

SHOW OF GRACE, SKILLS AND SPEED



Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said presided over the annual horse race of Royal Cavalry in Buraimi on Thursday. The race was organised by Royal Court Affairs and represented by Royal Cavalry. Entertainment and stunts shows were performed between the race rounds, including display of equestrian skills (Full report on Page 02)

Travel gets off to a flying start in 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The number of travellers flying out of Oman seeking holidays abroad crossed the pre-pandemic level in January. Skyscanner, a metasearch engine and travel agency used by 100mn people per month, has revealed that bookings through it by Omani travellers for travel this year are up - over 45 per cent - compared to the corresponding week of January 2019. The company compared volumes for all economy, return flights from Oman between Dec 31, 2018 to January 6, 2019 and January 2 to January 8, 2023. India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Turkey were the top five destinations for travellers from Oman this year. Commenting on the statistics, Ayoub el Mamoun, Skyscanner Travel Expert, said, "We're seeing demand for holidays is high going into 2023, and bookings in the first week in January exceeded the volume during the corresponding week of the 2019 pre-pandemic period by 45 per cent. This large wave of interest shows that travellers are eager to make plans, as well as continue to make up for lost time." According to the latest statistics from the National Centre for



Saudi Arabia attracted 18mn visitors in 2022

Riyadh - Saudi Arabia registered more international arrivals than any other Arab nation in the first nine months of 2022. The kingdom targets 100mn annual visitors by the end of this decade. Figures released by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) show that Saudi Arabia attracted more than 18mn inbound visitors in the first three quarters of 2022, followed by the UAE (14.8mn) and Morocco (11mn). Tourism spending in Saudi Arabia also rose sharply last year, touching US\$7.2bn in the first half of 2022 according to Ministry of Investment figures.

Statistics and Information, the number of departing passengers from Muscat International Airport rose 140.3 per cent to 3,218,666 in the 11 months of 2022 from 1,339,185 in the corresponding period of 2021. International arrivals at Muscat airport also rose 189 per cent till November 2022 to 3,470,363 from 1,200,527 in the corresponding period of 2021. The number of departing international flights in the same period in 2022 went up 130.7 per cent to 26,903 from 11,661 in 2021, while the number of international flights arriving rose 131 per cent to 26,890 from 11,642 in 2021.

Oman calls for end of 'dangerous escalation' of conflict in Palestine

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In response to the Israeli army operation in the occupied West Bank in Palestine as well as a gun attack on a synagogue in Jerusalem, Oman has affirmed its firm position in rejecting and condemning all forms of violence and terrorism that target civilians and undermine security and stability. The sultanate further called

on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities towards stopping the dangerous escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which claimed the lives of Palestinian and Israelis. Seven people died on Friday in a gun attack on a synagogue in Jerusalem and two others were wounded in an attack in the city on Saturday morning. The shootings came after nine Palestinians were killed in an Israeli army operation in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. Oman also affirmed its position in calling on the international community to achieve a just and comprehensive peace and to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

NEWS BRIEF

COLD SPELL SWEEPS SULTANATE

Muscat - A cold spell is sweeping Oman as the sultanate overcomes the affects of freezing north-easterly winds coupled with an upper trough that caused isolated rains across several wilayats over the last couple of days. Jabal Shams continues to experience sub-zero temperatures with the mercury dropping to -3.9°C on Saturday morning. The lowest temperature for the year on Oman's highest peak was -4°C on January 25. The second coldest place was Saiq (4.2°C), followed by Yanqul (8.8°C).



Oil output in Bisat oil field rises to 60,000 bpd

MICE sector boosted by impressive performance of OCEC in 2022

OCEC hosted 215 events attracting 1.2mn visitors and 10,000 participants from 85 countries

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Year 2022 was a massive success for the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector with the sultanate's centrepiece venue - Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) - hosting 215 events attracting more than 1.2mn visitors and hosting over 10,000 participants from 85 countries. Encouraged by the success in the year gone by, OCEC is geared up to host new events and activities in 2023, including seven international shows in the coming months. Saeed bin Salem al Shanfari, CEO of OCEC, informed that hosting such international and



regional events boosts the national economy by supporting the hospitality sector and increasing the number of arrivals through Muscat International Airport. "The international events hosted by OCEC help attract foreign investments and raise the level of foreign spending in the sultanate, in addition to exchanging knowledge and showcasing Oman's cultural heritage." Shanfari added that OCEC

seeks to host high-level events this year with a view to enhancing competitiveness of the sultanate and placing it on the global MICE map as an excellent host of such events. OCEC started the year by hosting a big-ticket sports event - World Veteran Table Tennis Championships 2023 - from January 15 to 21. The championship saw the participation of over 1,600 players from 69 countries, boosting the overall tourism and allied industries in

the sultanate. OCEC is currently gearing up for other events, including Oman Bride Show (February 1-3), Nabatat Carnival - an annual event that brings together farmers, green house operators and plant enthusiasts to showcase their products and exchange expertise in agriculture and farming - (February 23-26), Muscat Art Exhibition (May 8-10) and Oman Perfume Show 2023 (May 31-June 4) among others.

MERA to observe 2023 as Year of Endowments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To encourage people to donate and in solidarity of charitable organisations, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) launched an initiative called '2023 - The Year of Endowments', on Thursday. H E Dr Mohammed Said al Maamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, has affirmed that the ministry seeks to develop the endowments sector and its governance in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. About the ministry's efforts to spread the importance of endowments among community members, an official at MERA said, "Endowments are of great religious and societal importance. The ministry issued the Corporate Governance Guide for private charitable institutions in 2019 and an electronic portal for endowments - 'Waqf' - in 2022." Elaborating on the Waqf initiative, the official informed that Imam Jabir bin Zaid Waqf Foundation launched the endowments partnership portal, which aims to improve community-based endowment services and offer digi-



The ministry seeks to develop the endowments sector and its governance in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040

H E DR MOHAMMED SAID AL MAAMARI

tised solutions to streamline humanitarian donations. The ministry also launched an electronic system of endowments in 2022. "It is a comprehensive scheme that organises the process of compiling and registering endowments and those managing these activities in Oman. The system will ultimately electronically connect all parties involved, including donors and people responsible for managing endowments, as well as public and private entities."

Equestrian skills take centre stage in Buraimi

Buraimi - Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said presided over the annual horse race of Royal Cavalry in Buraimi on Thursday.

The race was organised by Royal Court Affairs and represented by Royal Cavalry.

Ridden by cavalryman Amer Ali al Rasbi, a horse named RB-Blast Off, owned by Sayyid Saud Harib al Said, clinched the His Majesty the Sultan's Cup in the fifth round, 2,000m race titled Hisn al Khandaq Race for Arabian thoroughbreds.

The first round - Hisn Marjab Race - a 1,200m race for Arabian purebreds, dedicated to female riders, was won by Al Asbaq ridden by Ramla Khalil al Zadjali.

The 1,200m second round race for Arabian purebreds - Hisn al Aadhid Race - saw RB Kinsman take the first place. Owned by Sayyid Saud Harib al Said, the horse was ridden by cavalryman Amer Ali al Rasbi.

The 1,600m third round race, titled Hisn al Hilla, was won by Futain with Mike Y Forest astride.

The 1,600m fourth round for Arabian thoroughbreds - Hisn Bait Annad Race - was won by Jathjat, owned by Abdullah Ali al Maamari, ridden by cavalryman Qais Saif al Busaidi.

Entertainment and stunts shows were performed between the race rounds, including display of equestrian skills, Aiyala Ballads, archery, tent pegging, music bands, horse and camel pageants, and poetry recitation.

At the conclusion of the event, Sayyid Theyazin handed over cups and trophies to winners of the five rounds of the race. He also accepted a commemorative gift from the Royal Cavalry.

ONA



Al Bashayer festival for camel racing from Feb 13

Muscat - The sixth edition of Al Bashayer Annual Festival for Arabian Camel Racing will be held from February 13 to 18 at Al Bashayer Camel Racing Field in the wilayat of Adam, Dakhliyah.

The festival will see participation of camel owners from Oman and Arab and GCC countries.

According to Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, the Al Bashayer festival is among the most prominent sporting, social, cultural and tourism events in the sultanate and the GCC countries. "The Al Bashayer Camel Racing Field is a place to witness sporting achievements."

He added that the festival provides an opportunity to showcase culture and enhance social harmony through several events accompanying it.

sifr
SODIUM FREE DRINKING WATER

SEASONAL OFFER

50% ONLY

HOT & COLD DISPENSER

PLUS 2 FULL BOTTLES

PLUS 30 REFILL COUPONS

20% ONLY

WHITE TAP DISPENSER OR TAP DISPENSER OR MANUAL WATER PUMP OR CRADLE WITH TAP

PLUS 2 FULL BOTTLES

PLUS 15 REFILL COUPONS

Offer valid from 1st January to 31st March 2023.

C.R. No: 1305452 | HK: 06/40/2023

CALL TOLL-FREE **800 71 222** or GSM: **9275 5522**



Costa Rica Virtuoso Guitars concert at ROHM on Feb 2, 3

Muscat - Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will present a concert titled 'Costa Rica Virtuoso Guitars' on February 2 and 3.

The concert features the Costa Rica Guitar Quartet, with a string ensemble, who will perform at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts.

The quartet is an award-winning ensemble that blends the unique rhythm and sounds of Latin American music with contemporary adaptations paying

Muscat, Musandam to host Cinemana from Feb 4

Our Correspondent Muscat

The fourth edition of International Arab Film Festival - Cinemana - will be held at two locations - Muscat and Musandam - starting February 4.

The five-day festival will screen more than 120 films from Oman, Syria, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Bahrain, Serbia and India, among others, at Lunar Cinema in Seeb and Musandam Sports Club.

Speaking about the festival, Khalid Zadjali, vice-president of General Union of Arab Artists, said, "When Cinemana was founded in cooperation with the General Union of Arab Artists, the goal was to promote Arab cinema, and to develop and enhance the culture and traditions of the Arab world. We are happy to host the event in Oman this year which artists from the region will attend."

He described film festivals as an opportunity to promote the



film industry of the country and attract investments in the sector.

This year, one of the major attractions of the festival is a symposium on 'The Role of Social Media in Cultural Development'. Alongside industry experts, several social media influencers and social workers from Oman and the Arab world will participate in the symposium.

A seminar on 'The Role of Cul-

tural Industries and Sustainable Development' presented by writer Anoud Khalid from Sultan Qaboos University will be another attraction, besides movie screenings and workshops.

