimy green spirits in a bid to save New York from a supernatural takeover spawning decades of sequels and reboots.

The iconic outfits worn by its four stars remain one of the most popular and recognisable Halloween costumes to this day.

Reitman was born in Komarno, in what is now Slovakia, on October 27, 1946.

His Jewish parents survived the Nazis but, four years after his birth, fled Czechoslovakia to escape communism. They eventually made their home in Toronto.

He is survived by his son Jason, the director, and daughters Catherine and Caroline.

AFP

Indian firm accused of \$3bn fraud

Mumbai, India - A ship-building company has been accused of defrauding India's largest state-run bank and 27 other financial institutions of over US\$3bn, the country's top investigative agency said, in what would be its biggest-ever bank fraud.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) - India's federal investigative agency - said in a statement that ABG Shipyard had duped 28 banks out of ₹228.42bn (US\$3bn).

The alleged theft by the Gujarat-based shipbuilder surpasses the US\$2bn jeweller Nirav Modi was accused of cheating Indian banks out of in 2018.

AFP

Stakes 'never been higher' in climate fight: IPCC head

Paris, France - The stakes in the fight against global warming are higher than ever, the UN's climate science chief said on Monday as nearly 200 nations met to finalise what is sure to be a harrowing report on climate impacts. "The need for the Working Group 2 report has never been greater because the stakes have never been higher," Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) chair, Hoesung Lee said in a live videocast.

Species extinction, ecosystem collapse, mosquito-borne disease, deadly heat, water shortages and reduced crop yields are already measurably worse due to rising temperatures.

Just in the last year, the world has seen a cascade of unprecedented floods, heatwaves and wildfires across four continents.

All these impacts will accelerate in the coming decades even if the carbon pollution driving climate change is rapidly brought to heel, the IPCC report is likely to warn. A crucial, 40-page Summary for Policymakers - distilling underlying chapters totalling thousands of pages, and reviewed line-by-line - is to be made public on February 28.

"This is a real moment of

reckoning," said Rachel Cleetus, climate and energy policy director at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "This not just more scientific projections about the future," she told AFP ahead the two-week plenary. "This is about extreme events and slow-onset disasters that people are experiencing right now."

The report will also underscore the urgent need for 'adaptation' - climate-speak which means preparing for devastating consequences that can no longer be avoided, according to an early draft seen by AFP in 2021.

In some cases this means that adapting to intolerably hot days, flash flooding and storm surges has become a matter of life and death.

'Doping the atmosphere'

"The growth in climate impacts is far outpacing our efforts to adapt to them," said Inger Andersen, head of the UN Environment Programme, noting that climate change threatens to become a major driver of species loss. IPCC assessments - this will be the sixth since 1990 - are divided into three sections, each with its own volunteer 'working



A file photo shows a protestor displaying a placard reading 'I love my planet' during an action organised by environmental movements in Paris (AFP)

group' of hundreds of scientists.

In August 2021, the first instalment on physical science found that global heating is virtually certain to pass 1.5°C, probably within a decade.

Earth's surface has warmed 1.1°C since the 19th century.

"We have been doping the atmosphere with fossil fuels," World Meteorological Organization chief Petteri Taalas said on

Monday, comparing the result to the 'enhanced performance' of Olympic athletes who used banned substances.

The 2015 Paris deal calls for capping global warming at 'well below' 2°C, and ideally 1.5°C.

This report is sure to reinforce this more ambitious goal.

It will likewise underscore that vulnerability to extreme weather events - even when they are

made worse by global warming - can be reduced by better planning and preparation, according to the draft seen by AFP.

This is not only true in the developing world, noted Imperial College professor Friederike Otto, pointing to massive flooding in Germany last year that killed scores and caused billions in damage.

"Even without global warming there would have been a huge rainfall event in a densely populated geography where the rivers flood very easily," said Otto, a pioneer in the science of quantifying the extent to which climate change makes extreme weather events more likely or intense.

The report will zero in on how climate change is widening already yawning gaps in inequality, both between regions and within nations. The simple fact is that the people least responsible for climate change are the ones suffering the most from its impacts.

The report is also likely to highlight dangerous 'tipping points', invisible temperature trip wires in the climate system for irreversible and potentially catastrophic change.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Key US-Canada border crossing reopens

Windsor, Canada - A major US-Canada border crossing re-opened late on Sunday almost a week after it was forced shut by truck driver-led protests against coronavirus restrictions, prompting police to quell the demonstration with a series of arrests.

The blockading of the Ambassador Bridge, which handles an estimated 25 per cent of trade between the two countries, had disrupted business in the world's largest economy and forced automakers in the United States and Canada to halt or scale back production.

The demonstrations, which have also paralysed the Canadian capital Ottawa, have sparked similar movements in France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand. Some US truckers are considering a protest for March. "The Ambassador Bridge is now fully open, once again allowing the free flow of commerce between the Canadian and US economies," the Detroit International Bridge Company said in a statement.



Police gather to clear protestors against COVID-19 vaccine mandates who blocked the entrance to the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, on Sunday (AFP)

In a tweet, Canadian Border Services confirmed the reopening but said 'non-essential travel is not advised'.