The festival's competition categories include documentaries, shorts, feature and animation films. There will also be workshops on dialogue delivery, technical know-how and acting.

mai
alkaline

Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water

HYDRATE SMARTLY

- ✓ Ultra-hydrating
- ✓ Revitalizing
- ✓ Energizing

pH 9.1 to 9.5

oman OASIS

Toll-free **800 71 222** or **9275 5522**

C.R. No.: 1365452

US\$150mn drug manufacturing factory inaugurated in Salalah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, inaugurated Philex Pharmaceuticals in Salalah Free Zone last week.

Philex Pharmaceuticals is a drug manufacturer and important supplier meeting the pharmaceutical needs of Omani markets and will export to the GCC, Arab and African markets shortly.

The facility, built to international standards, is the most recent project in the pharmaceutical sector in Oman. With an investment of about \$150mn, it aims to make Salalah Free Zone a regional centre for pharmaceutical and biological industries.

With the opening of Philex Pharmaceuticals' manufacturing facility, the total existing investments in the pharmaceutical sector is now close US\$200mn,



(Supplied photo)

invested in seven factories in Salalah Free Zone and Raysut Industrial Zone. Of the seven, three factories produce pharmaceutical items and four medical supplies.

On the occasion, H E Dr Ali Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), said, "Opening this factory marks an added value to the pharmaceutical and medical

supplies industry in general in Oman, particularly in the free and industrial zones in Dhofar governorate, which is an attractive investment sector."

He further added, "Today, we are observing the opening of the RO23mn-first phase of the factory, which is equivalent to about US\$60mn. The project's production capacity is approximately 1bn pills and 1bn capsules of 50 medicinal items in this phase.

The factory is expected to be completed soon with its second and third phases, taking the investment value to RO58mn (US\$150mn)."

H E Sunaidy informed that two more projects valued at RO13.5mn (US\$35mn) are planned in Salalah Free Zone.

"One is for production of medical tools and another, which is under construction, for medical supplies. Additionally, four

other factories in Raysut Industrial City with an investment value of RO40mn (US\$104mn) are being planned for production of injectable solutions, pharmaceuticals, medical gloves and masks, and other medical supplies."

The Ministry of Health has stressed the importance of strengthening pharmaceutical security in Oman. 'The Directorate General of Pharmaceutical Affairs & Drug Control seeks to establish an industry for medicines and medical supplies by coordinating with the concerned authorities, as well as encouraging and attracting investments in the field of drug manufacturing,' MoH stated.

At the end of 2022, Oman had seven drug manufacturers and seven manufacturers of medical supplies. Nine other factories are under construction, of which seven are for medicines and two for medical supplies.

Desert adventure fest in N Sharqiyah starts today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) will organise an event called Desert Adventure Festival in Bidiyah in North Sharqiyah starting Sunday as part of its efforts to stimulate tourism in the sultanate. The festival will run until February 3.

An official at MHT, said, "The six-day festival includes many activities - cultural, sports, entertainment and heritage. The festival aims to attract tourists and desert adventure enthusiasts to Sharqiyah Sands."

The festival activities include entertainment for children, hot air balloon rides, paragliding, laser shows and endurance challenges organised by Omani Automobile Association and Bidiyah Endurance Racing Club.

The official reiterated that the festival's aim is to revitalise winter tourism in North Sharqiyah in general and the wilayat of Bidiyah

in particular, and encourage people to visit Sharqiyah Sands and enjoy the adventure activities it has to offer.

The ministry will also hold the first edition of Omani Maritime Heritage Festival in Sur, South Sharqiyah, from February 3 to 19. "The festival will highlight the role of the wilayat, in the past and present, as a commercial and historical centre," the official said.

The festival will present a maritime heritage village, an Omani food carnival, and activities simulating the historical and traditional sea voyages of Omani ships.

Additionally, the ministry will organise the annual festival of the Governorate of Dakhliyah from February 23 to March 4, in cooperation with the Governor's Office. The festival will include several cultural, heritage, entertainment and adventure activities, and present a number of tourism experiences unique to the governorate.

MoU signed to provide jobs to 100 disabled individuals

Our Correspondent
Muscat

MB Foundation has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Human Development Centre for the Disabled (HDCD) to support 'Together for Them', an initiative which aims to provide job opportunities to 100 disabled people in various industries in Oman.

Iman al Barwani, Vice-Chairperson of MB Foundation, signed the MoU on behalf of MB Foundation, while Awatef al Salman signed on behalf of HDCD.

Following the signing, Iman said, "I am especially proud of this initiative because it is aligned with supporting people with disabilities in Oman, which is one of MB Foundation's four main pil-



(Supplied photo)

lars. In the past, the foundation has provided a training centre for disabled people with the purpose of developing the skills they need. In addition, the foundation has sponsored the training costs of ten trainees."

On her part, Awatef said, "We are happy with this MoU and look forward to future steps towards

reaching our goal of providing jobs to 100 disabled people in various local industries including oil and gas, energy, investment communications, and the financial and banking markets. I believe disabled people have talents which will enable them to thrive in these jobs and be a great addition to their organisations."

Salalah port receives 5,500 on board 2 cruise ships

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Port of Salalah received the cruise liner *Queen Mary 2* with 3,415 passengers on board on Saturday. Earlier on Thursday,

the port received the Italian cruise ship *Costa Deliziosa*, carrying 2,487 people, including 1,625 tourists.

The tourists' itinerary included visits to important archaeological and historical

monuments in Dhofar, in addition to visits to beaches and traditional markets in Salalah.

Several cruise ships visit the sultanate due to its strategic location overlooking the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea.

Tender Announcement

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders :

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Location	Tender Price (OMR)
RFQ MEDC/2023/003	Annual Maintenance Contract and Support Renewal for Commvault Backup System	08/02/2023	23/02/2023	Specialized	—	Free cost
RFQ MEDC/2023/004	Annual Maintenance Contract and Support Renewal for VMware Systems	08/02/2023	23/02/2023	Specialized	—	Free cost
RFQ MEDC/2023/005	Annual Maintenance Contract for UPS System for MEDC Branches	08/02/2023	23/02/2023	Specialized	—	Free cost
RFQ MEDC/2023/006	Supplying of Termination and Straight Joint & Right-Angle Boot	08/02/2023	23/02/2023	DCRP Approved Consultant Type 1 & 2	MEDC Stores Department - South Mabaila	26.25
RFQ MEDC/2023/007	Supplying Of Different Types of Ferrules and Lugs	08/02/2023	23/02/2023	DCRP Approved Consultant Type 1 & 2	MEDC Stores Department - South Mabaila	26.25
RFQ MEDC/2023/008	OLU, HFU & BAND JOINT	08/02/2023	23/02/2023	DCRP Approved Consultant Type 1 & 2	MEDC Stores Department - South Mabaila	26.25

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure , please visit MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com or call 24588600 – Ext: 8952, 8707
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com, one week before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in clause 20.0 in Prime Document and to the supplier guideline available MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should be included in the commercial proposal only as sof copy. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - After the commercial opening , the qualified bidders will be notified to submit the original (hard copy) of bid bond to MEDC office. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - MEDC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - Muscat Electricity Distribution Company gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - For projects whose value is less than OMR 10K, the priority to award will be given to registered companies that hold a valid certificate Of Reyadah. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification. - Any company that does not reach 60% Omanisation, including its sub-contractors, will be disqualified.

PURSHOTTAM KANJI

EXCHANGE

شركة برشوتم

كانجي للصرافة

Bring Home

your Exchange

Download our App Today!

Download on the Google Play

Download on the App Store

99101314, 99849289

customersupport@pkexchange.net

www.pkexchange.com

pkexch

@pkexchange1

medcoman.com

80070008

شركة مسقط لتوزيع الكهرباء

عضو في مجموعة ناما

Member of Nama Group

نوع

نوع

نوع

نوع

Oil output in Bisat oil field rises to 60,000 bpd

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's global integrated energy company OQ Group on Thursday announced the commissioning of its third crude oil processing plant in the Bisat oil field in Block 60, raising the oil field's production capacity to 60,000 barrels per day (bpd). OQ Group celebrated the commissioning of the Bisat oil field - located at Block 60 concession area in Abu Butabul - during a ceremony at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC). The event was held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Taimur bin Assad al Said, chairman of the board of governors of the Central Bank of Oman.

The Bisat oil field comes as part of OQ's contribution to supporting the government's efforts to maximise the use of Omani natural resources and enabling national companies to manage operations in the oil exploration and production sector.

The commissioning of the new crude processing plant makes OQ Group one of the largest oil producers in the sultanate, bringing the group's production capacity to 220,000 barrels of equivalent oil per day, representing nearly 13 per cent of Oman's total oil production.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Talal bin Hamed al Awfi, CEO of OQ Group, said, "We are delighted to inaugurate



Commissioning of Bisat oil field makes OQ one of the largest oil producers in Oman, bringing group's production capacity to 220,000 bpd

the Bisat oil field whose discovery represents a quantum leap in exploration operations, as the focus shifted to the production of crude oil. The filed recorded production growth rates from 5,000 bpd in 2019 to 55,000 bpd by 2022. Today, OQ Group celebrates a production increase that reached 60,000 bpd."

The Bisat oil field is one of the most important projects of OQ's upstream sector and Oman Investment Authority's national development portfolio. It comes as part of OQ's efforts to promote the added value of Oman's natural resources, support the development plans, improving

the revenues and achieve the objectives and aspirations of Oman Vision 2040.

"This project contributes to enhancing the company's position and reputation as one of the oil field developers in the sultanate. This in turn bolsters the government's confidence in our ability to develop other oil fields. It will also allow us to create job opportunities for our local communities and support nation building efforts, one of the key goals of Oman Vision 2040," Awfi noted. The In-Country Value contribution from the Bisat oil field project reached about RO157mn. In addition, the

total amount spent on local SMEs and contractors logged RO34mn of the overall cost of the project. Products manufactured in Oman accounted for RO60mn of the total procurement of the project.

Awfi said that the Bisat oil field applies advanced technologies and modern solutions such as the fabricated designs of the production stations.

This contributed to accelerating the production after two years only following the discovery of the field. As result, the return of investment was maximised within a record time.

"This reflects the efficiency of the strategy that has been adopted to accelerate the production using the latest technologies, the outstanding levels of national competencies working in the field, and the assiduous efforts exerted to support the targets and visions of our national economy," he added.

PDO to open RO87mn water treatment plant on Feb 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) on Wednesday will celebrate the official opening of the Rima water treatment plant which has been built at a cost of RO87mn.

The opening ceremony will be held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, according to an Oman News Agency report. The Rima water treatment



plant represents an environmentally friendly alternative to the disposal of water associated with oil extraction. The project will re-

duce greenhouse gas emissions by 48,000 tonnes annually.

The new water treatment plant will contribute to creating a desert oasis for wildlife where vegetation is used to purify water from oil pollutants.

PDO's Rima water treatment plant is capable of treating about 60,000 cubic meters per day of water associated with oil production operation. This capacity is higher than the project's designed capacity of 40,000 cubic meters per day.

KPMG holds exclusive Oman Budget Forum discussions

Muscat - Major audit and advisory firm KPMG held its annual Oman Budget Forum event to discuss the impact of the 2023 Oman budget and the government programmes to spur economic growth, build investor confidence and job creation in the sultanate.

Earlier in January, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik ratified the 2023 budget, inspired by the Oman Vision 2040 and the 10th Five-Year Development Plan. At the Oman Budget Forum the KPMG team shared their analysis and breakdown of the budget, with input from notable panelists to shed light on Oman's expected sector-specific revenues.

With oil and gas constituting a large percentage of the sultanate's total revenue and as oil



prices per barrel continue to rise, KPMG's analysis of the Oman State Budget for 2023 presented at the forum, expects to see a stronger year ahead for the country and region.

The Ministry of Finance issued a Guide to the State Budget which includes the 2022 preliminary results. As per the 2022 preliminary results, revenues

were at RO14.2bn increased by 35 per cent compared to the budgeted revenue of RO10.6bn. Expenses were at RO13.1bn increased by 8 per cent compared to the budgeted expenses of RO12.1bn. Oman is also expected to record its first surplus (RO1.15bn) since 2013 compared to the budgeted deficit of RO1.55bn.

MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

MSX index posts weekly losses amid selling pressure

The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) posted nearly one per cent loss during the last week, mainly due to selling pressure in the financial and industrial stocks.

MSX30 Index ended the week lower by 0.98 per cent at 4,751.49 points. Among sectoral indices, Financial Index lost 1.80 per cent for week while Industrial Index dropped 2.98 per cent. However, Service Index was up for the week by 2.55 per cent. The MSX Shariah Index closed lower by 0.61 per cent.

Local news

►Bank Muscat's board of directors on Tuesday approved the bank's financial results for the year ended December 31, 2022. The board proposed a 15 per cent cash dividend for the year 2022. Bank Muscat shareholders would receive a cash dividend of 15bz per ordinary share aggregating to RO112.596mn on the bank's existing share capital. The proposed cash dividend is subject to the formal approval of the annual general meeting (AGM) of the shareholders and regulatory authorities. The bank's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) after the cash dividend payout will be 21.25 per cent which is well above the regulatory minimum. ►Taageer Finance board approved the audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2022. The board recommended a cash dividend of 5 per cent and stock dividend of 2 per cent for the year 2022 and appointed Krishnan Raman

as the secretary to the board. The financial statements and dividend are subject to approval of Central Bank of Oman and the shareholders in the AGM of the company.

►Ahlibank announced a net profit of RO33.09mn for the year ended 2022 compared to RO27.61mn in 2021, an increase of 19.8 per cent. Based on the results achieved, the board of directors of Ahlibank has proposed a cash dividend of 9 per cent (9bz per share). The unaudited financial statements are subject to Central Bank of Oman and shareholders' approval.

►Oman's average daily production of crude oil and condensates exceeded 1.06mn barrels per day (bpd) for the full year 2022, up by 9.6 per cent in comparison to average daily output of 971,200 bpd recorded in 2021. The sultanate's total oil production in 2022 increased by nearly 10.5 to 388.4mn barrels compared to 354.5mn barrels in 2021, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Of the total production, crude production grew by 12.8 per cent to 309.5mn barrels in 2022 from 274.4mn barrels in 2021, while condensates output decreased by 1.4 per cent to 78.9mn barrels during last year against 80mn barrels in 2021. Total oil exports for the full year 2022 grew by 10.6 per cent to 319.5mn barrels in comparison with 288.9mn barrels in the previous year, the NCSI data showed.



►Abraj Energy Services - part of OQ Group - announced last week its intention to proceed with an initial public offering (IPO) and listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), which is expected to take place in March 2023. The offering, representing up to 49 per cent of Abraj's total issued share capital, amounts to the divestment of shares currently held by the selling shareholder, OQ. A minimum of 51 per cent shareholding will continue to be indirectly held by OQ.

►Centralised Utilities Company (Marafiq), a joint venture owned by OQ and Gulf Energy Development Corporation of Thailand, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Siemens Energy, to cooperate in the fields of innovation in the energy and water sectors. The MoU provides opportunities to work on advanced tech-

nologies, research and development and accelerate the local Omani capabilities and knowledge in line with Oman Vision 2040.

GCC markets

Kuwait saw its consumer prices on annual basis grew by 3.15 per cent by the end of 2022 compared with the year before, according to the State of Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (KCSB). The bureau, in a report to state news agency KUNA issued during last week, said that inflation rate rose 0.17 per cent in December on monthly basis due to increase of prices of all main groups that influence movement of the key indices particularly food and education.

Saudi Arabia's overall merchandise exports increased by 3.6 per cent in November 2022 compared to the previous year with the value of exports hitting

SAR112.8bn (US\$30.3bn), up from the previous year's figures of SAR109bn, according to data released by General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT). According to GASTAT, this increase was mainly due to oil exports, which rose by SAR9.5bn or 11.8 per cent in the same period, increasing to SAR90bn from SAR80.5bn in November 2021, it stated.

However, Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports (including re-exports) fell in November last year by 19.7 per cent, compared to the year before, decreasing to SAR22.7bn from SAR28.3bn. The kingdom's merchandise imports increased by 26.5 per cent in November 2022. The value of imports amounted to SAR62.7bn in November 2022 compared to SAR49.6bn in November 2021, it added.

Brazil's total exports to the Arab world witnessed a stag-

gering growth last year, climbing to US\$17.743bn in 2022, according to the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce (ABCC). Brazil's imports from the region have touched US\$15.037bn in 2022. Brazilian exports to Saudi Arabia witnessed a growth of 41.26 per cent from US\$2.070bn in 2021 to US\$2.925bn in 2022. Similarly, exports to the UAE increased by 40.09 per cent, from US\$2.327bn in 2021 to US\$3.260bn in the following year.

Global developments

The US economy likely maintained a strong pace of growth in the fourth quarter as consumers boosted spending on goods, but momentum appears to have slowed considerably towards the end of the year, with higher interest rates eroding demand. The Commerce Department's advance fourth-quarter gross domestic product report could mark the last quarter of solid growth before the lagged effects of the Federal Reserve's fastest monetary policy tightening cycle since the 1980s kick in. Most economists expect a recession by the second half of the year, though mild compared to previous downturns. Retail sales have weakened sharply over the last two months and manufacturing looks to have joined the housing market in recession. While the labour market remains strong, business sentiment continues to sour, which could eventually hurt hiring.

US mortgage rates fell for the third consecutive week, driving up demand for home loans. The Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) reported the average rate on a 30-year, fixed-rate conforming mortgage (up to US\$726,200) last week was 6.20 per cent, down from 6.23 per cent the week before and the lowest it's been since September. The falling rates helped boost loan applications by 7 per cent. Applications for refinancing, which are especially influenced by borrowing costs, shot up 15 per cent. Applications to purchase a home increased by 3 per cent.

South Korea plans to scrap a number of regulations in the local stock market within this year to make investment easier for foreign investors, its financial regulator said last week, in an effort to bring in more money into the market.

Recommendation

Global markets are somewhat continuing on the positive trajectory from the start of the year, supported by 2022 results announcements and other macroeconomic data. However, uncertainty on the US Fed's rate actions continue to weigh on the market sentiment.

Regionally and locally, markets are also reacting to result announcements for the recent year end. We advise investors to read full financial statements of the companies as and when they are disclosed, to learn more about the companies' plans and outlook for 2023.

US growth slows in 2022 as downturn fears loom

Washington, US - The US economy grew at a slower pace in 2022 but performed better than expected in the final months of last year, the Commerce Department said, as recession fears loomed.

Economic activity has been moderating as the US central bank hiked the benchmark lending rate seven times last year, in hopes of cooling demand and reining in costs as inflation surged.

The property sector has slumped, followed by declines in manufacturing and retail sales.

Against this backdrop, the world's largest economy expanded 2.1 per cent for all of 2022, down from the figure in 2021, according to Commerce Department data.

"The increase in real GDP in 2022 primarily reflected increases in consumer spending, exports," and certain forms of investment, said the department in a statement.

For the October to December period, US gross domestic product exceeded expectations to rise at an annual rate of 2.9 per cent.

This was slightly below the 3.2 per cent jump in the third quarter last year, and marks a second straight quarter of growth after two rounds of contraction.

President Joe Biden cheered the "very good news about the American economy" Thursday, highlighting better-than-anticipated fourth quarter growth and resilience in the jobs market.

"We're moving in the right di-



US President Joe Biden cheered the "very good news about the American economy" Thursday (AFP)

The 2.1% growth in real GDP in 2022 primarily reflected increases in consumer spending, exports, and certain forms of investment, Commerce Department said

rection. Now we've got to protect those gains... that our policies have generated," he said in a speech in Virginia.

Slowing 'sharply'

While the economy grew strongly in the fourth quarter, most of the advance took place early on and a repeat performance in early 2023 is unlikely, said Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics.

Household spending and business investment remained posi-

tive in the final months last year but slowed, added Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics.

Inventories and net trade may have bolstered growth, but analysts caution that this cannot be relied upon in the new year.

Meanwhile, investment in the residential sector continued contracting, in the longest streak since the housing crisis, said Klachkin.

The interest-sensitive housing sector has been reeling as the

Federal Reserve hiked rates, with mortgage rates remaining high and weighing on affordability.

"Looking ahead, recent data suggest that the pace of expansion could slow sharply in the first quarter, as the effects of restrictive monetary policy take hold," Farooqi said.

A separate Commerce Department report released Thursday showed orders for big-ticket US manufactured goods were stronger than expected in December, though data indicated a weak ending to 2022 for business investment and equipment spending, she added.

A slowdown would be welcome news to the Fed and could open doors to a slower pace of rate increases ahead.

AFP

Fraud claims wipe \$45bn off India's Adani Group stocks

Mumbai, India - Shares in the business empire of Asia's richest man Gautam Adani nosedived Friday, extending last week's losses to US\$45bn, days after a US investment firm claimed it had committed "brazen" corporate fraud.