Police had begun clearing the bridge to the US city of Detroit on Saturday, successfully removing trucks from one major intersection. But some demon-

strators remained, extending the protracted standoff and preventing traffic from flowing.

By Sunday, police said between 25 and 30 protesters had been arrested.

"There will be zero tolerance for illegal activity," police in Windsor, Ontario, tweeted.

Copypat movements

The truckers have found support among conservatives and vaccine mandate opponents across the globe, even as COVID-19 measures are being rolled back in many places.

In Paris on Saturday, police fired tear gas and issued hun-

dreds of fines in an effort to break up convoys coming from across France.

The Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria have also seen copypat movements, and Belgian authorities said on Monday they had intercepted 30 vehicles as police scrambled to stop a convoy of trucks.

Demonstrators were seeking to head north to the seat of the European Union in defiance of a Belgian ban.

Brussels mayor Philippe Close told local RTBF radio that a total of 400-500 cars and vans had been spotted en route for the Belgian capital.

"About 30 have been blocked and the others have vanished," Close said.

'Serious consequences'

Washington had applied pressure on the Canadian government, asking it last week to use 'federal powers' to end the blockade and warning of 'serious consequences' for the US economy. As police moved to clear the protest over the weekend,

US officials praised the 'decisive' action.

Speaking before the bridge resumed operations, White House national security advisor Liz Sherwood-Randall said US and Canadian officials recognised 'the imperative of taking swift, strong action and deterring future blockades'.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had underscored that 'this conflict must end', but faced criticism for failing to act more decisively.

Truckers had originally converged on the capital to press their demand for an end to a vaccination requirement affecting drivers crossing the international border.

But the movement spread, with protesters eventually calling for an end to all vaccine mandates, whether imposed by the federal or provincial governments. Ottawa has been the epicentre of protests. On Saturday, police said about 4,000 demonstrators were still occupying the downtown area, in the third weekend of the movement.

AFP

Swedes over 80 to receive 4th dose

Stockholm, Sweden - Sweden's public health agency on Monday recommended a fourth dose of the COVID-19 vaccine for people over the age of 80, those in nursing homes and those receiving at-home care. The agency said the jab should be taken four months after the previous dose, at the earliest.

"The spread of COVID-19 is still intense in Sweden. An increasing number of cases have been reported in recent weeks, including among people at increased risk of severe illness," the agency said.

"The immune system's ability to react to the vaccination, and build up lasting protection, decreases with age," it added. "A booster strengthens that protection," state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell said in a statement from the agency.

AFP

Germany to end most curbs in March: Draft govt plan

Berlin, Germany - Germany will end most government restrictions to fight the coronavirus pandemic in March, according to a draft official plan seen by AFP on Monday, as new infections rates ease.

Two years after the start of the outbreak in Germany, curbs to prevent contagion will begin falling away.

As a first step, contact restrictions will ease allowing more to meet privately, while access to shops will be open to all without checks on whether the individuals are vaccinated or tested.

From March 4, access to restaurants will be open to unvaccinated people too if they show a negative test.

In a final step, 'broad restrictions of social, cultural and economic life should be gradually lifted by the start of spring on March 20, 2022,' said the draft document to be approved by federal and state leaders on Wednesday.

After that date, Europe's top economy would rely on 'basic protection measures' including



Moviegoers are checked for vaccination status at the Berlinale Palace on the second day of the 72nd Berlinale Film Festival in Berlin on Friday (AFP)

'in particular the wearing of medical masks' in public.

Rules requiring employers to allow staff to work from home if possible would also be lifted at that time.

For several weeks, Germany has restricted access to bars and restaurants to people who have received a booster jab of the coronavirus vaccine or who are tested on top of being fully vaccinated or recovered.

Contact restrictions are also in place keeping private gatherings to 10 people, or two households if an unvaccinated person is present.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz is due to meet with leaders of Germany's 16 states on Wednesday to agree the next steps on dealing with the pandemic.

On Monday, Germany reported 76,465 new COVID-19 infections over the last 24 hours and 42 deaths in the second week in a row to show falling rates. Germany's states, which have significant autonomy in implementing restrictions from mask-wearing in public transport to home-schooling, have already begun to gradually ease curbs.

AFP

Hong Kong leader Lam says city 'overwhelmed' by Omicron wave

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong's health facilities have been overloaded by an 'onslaught' of COVID-19 infections, its leader said, even as authorities cling to a 'zero-COVID' policy despite an unprecedented rise in cases fuelled by the Omicron variant. Authorities have adhered to mainland China's policy of stamping out the smallest outbreak with mass quarantine, widespread tracking, and prolonged social distancing measures since the start of the pandemic.

But the extremely contagious Omicron variant breached the Chinese territory's defences in late December, piling up more than 8,000 infections in a few weeks with researchers warning that daily cases could exceed 25,000 by next month.

While the infection rate remains low compared to major cities around the world, Hong Kong's policy of sending even asymptomatic cases to hospitals and quarantine facilities has filled up beds and amplified wait times.



A man talks on the phone in front of a banner of a restaurant in Hong Kong on Monday (AFP)

"The onslaught of the fifth wave of the epidemic has dealt a heavy blow to Hong Kong and overwhelmed the city's capacity of handling," leader Carrie Lam said in a statement issued on Sunday night. The surge in cases has increased wait times 'for admitting people who test positive to isolation facilities', she added.