Adani, 60, began his week the world's third-richest person but has tumbled down the rankings to seventh on Forbes' billionaires tracker after a US\$22.6bn hit to his fortune in Friday's trade.

His flagship Adani Enterprises plunged nearly 20 per cent over the day's trade in Mumbai, briefly triggering an automatic trading halt, before recovering slightly to close 18.52 per cent lower.

Five other group companies hit their own stock exchange circuit breakers, with shares in Adani Total Gas, Adani Green Energy and Adani Transmission falling 20 per cent apiece.

"Obviously this is panic-selling," JM Financials equity research chief Ashish Chaturmohta told AFP, adding that traders were creating fresh short-sell positions to protect earlier bullish bets on Adani stocks.

Hindenburg Research last week alleged in a report that Adani Group had used undisclosed related-party transactions and earnings manipulation to "maintain the appearance of financial health and solvency" of its listed business units.

The conglomerate said it was the victim of a "maliciously mischievous" reputational attack by Hindenburg just as it was preparing for a major fundraising round.



Gautam Adani (AFP)

Legal chief Jatin Jalundhwala said Adani was exploring its punitive action against the research advisory in US and Indian courts.

Hindenburg responded that Adani had ducked the issues its research had raised and instead resorted to "bluster and threats".

"If Adani is serious, it should also file suit in the US," the firm said in a statement. "We have a long list of documents we would demand in a legal discovery process."

Shares in Adani business units have soared as much as 2,000 per cent in the past three years, adding more than US\$100bn to its founder's net worth and vaulting him up the ranks of the world's richest people.

Adani - who now has an estimated fortune of US\$96.6bn - is considered a close supporter of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The report said a pattern of "government leniency towards the group" stretching back decades had left investors, journalists, citizens and politicians

unwilling to challenge the group's conduct "for fear of reprisal".

"The signal is that because the Adanis are very close to the powers that be today, therefore nobody would challenge them," economist Arun Kumar told AFP.

"Those who earlier criticised Adani, those who tried to do some investigation, Adani's launched big (legal) cases against them, so they have scared off a lot of people," he added.

'Old news'

Mumbai-based market analyst Arun Kejriwal said Hindenburg was looking to capitalise on its short position in Adani - which it announced with the release of its report - and described the allegations as "100 per cent unsubstantiated".

"It is just a compilation of old news at a time when it hurts them the most," Kejriwal said. "The more scandalous they make it, the more damage it causes." AFP



Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (left) speaks during a joint media briefing with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on January 25 (AFP)

Egypt, India launch 'strategic partnership' to boost trade

New Delhi, India - Egypt and India announced Thursday a "strategic partnership" to increase trade by billions of dollars and strengthen diplomatic ties, as President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi concluded a visit to New Delhi.

Facing a worsening economic crisis, Egypt is scrambling to boost international trade and attract investors.

India is already Egypt's seventh-largest trading partner, according to data from Cairo's central bank, with a joint statement issued Thursday touting "a record high of US\$7.26bn" during the last fiscal year.

Sisi and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expect annual bilateral trade to rise "to US\$12bn within the next five years", said the statement, capping the Egyptian president's three-day visit.

Modi hosted Sisi on Thursday as "guest of honour" for a Republic Day ceremony, marking the anniversary of the adoption of India's post-independence constitution.

The two leaders agreed to increase Indian investments in Egypt, which currently stand at

"over US\$3.15bn" according to their statement, including through a potential "dedicated land area for Indian industries in the Suez Canal Economic Zone".

The statement also notes "strengthened bilateral cooperation" in agriculture, space research and tourism.

The economic crisis in Egypt, triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, has sent the local currency plummeting.

The war has also unsettled global investors who pulled billions out of the North African country.

The Egyptian pound has lost half its value against the US dollar since March, following a devaluation demanded as part of a US\$3bn loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

In a sign of closer diplomatic ties, Modi has also invited Sisi to participate in the G20 summit in India in September to represent "the interests and priorities of the global south", their statement said.

AFP

IMF announces visit to crisis-hit Pakistan

Karachi, Pakistan - The IMF will send a team to Pakistan this week to discuss reviving a desperately needed bailout programme, with a foreign exchange crisis bringing imports almost to a standstill.

The South Asian nation is in dire economic straits servicing endless external debts, battling rising inflation and with only enough dollars for around three weeks of imports.

The IMF said in a statement late Thursday that a review team will arrive in the capital Islamabad on Tuesday in a bid to break the deadlock over releasing more financial aid.

It comes days after Islamabad bowed to pressure to remove an exchange cap to help control a rampant black market. Its removal saw the rupee plummet to a historic low against the US dollar on Thursday.

Mohammad Sohail, financial analyst and CEO of Topline Securities, said the government had cleared a big hurdle in securing the next IMF instalment.



An aerial view of the commercial district of Pakistan's port city of Karachi on January 27, 2023 (AFP)

"Leaving the forex market to market forces was one of the biggest conditions of the IMF, which the government was defying in the past," he told AFP.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Friday he was hopeful of an agreement this month.

"Pakistan today stands at a crossroad where we are striving to save each penny," he said at an event in the capital, adding

that a priority list for imports has been set up.

Political chaos

The state bank, which has refused since the start of the month to issue letters of credit in almost all instances other than food and pharmaceutical imports, overnight reported that reserves had fallen again to a near-nine-year low of US\$3.7bn.

The tumbling economy mirrors political chaos, with former prime minister Imran Khan heaping pressure on the weak coalition government and calling for elections that are due no later than October.

Khan, who was ousted last year in a no-confidence motion, brokered a multi-billion dollar loan package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in

2019.

But Khan reneged on his promise to cut subsidies and market interventions that had cushioned the cost-of-living crisis, causing the programme to stall.

It was briefly revived under Sharif but he has also been reluctant to meet loan conditions amid falling popularity.

Sharif called earlier this month for the IMF to give Pakistan breathing space as it tackles a "nightmarish" situation, with thousands of shipping containers held up at Karachi port.

Pakistan is still recovering from devastating floods and battling a major energy shortage that has caused factories, including in the crucial textiles export market, to partially shut down.

A nationwide electricity outage this week that lasted more than 12 hours was linked to a cost-cutting measure, estimated to have cost the textile industry alone \$70 million.

AFP

Elon Musk, White House discuss electric vehicles

Washington, US - Tesla head Elon Musk met with senior White House officials Friday to discuss the Biden administration's push to grow the electric vehicle market, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.

"That meeting did happen today," she told reporters.

Musk, who has had sometimes openly prickly relations with President Joe Biden, met infrastructure development coordinator Mitch Landrieu and clean energy advisor John Podesta.

They discussed "electrification and how the bipartisan infrastructure law and the Inflation Reduction Act can advance EVs and increase the electrification



Elon Musk

more broadly," Jean-Pierre said, referring to two major pieces of legislation passed under Biden providing subsidies and incen-

tives to bolster clean energy, electric vehicles and general infrastructure.

Jean-Pierre said Biden did not

Elon Musk discussed electrification and how bipartisan infrastructure law and Inflation Reduction Act can advance EVs and increase the electrification more broadly

meet with Musk, but "it's important that senior members of his team had a meeting."

The billionaire entrepreneur

occupies an unusual place at the intersection of cutting edge industry and politics with ownership of the country's most famous EV brand, space projects and Twitter. He has often tangled with the Biden administration and has used Twitter to embrace right-wing talking points.

On Thursday, he said he met with Republican Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy and Democratic minority leader Hakeem Jeffries as Congress explores potential curbs on social media platforms.

Musk tweeted that he went to "discuss ensuring that this platform is fair to both parties."

AFP

Indian Embassy celebrates Republic Day

The Indian Embassy in Muscat celebrated the 74th Republic Day of India with a colourful flag-unfurling ceremony and a grand evening reception on Thursday, a release said.

India's Ambassador H E Amit Narang unfurled the National Flag in the morning after paying floral tributes at Mahatma Gandhi's statue.

This was followed by the National Anthem and reading out of the Indian President's address to the Nation by the Ambassador.

More than 500 people from the Indian community, friends of India in Oman, Embassy officials, and representatives from the media participated with great enthusiasm and patriotic fervour in the joyous celebration. Students of Indian School Maabela enlivened the occasion with their soulful rendition of patriotic songs.

To mark the Republic Day, Ambassador Amit Narang hosted a gala reception on the same day in the evening in which H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baawain, Oman's Minister of Labour, graced the occasion as the chief guest.

H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Isa al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs, Foreign Ministry; Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Faisal bin Abdullah bin Saeed al Rawas, chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce



and Industry (OCCI), Members of Majlis Dawla and Majlis Shura, other senior govern-

ment officials, Ambassadors resident in Muscat as well as distinguished members of

Omani and Indian community attended the reception. Chief Guest of the day to-

gether with Ambassador Narang unveiled the uniquely designed G20 logo titled 'India-

Oman: Together in G20' signifying the special invite India has extended to Oman as a guest country for G20 meetings and Summit during India's presidency.

Addressing the gathering, Ambassador spoke about why India matters to the world, highlighting the size, scale, and diversity of the country, the unprecedented economic growth, and the historic digital revolution India is witnessing.

He also extended warm greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and noted that India will be a ready partner in the realisation of His Majesty's 'Oman Vision 2040'.

The reception also featured a range of captivating cultural performances, including elegantly curated Indian classical dance by a talented group of teenagers from Salalah, a mesmerising musical band by students of Indian School Ghubra.

The reception also featured a wide variety of Indian delicacies, which added to the festive atmosphere of the event.

Since 2023 is designated as the International Year of Millets by the United Nations, following a proposal by India, a special stall was set up giving a millet culinary experience to the guests.

An added attraction were the three 'Selfie with India' corners enabling the guests to photograph themselves with the life-size exhibits of some of the iconic architectural wonders of India.

ISWK, ISWK-International mark India's Republic Day

Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir and Indian School Wadi Kabir International hosted a ceremony to mark the 74th Indian Republic Day for all the other Indian schools in the Sultanate of Oman with great eclat.

The school ground was tastefully decorated with flower-pots, bunting, cut-outs of peacocks and national flags.

Introduction to the 'Republic Day Programme' began with the compere throwing light on the historical significance of this day and its integral value to our nation. The programme was anchored bilingually by the compere in Hindi and English, hence keeping the fervour and spirit of India's national language and mother tongue alive.

Chief Guest, H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, was accompanied by his wife Divya Narang and other noteworthy dignitaries. Also present on the momentous occasion were Anil Khimji and Kiran Asher, valued patrons of the school.