Surrounded by patients

queuing for tests all of last week, the city's hospitals on Sunday told people who have 'stable or have mild symptoms' to stay at home. But Lam said the government 'will spare no effort to implement' the 'zero COVID' strategy and that China will help the city to bolster testing and quarantine resources.

Hong Kong has struggled to persuade its elderly population

to get vaccinated with only around 50 per cent of people over the age of 70 receiving a jab.

The government has repeatedly said its 'zero COVID' policy is meant to buy more time for them to get inoculated.

Researchers warned on Friday that by the end of March, the city could be racking up 28,000 daily infections. Hong Kong had only recorded a touch over 12,000 cases by the end of 2021. Last week marked the city's first COVID-19 deaths in five months, with seven patients over 70 and one four-year-old boy falling to the virus.

On Monday, authorities said two more elderly patients had passed away, and the hospital occupation rate now at 90 per cent - which is its limit.

In-person teaching in kindergartens, primary schools, and secondary schools - which have been closed since January - will remain suspended until early March, the city's Education Bureau said.

AFP

The Brazil resort town Atafona disappearing into the sea

Atafona, Brazil - Vultures roam the sand in the Brazilian resort town of Atafona amid the ruins of the latest houses destroyed by the sea, whose relentless rise has turned the local coastline into an apocalyptic landscape.

The Atlantic Ocean advances an average of 6m a year in this small town north of Rio de Janeiro, which has long been prone to extreme erosion - now exacerbated by climate change.

The sea has already submerged more than 500 houses, turning the once idyllic coastline into an underwater graveyard of wrecked structures.

One of the next to lose his home will be Joao Waked Peixoto.

Walking through the jumbled rubble of what was once his neighbours' house, he looks at what is left: a fragment of a blue-painted room strewn with tattered magazines, a bicycle and other remnants of life.

"When will we have to leave?

That's an unknown," he says.

"The sea advanced three or four meters in 15 days. Our wall might not last until next week."

Waked Peixoto's grandfather built the house as a vacation home, a beachfront getaway with large rooms and a garden.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Waked Peixoto and his family moved in full-time.

But it now looks inevitable the house will be swallowed by the sea.

"It will be a shame to lose this house, because it holds so many memories of my whole family," he says.

Extreme erosion

Atafona, a town of some 6,000 people, has long suffered from extreme erosion. It is part of the four per cent of coastlines worldwide that lose five meters or more every year.

The problem is being exacerbated by global warming, which is causing sea levels to rise and making currents and weather



View of the remains of a house at Atafona beach, in Sao Joao da Barra, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on February 7 (AFP)

patterns more extreme, says geologist Eduardo Bulhoes of Fluminense Federal University.

But Atafona has had a 'chronic problem' for decades,

he says.

The Paraiba do Sul river, whose mouth is in Atafona, has shrunk because of mining, agriculture and other activities that

drain it upstream.

"In the last 40 years, that has drastically reduced the river's volume, meaning it transports less sand to Atafona," says Ed-

uardo Bulhoes.

With less sand, the town's beaches have stopped regenerating naturally, ceding ground to the sea.

Construction on the coast has only made the problem worse, by stripping away sand dunes and vegetation, the beaches' natural defences.

The result has been disastrous for the tourism and fishing industries.

"Large boats can't come through the river delta anymore... and the money disappeared along with them," says Elialdo Bastos Meirelles, head of a local fishermen's community of some 600 people.

"The river is dead."

'Abandoned'

Local authorities have studied several plans to curb the erosion, including building dikes to reduce the force of the ocean's waves and hauling sand from the river delta to the beach.

Bulhoes, the geologist, pro-

posed the latter, which is modeled on similar initiatives in the Netherlands, Spain and the United States.

But the projects exist only on paper so far.

The county under-secretary for the environment, Alex Ramos, told AFP that no one had yet come up with a definitive solution, and that any plan would have to gain approval from the environmental regulators first.

In the meantime, the county has launched a social assistance programme that pays US\$230 a month to more than 40 families who lost their homes to erosion.

But critics accuse the local government of a lack of political will. "We keep hearing promises," says Veronica Vieira, head of neighbourhood association SOS Atafona.

"But this town has been abandoned. It's an apocalypse. It makes you want to cry."

AFP

ICE DANCING

WAACKING ON ICE

French ice dancers Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron made a commanding start to their quest for Olympic gold, last weekend, breaking their own world record to place top in rhythm dance

Five-time European and four-time world champions, Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron, who are chasing their first Games title after coming second in 2018 (due to a disruption stemming from a wardrobe malfunction) are on their way to greater glory this time round. Dancing to John Legend in matching sheer burgundy, the French duo's fluid, fast choreography and technical tightness saw them edge their closest rivals, Victoria Sinitsina and Nikita Katsalapov.

"It was amazing, it was kind of an out-of-body experience," said Cizeron. "Every second was so slow, but we enjoyed every second."

The Russians came second with 88.85 with a tongue-in-cheek performance to striptease staple "You Can Leave Your Hat On".

They are the reigning European and world champions, after Papadakis and Cizeron skipped those competitions due to COVID-19 concerns, so this is the first time the pairs have faced off in a major competition for over two years.

"When it comes to competition we have 17 years of experience together to lean on, and that's what we did tonight," said Cizeron. "We have a lot of things to think about," said Katsalapov. "We don't usually think about the points, judges, teams we're competing with. Today's performance was really good and very clean."

Americans Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue placed third ahead of compatriots Madison Chock and Evan Bates, whose compelling Billie Eilish programme was marred by a slip-up from Chock.

Street style

The theme for the rhythm dance event was 'street style', a broad one that could include types of dance like hip hop, funk or jazz.

"We tried different kind of dances and we started doing some waacking dance," said Papadakis. "We worked with a specialist and we fell in love with it."

Waacking, a form of dance usually set to disco and characterised by quick-moving arm movements and striking poses, emerged on the west coast of the United States in underground gay clubs in the 1970s.

The theme brought an eclectic range of music and costumes out onto the ice - Madonna, Britney Spears and George Michael all made an appearance, as did a fuschia leopard print jacket, a shimmering disco-ball-like dress and Batman villains The Joker and Harley Quinn.

Canada's Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier, who came sixth dancing to an Elton John medley, showed up in matching fluorescent orange unitards complete with crystals, flared sleeves and multi-coloured feathered shoulders.

Valieva 'strong girl'

The figure skating competition at the Beijing Games has been overshadowed by a doping scandal involving Russia's Kamila Valieva, who is just 15 and was favourite for gold in the women's individual event.

With her coaching team under scrutiny, Valieva's main teacher Eteri Tutberidze appeared briefly rinkside on Saturday.

Checking her phone frequently, she was there to cheer on her daughter Diana Davis - who placed 14th - and left immediately afterwards.

Valieva's right to compete will be ruled on by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, with a decision due Monday.

"It's bad for everyone because such a situation around sports is really bad, but I hope everything will be good around Kamila and around our team," said Katsalapov.

His partner Sinitsina added, "She's a strong girl. I told her to calm down, even if it's a hard situation right now."

AFP



Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron

Russia's Victoria Sinitsina and Russia's Nikita Katsalapov

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TRENDS IN 2022

FLORAL PRINTS, FLUORESCENT HUES

This year will see experiments with patterns, a dive into retro styles, and a craze for floral prints, fluorescent hues, funky styles and funky styles

The year 2022 is expected to be much brighter than the preceding two years when fashion took a backseat the world over. If the Copenhagen Fashion Week AW22 was an indicator, this year will see experiments with patterns, mixing clashing colours, a dive into retro styles, and a craze for floral prints, fluorescent hues, funky styles. Taking a few cues from AW22, the Trendsetter provides glimpses of what to expect:

Floral prints
Nostalgia was popular on and off the runway this season, this time taking inspiration from the floral print popularised in the '70s. An accent to a monochrome outfit or a pattern-clashing ensemble looks fantastic, and you can swap out varying sizes for more complexity. Add a modern twist to the look with a faux fur jacket or trench coat. Alternatively, you can also introduce other elements from the decade, such as a pair of flared pants, printed trousers, a maxi dress, or a shirt.

The '80s vibe
From oversized blazers to shell suits and high-waisted swimwear, the '80s have majorly influenced fashion choices for decades. We've seen business casual attire

for many seasons, but give it an '80s kick by pairing roll necks with blazers and straight-legged trousers - add a string of pearls and a few brooches for a more authentic look. While you're running errands, combine your favourite white sneakers with a loose-fitting pair of jeans and a bright-coloured sweater - it's the ultimate tribute to the decade.

Boho grunge
Another trend that comes and goes is boho grunge - a mixture of the '60s and '70s influences combined with the laid-back and non-compliant nature of the '90s grunge movement. To master this edgy look, try a blend of artistic patterns - think paisley, crochet, and florals - with skater-girl accents, such as ripped jeans, khaki, leather jackets, and chunky combat boots. Layering is the key to getting the look right - mix and match different elements to suit your taste.

Crocheted croptops
Designers on the runway have included crocheted pieces for a few seasons, such as Fendi, Bottega Veneta, and Dior, and now on can see it on the streets of Copenhagen. Not just a summer item, you can wear the knitted pieces all year long. This season, it's all about layering it with different styles to create a mega-blend of genres. You can accentuate key colours with other parts of the

outfit, such as your stockings or overcoat. Alternatively, a simple pair of jeans will make for an excellent companion to the cute crop top.

Fluffy Shoes
When the temperature starts to dip, and your feet feel the chill, get them warm and toasty in a pair of fluffy shoes. This season, we're taking them outside - they're no longer just a household essential! Wear them as slides, with a long maxi skirt or jeans, or as a pair of brogues with trousers and a maxi coat. Choose what kind of material you'd like to try - teddy fabric, faux fur, or wool - the soft feeling will soothe your feet and add a cute touch to your already stunning outfit.