Other dignitaries included esteemed members of the Board of Directors, the honorary presidents of the school management committees Alkesh Joshi (of ISWK) and Gargi Chugh (of ISWK International), other revered members on the school management committees, Principal D N Rao and the staff of the participating Indian schools.

Oman Air announces 23% discount in 'Global Sale'

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, has launched its highly anticipated Global Sale, offering up to 23 per cent off Business and Economy Class fares.

During the promotion, which started on Thursday for direct sales and Saturday on e-channels, guests can choose from a range of destinations across the airline's network. With a host of exceptional on-board services from in-flight entertainment to meals, as well as the airline's signature Omani hospitality, every journey ensures the utmost



choice, convenience and comfort. Travellers can also take care of all their trip requirements in

one place with Oman Air Holidays. Combining exceptional value, customised service, and

the finest hospitality, leisure and tourism experiences on offer, guests can unlock memorable experiences at some of the world's most renowned destinations.

The Global Sale, which started on Thursday, will run until February 6 and travel will be valid from February 1 to June 30 for both one-way and return flights from, via, or to Muscat.

Tickets can be purchased through omanair.com, the Oman Air app, the Call Centre, any Oman Air sales office and official travel agents.



SBA introduces new 2023 Nissan Patrol in Oman

Muscat Building on its SUV dominance and as a testament to its commitment of making innovative automotive experiences accessible to all, Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) has launched the new 2023 Nissan Patrol in Oman with a host of aesthetic upgrades.

Catering to the evolving needs of customers in the region, the 2023 Nissan Patrol builds on a longstanding heritage that spans over 70 years and features an all-new and distinctive Patrol-branded fender vent badge for a unique visual identity.

Oman's relationship with the iconic Patrol dates back to 1956 when the first-generation of the SUV arrived in the Gulf. Proving itself as a reliable and capable SUV that can conquer all terrains, the 2023 Patrol builds on the success of its predecessors and remains true to the nameplate's ethos in continuously rewriting the benchmark for design, comfort, and technology.

A senior official of SBA said, "For over 70 years, the Nissan Patrol has integrated itself into the cultural fabric of Oman, earning its status as an icon and the admiration of nationals and expatriates alike. A flagship model for Nissan in the region, the Patrol is synonymous with class-

leading luxury, performance, and technology and the new 2023 Nissan Patrol continues to build on this deep-rooted legacy of defying ordinary and conquering everywhere."

Inspired by the brand's powerful design aesthetic, the 2023 Nissan Patrol makes a bold statement with a striking V-Motion chrome grille and 20-inch machine-cut alloy wheels. The stylised chrome along the bodywork emphasises the visual breadth of the vehicle, while the iconic design exudes luxury with a new fender vent badge.

Inside, drivers and occupants are welcomed into a premium and technologically loaded cabin. A high-resolution 12.3-inch infotainment screen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity takes centerstage on the dashboard, while two 10.1-inch rear entertainment screens, enhanced with screen mirroring capabilities, allow passengers to be more connected and entertained.

Packed with a suite of Nissan Intelligent Mobility (NIM) features, the 2023 Nissan Patrol offers drivers a safer, smarter, and more connected driving experience with more safety features available as standard across the line up. The safety of those on-

board and around the Patrol is ensured through a variety of assuring technologies, including Intelligent Emergency Braking with Pedestrian Detection, Intelligent Lane Intervention, Intelligent Blind Spot Intervention, Rear Cross Traffic Alert with Intelligent Intervention, and Intelligent Cruise Control.

Under the hood, drivers receive a choice of two powerful engines: a 4.0-liter V6 that produces 275 horsepower and 394 NM of torque, offering a unique combination of power, performance, and efficiency; or a larger 5.6-liter V8 that generates 400 horsepower and 560 NM of torque for ultimate performance in the toughest of conditions.

The V8 engine's direct injection system provides better wide-open throttle performance and comes fitted with a dedicated Eco mode for improved efficiency. Both engines are mated to an advanced 7-speed automatic transmission with Adaptive Shift Control that ensures smooth shifts, while allowing drivers to shuffle through gears manually for a more engaging experience behind the wheel.

SBA is largely committed to supporting Nissan's growth in the Sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction.

STARZPLAY launches its first Arabic original series with Abu Dhabi firm

STARZPLAY, the platform ranked consistently among the region's top three subscription video on demand services and Image Nation Abu Dhabi, the Academy Award winning media and entertainment studio, have announced the launch of STARZPLAY's first Arabic language original, *Kaboos*. The series is set to stream on the platform from February 9.

Set in different eras and across countries in the MENA region, *Kaboos* is a modern-day retelling of Arab folklore. The series takes viewers on a journey through frightening urban legends from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt and the UAE, with five standalone episodes depicting a spine-chilling modern retelling of a story inspired by regional mythology.

Spanning different genres of horror, from supernatural and classic horror stories to noir psychological thrillers, every episode of *Kaboos* is a uniquely eerie exploration of terrifying tales that have withstood the test of time. From ghouls that dwell in the isolated desert of Saudi Arabia, to a half-human, half-donkey hybrid that snatches children in Kuwait,



and a mysterious, shape-shifting jackal in Egypt, *Kaboos* celebrates the supernatural and the sinister side of urban myths.

Filmed across the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Egypt, each episode is directed by leading directors from across the region, including Majid al Ansari (*Zinzana, Paramormal*), Hana Kazim (*Makr*), Yasir al Yasiri (*122*), Ahmed Khaled (*30 March*) and Hala Matar (*Streetcar*).

The horror anthology series is produced by Yasir al Yasiri's and Mansoor al Feel'i's production company, Starship Entertainment.

The launch of *Kaboos* is a testament to STARZPLAY's com-



mitment to diversify its content to meet the needs of its audiences. The platform saw a unique opportunity to create Arabic content in a niche category such as the thriller genre with stories from the region, which will resonate with MENA viewers.

Nadim Dada, V P programming and content acquisition, STARZPLAY, said, "*Kaboos* is our biggest content asset this year, our very first Arabic language original and we are very excited to roll out the production across the Middle East. Our goal at STARZPLAY has been to invest in content that is regionally relevant and as a homegrown plat-

form we continuously strive to bring in content which our MENA audiences can relate to. We are confident that our subscribers will be immersed in the gripping tales of local and regional Arab mythology that will capture the Middle East's penchant for storytelling, but with a modern twist."

Kaboos features local and regional talent including Passant Shawky, Khaled Anward, Abrar al Hamad, Rakeen Saad, Kady al Qaisy and Ahmad al Saeed. The TV series will be available to stream on STARZPLAY, with the first two episodes being released on February 9, with the remaining episodes released weekly.

LuLu Oman launches 'India Utsav'

LuLu Oman launched 'India Utsav' to celebrate and promote the rich and diverse culture, heritage, traditions and flavours of India in Oman. The week-long festival, coinciding with the 74th Republic Day of India, will be a window to India's dynamic cultural universe and is part of Lulu's focused strategy to strengthen the cultural relations between the two countries.

The festival was inaugurated by H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, on January 25 in the presence of a host of officials from the Indian community and Lulu dignitaries at the Lulu Hypermarket, Baushar. The festival will be held till February 1, at selected Lulu outlets across the sultanate.

The festival, which is a kaleidoscope of culture, colours and cuisines of India, will provide customers a unique opportunity to experience Indian extravaganza in every category from lifestyle and fashion to food and drinks. There will also be amazing promotions and offers on a wide range of Indian products on display. Special stalls will be set up to familiarise and promote Indian handicrafts, khadi products, and regional cuisines and snacks to people all over the world.

Speaking after the launch, Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, stated, "I am very happy to have inaugurated 'India Utsav', which is a very significant initiative



taken by the Lulu Hypermarket to promote products from India. From foodstuff to fast-moving consumer goods, Indian products have always been well-received by both locals as well as expatriates in Oman. Through this festival, Lulu has also provided consumers an opportunity

to enjoy a whole new range of products coming from the Indian market. I wish Lulu Hypermarket all the very best for all their future plans and projects in Oman."

Commenting on the promotion, Ananth A V, Director of LuLu Hypermarkets Oman and

India, stated, "India Utsav is a vivid evidence of the cultural exchanges between Oman and India. The event will connect the people of the two countries and offer local residents and expatriates a chance to experience the typical cultural features of India."

"Our objective is that this

event will further strengthen our longstanding ties, encourage new ventures, inspire further creativity, and spur innovation to achieve great things together. Above all, we hope, this event would lay the foundations for a new dynamic relationship between the two countries for the

future," he added.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director - Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman, remarked, "We are glad to organize 'India Utsav' to further strengthen the cultural relations and traditions of India among people from other nations of the world, while inculcating a sense

of cultural pride amongst Indians living in Oman. The exotic delights of everything about India, including the culture, fashion, cuisine, and lifestyle, are always popular with expats from all walks of life and age groups. The festival will be an event to look forward to a truly delightful experience for all visitors, enhancing the overall Indian festive mood."

"The cultural extravaganza will include a series of entertaining events and fun-filled performances, along with finger-licking Indian culinary experience. The festival will be a treat for the entire family, catering to every individual's taste. Authentic Indian apparel, genuine homeware, latest and most exquisite clothing collection, traditionally intricate jewellery and other trendy items will be on display to add to a wholesome Indian shopping experience," he added.

Festival essentials ranging from authentic food products, ethnic wear, gift sets, traditional sweets and much more will be available throughout the entire season. There will be cultural shows and events organised as part of the festival. Shoppers can experience the genuine flavours of India in a variety of dishes that describe the authenticity and rich history of India. There will be special stalls for customers to savour a selection of melt-in-the-mouth Indian sweets and snacks.

Badr Al Samaa, OFA hold prize distribution ceremony for social media contest winners

Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals recently organised a ceremony in the conference hall of Oman Football Association (OFA) to hand over gifts to the winners of a social media contest for the football lovers of the sultanate.

The gifts to the winners were handed over by the management of OFA - Hilal al Sinani, general secretary; Shabib al Hosni, assistant general secretary and Dr Majid al Wardi, head of medical services and management of Badr Al Samaa; Firsath Hassan, executive director and Sameer PT, CEO.

Speaking on this occasion Hilal al Sinani told that the journey with Badr Al Samaa has been incredible and he appreciated the extraordinary medical support provided by Badr Al Samaa to OFA.

Firsath Hassan assured continuous support to OFA and said that sport is the best way to send across the message of fitness and good health. "We will continue to support all sports in Oman."

Sameer P T congratulated the



winners and thanked the national football team players to associate with the campaign.