Fluorescent green accessories
We've fallen hard for fluoro colours this season, so if pink isn't your favourite shade, why not try green? It's all about embracing daring accessories this season. Think shoes, bags, scarves, sunglasses, and everything in between - this trend is a fantastic way to elevate a subdued look or add a bit of extra oomph to an



Lime green outfits
When in Copenhagen, expect to see a lot of bright colours, and this season is no exception. Lime green isn't for the faint of heart, but it can look spectacular when pieced together in the right way. Shades of yellow, gray, olive, or pistachio complement the shade perfectly and create dimension to an already complex hue. Style it as a monochrome outfit, with a loud pat-

tern printed across the top and bottom, or mix and match fabrics and textures for a unique approach. Don't be afraid to inject a tone from the other side of the colour wheel, too, like hot pink or red - say goodbye to fashion faux pas and let your inner creativity shine.

Chunky knits
Say goodbye to boring neutral knits - this season, try the brightest colours to combat the gray skies. Chunky sweaters are nothing new, but when blended with bold patterns, funky shade combinations, and lengths, you have got a recipe for a fresh new take on a classic. Begin with a neutral base, such as a black long-sleeved shirt and stockings, and then wear the oversized jumper over the top. Alternatively, layer more than one pattern over the top of the other - think checked knits with paisley, polka dots, stripes, or animal print.

Soft bags
Brands like Bottega Veneta and Prada have pioneered the padded bag revolution, and it's still dominating today. Soft fabrics like leather and nylon often defy gravity, featuring interesting shapes and silhouettes. If you prefer different materials, why not try something crocheted or knitted? This can be worn with many different silhouettes to create complexity in your wardrobe.



Austria get party started with men's ski jumping team gold

Zhangjiakou, China - Ski jumper Manuel Fettner said celebrating as a group was "much more fun" than individual success after leading Austria to Olympic gold in the men's team event on Monday.

Fettner, who took silver in the men's individual normal hill competition last week, sealed a comeback victory for the Austrians after trailing Slovenia for much of the contest.

The 36-year-old said he "didn't think much" as he prepared for his crucial final jump, and celebrated wildly with his teammates after their score of 942.7 points had clinched them the gold.

"It's like a second type of sport," Fettner said of the team event, which he won with Jan Hoerl, Stefan Kraft and Daniel Huber. "For sure you have to focus on yourself but also watch your friends and teammates and cheer for them, and hope that they are jumping good, not only you."

Slovenia, who have enjoyed unprecedented ski jumping success at the Beijing Games, finished second on 934.4, while Germany took bronze on 922.9.

The opening round saw Slovenia and defending champions Norway duke it out for supremacy but Austria came roaring back in a final round delayed

by weather conditions.

Hoerl pushed Austria ahead with a penultimate jump of 137.5 metres to set Fettner up for the finale.

"Fettner is an old man," said Hoerl with a laugh.

"I'm very happy for him. He has done a great job here at the Olympics with second place on the normal hill and now with the team a gold medal. It's great for all of us."

Austria failed to even make

I think we are a great team - we're good friends as well and we're fighting through the whole season together

DANIEL HUBER

the podium at the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, despite claiming silver in 2014 and gold in 2010 and 2006.

Huber said the team "always believed" they could win despite the shaky start.

"I think we are a great team - we're good friends as well and we're fighting through the whole season together. It all came together on this day," said Huber.



Olympic champions Austria from centre left, Austria's Stefan Kraft, Austria's Daniel Huber, Austria's Jan Hoerl and Austria's Manuel Fettner leaps onto the podium celebrating victory (AFP)

Slovenian trailblazers

Slovenia had never won an Olympic ski jumping gold medal before the Beijing Games, but Ursa Bogataj won the women's

individual competition and they also claimed another in the new mixed team event.

The men's team could not complete the hat-trick but Lovro

Kos believes the Alpine nation has a bright future in the sport.

"It's very good that Slovenia has a lot of medals -- the viewership went up and I hope there will

be much more youngsters joining the sport," he said.

"It's awesome. It's an indescribable feeling."

Germany's World Cup leader

Karl Geiger has been out of sorts at the Beijing Games but he led a spirited effort from his team to claim bronze.

AFP



Russia's Kamila Valieva attends a training session on February 14 prior the figure skating event at the Beijing Games. (AFP)

Russian skater Valieva cleared to continue despite doping

Beijing, China - Russian teenage figure skater Kamila Valieva can compete again at the Beijing Olympics after sport's top court said on Monday she should not be suspended for failing a drugs test.

In a case that has rocked the Games, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruled the 15-year-old could take part in the women's singles event that begins on Tuesday.

The young Russian will be favourite to win but she has not been cleared of doping and could still face punishment at a later date. The International Olympic Committee said if Valieva fin-

ishes in the top three, it will not hold a medal ceremony until the doping issue is resolved.

CAS said it had rejected appeals by the IOC, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the International Skating Union to have Valieva's suspension reinstated after it was lifted by Russian anti-doping authorities.

The court cited "exceptional circumstances", including Valieva's age. Matthieu Reeb, CAS director general, said preventing Valieva from competing would have caused her "irreparable harm".

AFP

Humphries storms to Olympic gold to end German domination

Yanqing, China - Canadian-born Kaillie Humphries said her Olympic gold for her adopted USA has a special place in her heart after storming to victory Monday in the inaugural women's monobob event to end Germany's domination of the Winter Games ice track.

The 36-year-old was peerless at the Yanqing National Sliding Centre, building on her commanding overnight lead to clock 4min 19.27sec over the four heats.

Her winning margin of 1.54sec over her USA team-mate Elana Meyers Taylor, who took silver, is a huge gulf in a sport normally decided by tenths of a second.

"This will always hold a special place in my heart, my first for the USA," said Humphries, the first woman to win Olympic bobsleigh medals for two nations.

Humphries won Olympic



USA's Kaillie Humphries celebrates after winning the gold medal in the final run in the women's monobob bobsleigh event (AFP)

golds for Canada in the two-woman bobsleigh at both the Vancouver 2010 and Sochi 2014 Games, as well as a bronze four years ago in Pyeongchang.

However, she was only sworn in as a US citizen last December after switching allegiance following allegations she was verbally

harassed by staff in the Canadian team. Humphries, a fan of body art, explained why she wants to get a dragon to celebrate -- the Beijing Games track is nicknamed 'the snow dragon'.

"I will definitely be getting a USA tattoo and then more than likely a dragon tattoo too."

Meyers Taylor, 37, wept when it was confirmed she would win a medal, having spent 10 days in isolation until last Wednesday after testing positive for COVID-19. "I wanted to cry, I wanted to scream, I wanted to laugh - all the emotions just came out," she said.

She moved up from fourth overnight thanks to two superb displays leaving Canada's Christine de Bruin to finish with bronze at 1.76.

"This feels like more than gold, I am happy to the moon with this medal," added Meyers Taylor. "At one point, I was just trying to make it to the race, so to be here now and a silver medallist, it feels so amazing."

She high-fived Humphries in the finish area as the winner stood up in her sled after powering over the line.

AFP

MEDALS TABLE				
	G	S	B	T
Norway	9	5	7	21
Germany	8	5	2	15
United States	7	6	3	16
Netherlands	6	4	2	12
Austria	5	6	4	15
Sweden	5	3	3	11
China	5	3	2	10
Russian OC	4	6	8	18
France	3	6	2	11
Switzerland	3	0	5	8
Italy	2	5	4	11
Japan	2	4	5	11
Slovenia	2	3	2	7
Canada	1	4	10	15
South Korea	1	3	1	5
Australia	1	2	1	4
Finland	1	1	2	4
Hungary	1	0	2	3
Czech Republic	1	0	1	2
New Zealand	1	0	0	1
Slovakia	1	0	0	1
Belarus	0	2	0	2
Spain	0	1	0	1
Belgium	0	0	1	1
Latvia	0	0	1	1
Poland	0	0	1	1
G Gold S Silver B Bronze T Total				

Hanyu refuses to rule out Olympic return after Beijing heartbreak



Yuzuru Hanyu competes in figure skating event on February 10 (AFP)

Beijing, China - Yuzuru Hanyu refused Monday to rule out another tilt at Olympic gold after the two-time figure skating champion was dethroned at the Beijing Games by Nathan Chen of the United States.

The Japanese star said that he had been hampered by injury as he finished a disappointing fourth in the Chinese capital, but the 27-year-old said his achievements can never be taken away.

"I'm an Olympic champion - I

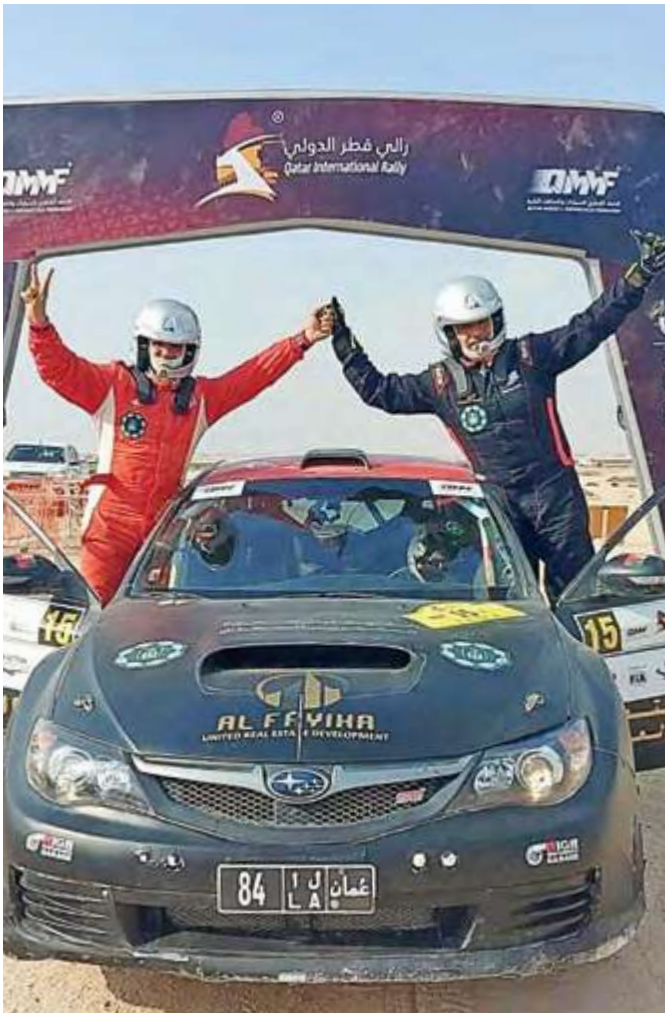
won two titles in a row and I'm proud of that," Hanyu told a packed room of reporters in Beijing. "As someone who has won two consecutive titles, I want to make sure I'm proud of myself and that's how I intend to live my life from here on."