He said the love for football in Oman is incredible and Badr Al Samaa will always stand shoulder to shoulder with quality healthcare services for OFA.

The group, in collaboration with OFA, had run a social media contest on Instagram and Face-

book for the football lovers namely 'Score with Badr and Win'.

In the Instagram and Facebook Reels, the national football players of Oman asked a series of questions to the social media users to test their knowledge about the game. Owing to the immense support and following for the game of football in

Oman and also football being the national sport of Oman, the contest witnessed a lot of engagement from the users and many of them responded with the right answers.

For each question winners were chosen through lucky draw system and in total 29 winners were selected. A co-branded t-shirt, executive health check-up

and a hypermarket gift voucher was given to the winners.

The current year is said to be a major milestone for Badr Al Samaa and Oman Football Association for their 'incredible journey' as partners as the year marks ten years of association.

The ceremony was anchored by Asif Shah, head branding and communication, Badr Al Samaa.

Online registration for admission in Indian schools to begin on Wednesday

The online registration for admission in Indian schools in the capital area for the next academic year (2023-24) for classes KG-I to IX will start from Wednesday.

The centralised admission system with online registration introduced by the Board of Directors, Indian schools in Oman has facilitated the entire admission process, making it convenient for parents and schools to take care of rush for admissions.

Online registration for admissions is applicable to seven Indian schools in the capital area - Indian School Bousher, Indian School Muscat, Indian School Darsait, Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir, Indian School Al Ghubra, Indian School Al Seeb and Indian School Al Maabala.

Admissions are open to children of Indian nationality

with valid resident visa. The registration of other expatriate nationalities will be considered subject to availability of seats from the first week of March. Children who have completed three years as on April 1, 2023 are eligible for Kindergarten admission.

Admissions for children with special needs are open at Care and Special Education (CSE) which is located on the Indian School Muscat premises. Parents can approach the CSE administration directly for admission (www.cseoman.com)

Admission procedures have been made completely online; parents, therefore, do not have to visit the Schools for submission of documents or the remittance of admission processing fee.

The online registration will close on February 28.

Bank Muscat strengthens partnership with Omani Fishermen's Association

In line with its strong commitment to social responsibility, community service and keenness to contribute to national development, Bank Muscat - the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman - has strengthened its partnership with the Omani Fishermen's Association.

The bank recently provided 35 refrigerators to fishermen in the wilayat of Sur at a ceremony organised at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Sur under the auspices of Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Hilal al Busaidi, the deputy wali of Sur. The event was also attended by Dr Juma bin Mohammed al Maamari, chairman of the Board

of Directors of the Omani Fishermen's Association, and Abdullah bin Juma al Araiimi, senior regional manager, Dakhliyah and Sharqiyah, Bank Muscat.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Juma al Araiimi, Senior Regional Manager, Bank Muscat, expressed his happiness with this partnership with the Omani Fishermen's Association. He said that the bank was keen to strengthen its partnership with various civil society organisations so as to provide the best services to different sections of society. He added that this support would contribute to the further growth and development opportunities for fishermen in Sur and improve their overall



quality of life.

Araiimi pointed out the importance of fisheries as one of the promising sectors identified for further development under

Oman Vision 2040. He also expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Omani Association of Fishermen for their efforts and hard work in aiding fishermen

across the Sultanate, and wished them all success in their future endeavours.

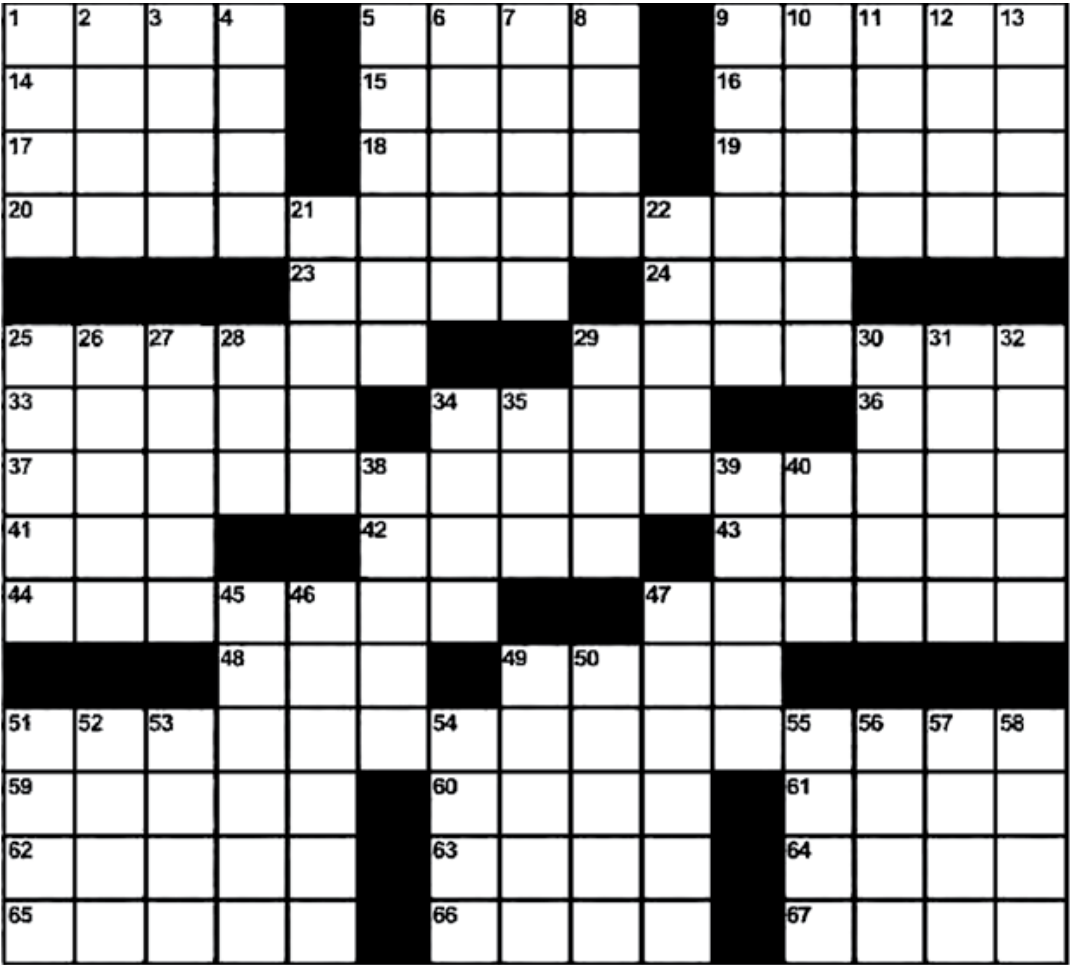
On his part, Maamari, chairman of the Board of Directors of

the Omani Fishermen's Association, extended his sincere thanks to Bank Muscat for the effective role played by the bank in supporting various civil society organisations and institutions in Oman. He stated that the bank's initiative would play a positive role in bettering the livelihood of fishermen and strengthen the national economy. He also described the role being played by the Omani Fishermen's Association in promoting various fisheries related activities such as the production and marketing of fish and related products, provision of suitable equipment to the fishing community in the sultanate and partnering with the concerned authorities to further

develop Oman's fisheries sector.

Over the years, Bank Muscat has been successfully providing support through various programmes and initiatives to various national development priorities and sectors. The bank has demonstrated its pioneering position in the field of sustainable development and actively encourages different segments of society to enhance their contributions to the national economy as well as efforts for economic diversification. Its extensive achievements continue to be recognised with the bank winning a number of accolades including being honoured by the Ministry of Social Development in 2022.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Sound enhancer
5) Hard to rattle
9) "Little" Chaplin role
14) "It _ what you think!"
15) Facial-tissue additive
16) Projections from a hub
17) Dog's bane
18) Small carps
19) Give off, as perspiration
20) Needing to watch every penny
23) Hereditary unit
24) Has the power to
25) Holders of conferences?
29) Unit of solar radiation
33) Argentine plain
34) Old Testament book
36) It's found in a lode-bearing wall
37) "If You Could Read My Mind" singer
MEASURED RESPONSE
41) Revelation response
42) Fit for the task
43) Delhi tongue
44) Small spreads, in Mexico

47) Analyzes grammar
48) Her mate
49) Good fruit with an unattractive name
51) Show those pearly whites
59) Punch bowl item
60) Is not, in dialect
61) Words following "sleep" or "step"
62) Helper, essentially
63) Toward the sheltered side
64) Southern food plant
65) Dries with absorbent paper
66) High school stereotype
67) Vat preparations

DOWN

1) Offend slightly
2) Spot of land
3) Patella's place
4) And others, in a bibliography
5) Film festival site
6) Join with others in a cause
7) Lehmann or Lenya
8) Engage, as gears

9) Boring tool
10) " _ Bull" (De Niro film)
11) Yemeni port
12) Catchall abbr.
13) Crux of the matter
21) Cold-water flat?
22) Internet payment method
25) "Pomp and Circumstance" composer
26) Coming-or-going word
27) Wrap handle
28) Conclusion
29) Expensive seating
30) Crying divers
31) Gradually deteriorate
32) Bigfoot relatives
34) Fathers' robes
35) Grand squared
38) Ruth's mother-in-law
39) Bangkok denizens
40) Source of needles
45) Alpine cottage
46) Backpackers
47) Metal-coated
49) Of practical value
50) One lacking hope
51) Let the cat out of the bag
52) Safety installation

53) Edible tuber
54) Indian flatbread
55) Frame of mind
56) Like a squid's defense

57) What Italians used to spend
58) Airport guesses, for short

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Having a healthy sense of ambition is fine, but be careful not to let your drive for success send you too far down the wrong road. An opportunity will come your way today that initially has you rubbing your hands together in anticipation. This is right up your alley, and it's what you've been waiting for! But upon closer examination you will see that this isn't everything you thought it was, and it might not take you where you want to go.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
It's been difficult to muster up any significant enthusiasm for a change someone you love has made in their life. Either you don't believe they are moving in the right direction, or you're having trouble accepting who they've become. Either way, you need to figure out how to deal with it. Decide if you're going to try to add your unsolicited two cents of advice. If you decide not to, then you should let it go once and for all.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Every little thing you do today will yield some surprisingly big consequences in your life, so you might want to avoid shopping. You could end up impacting your bank account in a much more negative way than you expect. Make sure you're looking your best when you're in the public eye today, because you might run in to someone unexpectedly who you'd like to impress. Your profile is about to get raised, and you want to be ready for absolutely anything. Bring on the adventure!