Hanyu said he did not know at the moment whether he would aim for a fourth Olympics in Italy in four years' time, but said he was reminded in Beijing of "how special" the competition is.

"I have an injury but I still managed to get back up and take on this challenge, and the Olympics are the only place where a skater can do something like that. In terms of feelings, yes I would like to skate at the Olympics again."

Hanyu revealed that he hurt his ankle on the eve of last week's free skate and had to receive pain-killing injections right before taking the ice.

AFP



Zakaria al Amri with his navigator Mohamed al Amri at the finish

Zakaria finishes fifth in Qatar rally

Losail, Qatar - Rally driver Zakaria al Amri on Subaru Impreza N14 ended Qatar International Rally 2022 on a high when he clinched the second place in Group N with his navigator Mohamed al Amri. The duo finished fifth overall after strong performance and pace during 10 stages of the Qatar International Rally.

Talking about the race, Zakaria expressed his delight in overcoming a very hard terrain and difficult navigation during the two-day race. He said that he did the best he could to be at podium with best result, at least in his group. "A lot of work went behind this effort by the whole team, to make this podium finish happen."

Zakaria said that he pushed as much as he could on the first day, taking precautions as the terrain was full of surprises.

"We had some mechanical problem but we overcame the issue in time. Then we accelerated and bettered our timing in our group in front of Abu Shurfa and Abu Jamoos from Jordan behind Mishari al Thufiari, who won the group title."

Zakaria said, "I am really thankful to my team and the mechanics for their support and hard work."

"Special thanks goes to Oman United Insurance and Alfaiha Real Estate for their support to us in the Middle East Rally Championship this year."



Patient Rawahi gets second spot in Qatar International Rally

Losail, Qatar: Qatar's Nasser Saleh al Attiyah overcame the most difficult challenge of his career at the Qatar International Rally to record a 16th victory at his home event and achieve a stunning milestone of 80 wins in the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) since 2003.

Driving his customary Autotek Volkswagen Polo GTI, Attiyah only hit the front on the eighth of 12 gravel special stages in the Qatar deserts and survived a front puncture in stage nine to press home his advantage over the final three stages. Mads Østberg pushed him all the way to the penultimate stage, but Attiyah hung on doggedly and eventually secured a winning margin of 4min 38.4sec after the Norwegian retired.

Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi was patient and stayed clear of trouble as chaos ensued around him. He and Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud were re-

warded with a stunning second place in their Oman Rally Team-run Škoda Fabia R2 evo and useful championship points.

Rawahi said, "Quite happy. The guys in front were pushing too much and a few of them had technical problems. I was trying to be clean and take advantage of anyone who made mistakes. Overall, on the second day, the times were quite close and I am happy with my performance. It was really important that we finished second."

"It is a good feeling," said Attiyah, who duly extended his lead in the regional series. "I am really happy to win Qatar Rally. This is my home and in front of my people. This was not an easy race. It was tricky. The pace that we did from yesterday to today, me and Kris and Mads, was very hard. This was a fantastic win. I was trying to keep one pace. It was amazing."



Improved top five finish for Oman Racing

ASIAN LE MANS SERIES
Dubai, Abu Dhabi - Fifth place in round two of the Asian Le Mans Series (ALMS) at Dubai Autodrome on Sunday, February 13 capped a strong and competitive opening weekend of the season for Ahmad al Harthy and Oman Racing. The sultanate's number one racing driver hailed a 'perfect race' in the No.69 Aston Martin.

Taking the second stint of Sunday evening's four-hour encounter in Dubai, Harthy produced an absolutely sensational drive and ran as high as second in the GT class - Oman Racing having qualified 10th fastest - as

a maiden ALMS podium result looked a possible reality.

In the end, with overall pace from the Aston Martin Vantage GT3 not quite a match on this occasion for the rival Ferraris and McLarens, Harthy and teammates Sam De Haan and Charlie Eastwood had to settle for a nonetheless satisfying top five result.

"It was a perfect race from our perspective, everything was spot on and we didn't do anything wrong all race," reflected Harthy, who is supported by Omantel, OQ and MHD-ITICS, "The team really did an amazing job, I drove



Ahmad al Harthy

a perfect race in my stint but we just didn't have the overall pace compared to our rivals - that was the difference no matter how well we performed.

"Sam did an incredible job in the first stint, a fantastic start to the race, and Charlie - as he always does - delivered a faultless drive. I'm really delighted with the performance we gave, running in P2 for so long felt amazing and it gives us the motivation to take to Abu Dhabi where we can hopefully fight for stronger results next weekend."

Following on from a strong top six result in round one on Saturday evening in Dubai, Oman Racing's trio had their sights set on more in Sunday's four-hour contest but with plenty of work to do from the fifth row

of the GT class grid.

De Haan started the race in the No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GT3 and put together an awesome opening lap, slicing his way through the pack and avoiding drama to climb into third place. Initially soaking up pressure from Brendan Iribe in his McLaren 720S, De Haan was shuffled back to fifth place on lap three and remained there up to the first round of driver-change pit-stops.