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
If you're in the middle of making any type of travel plans, today is a good day to finalize things. Another member of your party might suddenly be unsure of some details and try to put the brakes on making any commitments, so you'll have to be the person who pushes them to make up their mind. Prepare to be more assertive than you might normally be, because time is running out and you need to act quickly to get the best perks or amenities.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Today, you'll get a loud and clear wake up call when someone informs you of an opportunity that could be coming your way very soon. This news will be music to the ears of your healthy ambition. You've been dying for this kind of door to swing wide open and now it is. You should let your ambition lead you right through the door as quickly and forcefully as it wants. Toss any doubt out the window. Even if you don't know how you're going to tackle this task, tackle it you must!



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You have a lot more stamina than you thought you did, so when you find yourself in a situation where endurance is required, you will be able to handle it easily. You might even enjoy it! You don't have to dread that meeting with the long-winded blowhards, and extending your workout could turn out to be a truly rewarding experience. It's clear that you have what it takes to go the distance in your life right now, whatever the challenge might be.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
The current negotiations in a business deal aren't going as quickly as you'd like, but don't worry. Just because you're feeling held back doesn't mean that you're being outmaneuvered. Nor does it mean that you aren't going to end up getting everything you want in the end. So just ride out this series of delays. Wait out the discussion period. Listen and then give your honest feedback. No one is trying to trick you. They are merely trying to outlast you!



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Are you feeling sad about something that happened in the past? Don't. What's done is done. You have to keep carrying on. To get your mind off of things, get outside today and get your heat rate going. Remind yourself that your body is a living machine that needs to be pushed past its normal physical limits once in a while. Don't push yourself too hard, but do push hard enough to feel the wonderful rush of endorphins that good exercise brings.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You know the best way to stay out of a fight? Just keep your head down! Avoid the people who always instigate the drama. After all, they tend you drag you into it. True, you might worry that you're missing out on the excitement, but what's the value of that excitement? Will it help you get your work done faster or better? No. It will only distract you from what you really should be doing. Stick to what you need to do and let other people waste their time bickering.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Even though there is some injustice going on in your world, your inner warrior may not feel like coming out today. Is it time to force it to come out for the sake of someone's honor? It might be. Ask yourself what you would want if you were in the other person's shoes and you'll have your answer. It might be more convenient to just pretend you don't notice what's really going on, but you're better than that. Speak up when you see something wrong. It's the right thing to do.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
The people around you are kicking things into high gear right now, and it might leave you feeling like you're not doing enough yourself. But have no fear. Their high energy is contagious. All you need to do is hang around these movers and shakers and you'll start to feel your ambitions stir. Sidle right up to the people who are making things happen and elbow your way into the action. After all, you have nothing to lose but your insignificance!



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Sometimes needy people only get needier, so keep that in mind when one of them comes to you yet again to ask a favor. You may be helping them, but who is helping you? Too much time is being drained from your life and devoted to other people. It's time to put yourself back at center stage. Make this effort for them one more time, but make it clear that they're on their own after this. You're doing them no favors by enabling them. It's time for them to walk on their own two feet.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. How many verbs are in the following sentence: "Roger told his dog not to jump on the furniture with muddy feet"?
A. None
B. 3
C. 1
D. 2

02. Who voiced the eponymous hero in the 1973 film "Jonathan Livingston Seagull"?
A. Don LaFontaine
B. Mel Blanc
C. Billy West
D. James Franciscus

01. What facial feature is missing from the Mona Lisa?
A. Cheeks
B. Nose
C. Lips
D. Eyebrows

Answers: 1. D, 2. D, 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

P	O	A	T
M	P	L	C
L	U	T	A
S	K	P	A

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

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

WORD BUILDER



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

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

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Jerusalem: New attack after mass shooting

The new gun attack took place hours after a gunman killed 7 outside a synagogue

Jerusalem - A 13-year-old Palestinian boy shot and wounded a father and son in east Jerusalem on Saturday hours after a gunman killed seven outside a synagogue, raising fears of escalation despite international calls for calm.

Police said the latest gun attack occurred on Saturday morning in Silwan just outside the old, walled city in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem.

A father, 47, and his 23-year-old son sustained gunshot wounds to their upper bodies and were rushed to hospital, police and medics said.

Police had earlier announced the arrest of 42 people in connection with Friday's synagogue attack, one of the deadliest in Jerusalem in years.

The mass shooting was car-



Israeli security forces and emergency service personnel gather at a cordoned-off area in Jerusalem's Arab neighbourhood of Silwan on Saturday (AFP)

ried out by a 21-year-old Palestinian resident of east Jerusalem who drove up to the synagogue in the Neve Yaakov settler neighbourhood and opened fire during the Jewish Sabbath.

The attack coincided with In-

ternational Holocaust Remembrance Day.

It came with tensions rising across the region a day after one of the deadliest army raids in the occupied West Bank in roughly two decades, as well as rocket fire from militants in the

Gaza Strip and Israeli retaliatory air strikes.

Crowds shouted 'Death to Arabs' as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu toured the scene of the synagogue attack late on Friday.

Palestinians held sponta-

neous rallies to celebrate the killings in Gaza and across the West Bank, including in Ramallah where large crowds swarmed the streets chanting and waving Palestinian flags.

Opposition lawmaker Mickey Levy, from former pre-

mier Yair Lapid's centrist Yesh Atid party, warned the surging violence recalled the second intifada, the 2000 to 2005 Palestinian uprising that brought devastation to both sides.

"What happened 20 years ago, it's (starting) to happen right now," he told AFP.

"We need to sit, think how we can advance and stop this situation."

Arab condemnation

The Palestinian Authority in a statement said Israel was 'fully responsible for the dangerous escalation', without commenting on the two gun attacks.

Israel's police chief Kobi Shabtai called the synagogue shooting 'one of the worst attacks (Israel) has encountered in recent years'.

Several Arab nations that have ties with Israel - including Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates - condemned Friday night's shooting.

But the Lebanese group Hezbollah, one of Israel's most prominent foes, praised the attack as 'heroic', voicing 'absolute support for all the steps taken by the Palestinian resistance factions'.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he was 'deeply

shocked' by the 'terrible' Jerusalem attacks and that his country 'stands by the side of Israel'.

French President Emmanuel Macron said a 'spiral of violence must be avoided at all costs', with Russia also calling for 'maximum restraint'.

The White House has also condemned the violence, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken due in the region next week on a trip where he is expected to call for de-escalation.

The gunman at the synagogue was killed by police during a shootout that followed a brief car chase after the attack.

There has been no indication that he had prior involvement in militant activity or was a member of an established Palestinian armed group.

Authorities have not yet definitively identified the synagogue attacker, but Israeli and Palestinian media have widely named him as Alqam Khayri, who was being praised on some social media platforms including his Facebook page.

Shimon Israel, who lives near the synagogue and witnessed the attack, said he was sitting down for Shabbat dinner when he heard 'shooting and shouting'.

AFP

Watchdog blames Syria for 2018 chemical attack

The Hague, Netherlands - The global chemical weapons watchdog blamed Syria on Friday for a 2018 chlorine attack that killed 43 people, in a long-awaited report on a case that sparked tensions between Damascus and the West.

Investigators said there were 'reasonable grounds to believe' that at least one Syrian air force helicopter had dropped two cylinders of the toxic gas on the rebel-held town of Douma during Syria's civil war.

"The world now knows the facts," Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) chief Fernando Arias said in a statement. "It is up to the international community to take action."

Damascus and its ally Moscow claimed the April 7, 2018 attack was staged by rescue workers at the behest of the United States, which afterwards launched air strikes on Syria along with Britain and France.

The Douma case also caused controversy after leaks from two former employees accused the Hague-based watchdog of altering its original findings to make them sound more convincing. But the OPCW said its investigators had 'considered a range of possible scenarios' and concluded that 'the Syrian Arab Air Forces are the perpetrators of this attack'.

Western powers together called on Syria to be held accountable over the 'horrific' attack. "We call on the Russian Federation to stop shielding Syria from accountability for its use of chemical weapons," said a joint statement by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his counterparts from Britain, France and Germany.

"No amount of disinformation from the Kremlin can hide its hand in abetting the Assad regime."



OPCW chief Fernando Arias

Investigators said there were reasonable grounds to believe that at least one Syrian air force helicopter had dropped two cylinders of the toxic gas on the town of Douma

rebels had agreed to withdraw the day afterwards.

It said that 'at least one Mi-8/17 helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from Dumayr airbase and operating under the control of the Tiger Forces, dropped two yellow cylinders'.

The cylinders hit two residential buildings, it said.

The first 'ruptured and rapidly released toxic gas, chlorine, in very high concentrations, which rapidly dispersed within the building, killing 43 named individuals and affecting dozens more', said the report.

The second cylinder smashed into an apartment and slowly released some chlorine 'mildly affecting those who first arrived at the scene'.

Investigators had examined 70 environmental and biomedical samples, 66 witness statements, and other data including forensic analysis, satellite images, gas dispersion modelling, and trajectory simulations, it said.

AFP

'Toxic gas'

The watchdog said an 'elite' Syrian unit known as the Tiger Force had launched the attack during a military offensive to reclaim Douma, and that Islamist

Petr Pavel wins Czech presidential election

Prague, Czech Republic - Retired NATO general Petr Pavel beat billionaire former prime minister Andrej Babis in a presidential election run-off on Saturday, interim results showed.

Pavel, a former paratrooper, won 56.76 per cent of votes while Babis scored 43.23 per cent, with over 85 per cent of the vote counted, according to the Czech Statistical Office.

Turnout in the EU and NATO member country of 10.5mn people was unusually high at 70 per cent following an acrimonious campaign marked by controversy, death threats and a brazen hoax.

The 61-year-old Pavel will replace President Milos Zeman, an outspoken and divisive politician who fostered close ties with Moscow before making a U-turn when Russia invaded Ukraine last year. Pavel already beat Babis in the first round two weeks ago, scoring 35.4 per cent against 35 per cent for the former prime minister.

Since then, Babis and his



Petr Pavel and his wife Eva arrive at his election headquarters in Prague, Czech Republic, on Saturday (AFP)

family have been targeted by death threats, while Pavel was the victim of a hoax claiming he was dead as disinformation plagued the final campaign.

While the role is largely ceremonial, the Czech president names the government, picks the central bank governor and constitutional judges, and

serves as commander of the armed forces.

Voting in the small town of Dobrichovice southwest of Prague on an overcast Saturday morning, Irena Cihelkova told AFP the new president should serve the country well.

"He should be forthcoming and friendly, an asset for the

country, and not make problems abroad like some other Czech statesmen," she said.