Now the Asian Le Mans Series moves on to neighbouring Abu Dhabi for rounds three and four on February 19-20.



TOUR OF OMAN 2022



HIRT conquers Jabal Akhdar to take Tour of Oman lead

Top ten after 5 races

RANK	RIDER	TEAM
1	Jan Hirt	Intermarché - Wanty - Gobert Materiaux
2	Fausto Masnada	Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team
3	Rui Costa	UAE Team Emirates
4	Elie Gesbert	Team Arkea - Samsic
5	Anthon Charmig	Uno-X Pro Cycling Team
6	Kévin Vauquelin	Team Arkea - Samsic
7	Kevin Colleoni	Team Bikeexchange-Jayco
8	Rein Taaramäe	Intermarché - Wanty - Gobert Materiaux
9	Henri Vandenabeele	Team Dsm
10	Mauro Schmid	Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team

Muscat - Jan Hirt of Inter-marché-Wanty-Gobert Matériaux team displayed impressive climbing legs on Monday to tame the infamous ascent of Jabal Akhdar. The Czech rider enjoyed a strong support from his teammates, especially Rein Taaramäe, and went solo inside the last 2km.

Not only does Hirt took the stage win ahead of Kevin Vauquelin and Elie Gesbert (Arkea-Samsic), he also cracked Fausto Masnada (Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team) on slopes of more than 10 per cent to take the red leader's jersey at the end of an eventful stage that saw the battle open up early in the wind.

The 31-year-old shook off his rivals in the final two kilometres of the 150.5km ride from Samail which ended with a 5.7km climb up to the summit finish on Jebel Akhdar.

Hirt outpaced French riders Kevin Vauquelin and Elie Gesbert,

both of the Arkea-Samsic team, who finished 40 seconds adrift after the gruelling climb with 10.5 per cent gradient.

The Intermarche rider claimed his first success since the 2016 Tour of Austria, and overtakes overnight race leader Italian Fausto Masnada, who finished nearly two minutes adrift in 11th position.

The massive challenges of the day attracted the attackers as a 92-man peloton rolled from the Al Feyhaa Resthouse in Samail without Marco Canola (Gazprom-RusVelo).

Six riders manage to open a gap at km 4: Luca Rastelli (Bardiani-CSF-Faizane'), Laurenz Rex (Bingoal Pauwels Sauces WB), Antonio Angulo (Euskaltel-Euskadi), Andrea Peron (Team Novo Nordisk) and Nicolas Vinokurov (Astana Qazaqstan Development Team).

Abdulrahman Al Yaqoobi (Oman National Selection) tried

Hirt outpaced French riders Kevin Vauquelin and Elie Gesbert, who finished 40 seconds adrift after the gruelling climb with 10.5 per cent gradient.

Intermarché dominate the final climb

The second group, with Charmig and Cavendish, got back to the front bunch with 41km to go. Calm returned as Masnada's Worldpack drove the bunch to the bottom of the iconic ascent of Jabal Akhdar: 5.7km with an average gradient of 10.5 per cent.

Intermarché set the pace at the bottom of the climb and Rein Taaramäe quickly reduced the front group to a handful of riders. Hirt put the hammer down with 2km to go.

Arkea-Samsic's power duo, Elie Gesbert and Kevin Vauquelin, tried to follow but they were quickly dropped as the Czech flew to victory, while Masnada faltered, eventually finishing 11th of the stage (+1'48").

Tuesday's sixth and final stage covering 135.5km should favour the sprinters, with the finale at Muttrah Corniche.

to join them but he was caught by the peloton after 20km of battle, when the gap hit a maximum of 3'.

Intermarché quickly got to the front of the bunch to bring the gap down to two minutes and control the day. They made it clear ahead of the stage they wanted to take victory up Green Mountain with Jan Hirt, 3rd overall.

Team DSM split the bunch through the wind

The situation seemed to be under control until a change of direction exposed the riders to

crosswinds inside the last 70km. Team DSM, in line with their aggressive racing since the beginning of the Tour of Oman, put the hammer down and quickly tear the bunch to pieces.

The race leader Fausto Masnada was at the front, but the white jersey Anthon Charmig (Uno-X Pro Cycling Team) was caught behind after suffering a crash earlier in the race.

The early attackers were caught with 52km to go. Mark Cavendish (Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team) was caught in a crash with Ignatas Kononovs (Groupama-FDJ) but they both got back on their bikes.



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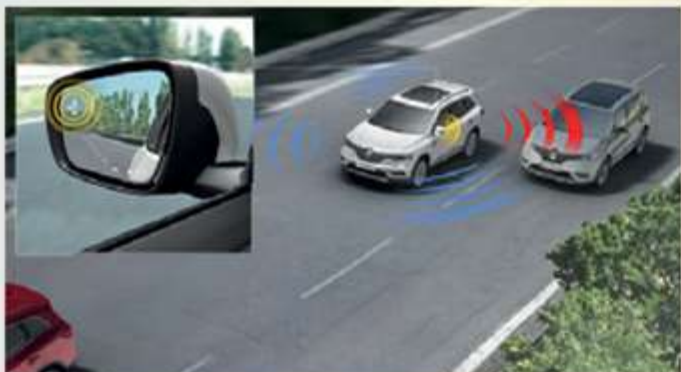
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