Pavel will be the fourth president of the Czech Republic since it emerged as an independent state after a peaceful split with Slovakia in 1993, four years after Czechoslovakia shed four-decades of totalitarian

communist rule.

His predecessors were Vaclav Havel, an anti-communist dissident playwright who led the country from 1993-2003, economist Vaclav Klaus (2003-2013) and Zeman, whose final term expires in March.

A graduate of a military university, Pavel was decorated as a hero in the Serbo-Croatian war when he helped free French troops from a war zone.

He rose to chief of the Czech general staff and chair of NATO's military committee.

Like Babis, Pavel was a member of the Communist Party in the 1980s. But, the man with a carefully trimmed beard and white hair, who has a passion for powerful motorbikes, has since become a strong advocate of EU and NATO membership.

"We have no better alternative. We should use all opportunities offered by membership and try to change that which we don't like," he said on his campaign website.

AFP

Detained in Morocco, Saudi faces extradition

Dubai, UAE - A Saudi man in Morocco faces extradition back home where he fears torture and a possible death sentence after being detained in the North African country, his brother said on Saturday.

Hassan al-Rabie, 26, was detained on January 14 following an international notice sent by Saudi Arabia in November calling for his arrest on terror-related charges, said his brother Ahmed residing in Canada.

He accused the authorities of seeking to take his brother 'hostage' in a bid to reveal the whereabouts of their brother Munir, a rights activist. Rabie was arrested while attempting to leave for Turkey, his brother added.

AFP

'Iran executes 55 people so far this year'

Paris, France - Iranian authorities have executed 55 people in 2023, Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) said on Friday, adding that the surging use of the death penalty aims to create fear as protests shake the country.

Meanwhile, rights group Amnesty International said three young people sentenced to death over protests - the youngest aged just 18 - had been subjected to 'gruesome torture' in detention.

IHR said it has confirmed at least 55 executions in the first 26 days of this year.

Four people have been executed on charges related to the protests, while the majority of those hanged - 37 convicts - were executed for drug-related offences, IHR said.

At least 107 people are still at risk of execution over the demonstrations after being sentenced to death or charged with capital crimes, the group added.

With Iran's use of the death penalty surging in recent years, IHR argued that 'every execu-



Iranian women shop at the bazaar of Tajrish in northern Tehran (AFP)

tion by the Islamic Republic is political' as the main purpose 'is to create societal fear and terror'.

"To stop the state execution machine, no execution should be tolerated, whether they be political or non-political," said IHR director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam.

He added that a lack of reaction from the international community risked lowering 'the political cost of executing protesters'.

'State-sanctioned killing'

Activists have accused Iran of using the death penalty as an instrument of intimidation to quell the protests which erupted in September following the death of the Mahsa Amini, 22, who had been arrested for allegedly violating the country's dress code for women.

UN rights chief Volker Turk has said Iran's 'weaponisation of criminal procedures' to punish demonstrators 'amounts to

state-sanctioned killing'.

On Friday, Amnesty said three men sentenced to death in December had been subjected to torture 'including floggings, electric shocks, being hung upside down and death threats at gunpoint'.

They were convicted of inciting arson and vandalism during protests in September in Mazandaran province in Iran's north, Amnesty said in a statement.

Javad Rouhi, 31, suffered torture that included being 'sexually assaulted by having ice put on his testicles', Amnesty said.

Mehdi Mohammadifard, 19, was kept for one week in solitary confinement in a mice-infested cell and was raped, leading to 'anal injuries and rectal bleeding, which required hospitalisation', it said.

Arshia Takdastan, 18, 'was subjected to beatings and death threats, including having a gun pointed at his head if he did not 'confess' in front of a video camera'.

AFP



People hold a demonstration against President Dina Boluarte at the Tupac Amaru square, demanding her resignation and new elections, in Cusco, Peru, on Friday (AFP)

Peru's Congress rejects plan for early elections

Lima, Peru - Peru's Congress rejected on Saturday a request by embattled President Dina Boluarte to bring forward elections to December 2023, as protests that have killed dozens rage on against her leadership.

The South American country has been embroiled in a political crisis with near-daily protests since December 7 when former president Pedro Castillo was arrested after attempting to dissolve Congress and rule by decree.

Demanding that Boluarte resign and call fresh elections, Castillo supporters have erected roadblocks on highways, causing shortages of food, fuel and other basic supplies. The government said it will soon deploy police and

soldiers to clear the roadblocks.

Lawmakers already agreed last month to bring forward elections from 2026 to April 2024.

In the face of relentless protests, Boluarte on Friday

with 45 votes in favour, 65 against and two abstentions.

Leftist parties had demanded that the advancement of elections be accompanied by a constitutional convention -

Jose Williams said, after more than seven hours' debate.

Following the vote, Williams received a request for 'reconsideration', which could be debated on Monday in a new session, though it would be difficult to reverse the decision.

Protesters have demanded immediate elections, as well as Boluarte's removal, the dissolution of Congress and a new constitution. "Nobody has any interest in clinging to power," insisted Boluarte.

"I have no interest in remaining in the presidency. If I am here it is because I fulfilled my constitutional responsibility."

As Castillo's vice president, Boluarte was constitutionally mandated to replace him after he

was impeached by Congress and arrested.

The US State Department said on Friday it remained concerned about the violent demonstrations as it called 'for calm dialogue and for all parties to exercise restraint and nonviolence', spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters.

In seven weeks of protests since Castillo's arrest, 47 people have been killed in clashes between security forces and protesters, according to the Ombudsman's Office of Peru. The autonomous human rights office said another 10 civilians - including two babies - were collateral fatalities when they were unable to get medical treatment or medicine due to roadblocks.

Nobody has any interest in clinging to power. I have no interest in the presidency. If I am here it is because I fulfilled my constitutional responsibility

DINA BOLUARTE



Three dead, one missing after record rain in New Zealand

Wellington, New Zealand - Record levels of torrential rain in Auckland left three dead with a fourth person missing, New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said on Saturday after flooding devastated the country's largest city.

During a press conference after visiting some of the waterlogged communities, Hipkins said flash flooding had led to 'three fatalities with one person still missing as a result of the weather'. "The level of devastation in some areas is consider-

able," he added.

Hipkins said Auckland experienced 'its wettest day on record' on Friday. "This is an unprecedented event in recent memory."

It is his first major incident since Hipkins took office on Wednesday following Jacinda Ardern's shock resignation.

"Having just surveyed the extensive damage both on the ground and (from) the air, it's clear it's going to be a big clear up job," he warned. Hipkins offered his condolences to the families of the deceased. "The



New Zealand PM Chris Hipkins

loss of life underscores the scale of this weather event and how quickly it turned tragic."

Police said on Saturday that

the bodies of two men were found in floodwaters in separate locations in a northern suburb.

A third person died after a landslide brought down a house near the city centre while a fourth individual is still missing after they were swept away in a community south of Auckland, police said. The flash flooding quickly turned many of Auckland's roads into rivers.

According to MetService, New Zealand's weather service, a record 249mm of rain fell on Auckland Airport in 24 hours

from Friday morning local time.

The wild weather temporarily closed the city's airport, the country's largest, with ankle-deep water in some terminals.

The domestic terminal reopened on Saturday afternoon but international flights were only expected to resume on Sunday. The persistent downpour also washed out Elton John's concert on both Friday and Saturday at Auckland's Mount Smart Stadium amid concerns for crowd safety.

Memphis city releases deadly police beating video

Memphis, US - The US city of Memphis on Friday released graphic video footage depicting the fatal police assault of a 29-year-old Black man, sparking small protests against police brutality in a number of US cities but none that flared into the violence that officials had feared.

Five Memphis officers, all also Black, were charged with second-degree murder in the beating of Tyre Nichols, who died in hospital on January 10 three days after being stopped on suspicion of reckless driving. The lengthy video footage from police body cameras shows a group of officers detaining Nichols, attempting to take him down with the use of a Taser, then giving chase as he evades them.

Subsequent segments - the footage runs about an hour in total, and is audio-only in parts - show Nichols crying out for his mother, and moaning as officers



Protesters face off with a line of police officers during a rally against the fatal police assault of Tyre Nichols, outside the LAPD headquarters, in Los Angeles, California, on Friday (AFP)

repeatedly kick and punch him.

Addressing an emotional press conference earlier on Friday, the victim's mother Row-

Vaughn Wells called out the officers who she said beat her son 'to a pulp', telling them: "You disgraced your own families when

you did this."

President Joe Biden, who has joined local officials in calling for protests to remain peaceful,

spoke with Wells on Friday to offer his condolences and commend 'the family's courage and strength'. The slain man's mother was 'obviously in enormous pain', Biden said, adding that she had 'made a very strong plea' for peaceful protests.

The father of a four-year-old son, Nichols worked for FedEx, loved skateboarding and taking photos, and had a tattoo of his mother's name on his arm.

"My heart just breaks," Wells

My heart just breaks... For a mother to know that their child was calling them in their need

ROWVAUGHN WELLS

Academy launches probe after indie film's surprise Oscar nomination

Los Angeles, US - The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said on Friday it was launching a review of Oscars campaigning, days after a small indie film surprised industry-watchers with a shock nomination to Hollywood's most prestigious awards.

To *Leslie* had taken just US\$27,000 at the box office when star Andrea Riseborough's name appeared on the shortlist of nominees for the Best Actress.

Riseborough, who plays a Texas single mother struggling with alcoholism, beat out presumed frontrunners Viola Davis (*The Woman King*) and Danielle Deadwyler (*Till*).

The nod came after an intense, last-minute social media campaign mounted on her behalf by celebrity friends including Edward Norton, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Sarah Paulson.

Movie industry magazine *Variety* said the Academy had received multiple calls and emails in the wake of the nomination, and there was a raging debate among moviemakers over whether rules had been broken.

On Friday, the Academy said it would be examining its processes, although it did not mention the film by name.

"It is the Academy's goal to ensure that the Awards competition is conducted in a fair and ethical manner, and we are committed to ensuring an inclusive awards process," a statement said.

"We are conducting a review of the campaign procedures around this year's nominees, to ensure that no guidelines were violated, and to inform us whether changes to the guidelines may be needed in a new era

of social media and digital communication.

"We have confidence in the integrity of our nomination and voting procedures, and support genuine grassroots campaigns for outstanding performances."

The Oscars are awarded based on the votes of the 9,500 members of the Academy - many of them previous winners.

Academy membership is divided into 17 branches - actors, directors, producers, costume designers and so on - with each branch picking the nominees in their area of expertise.

With around 1,300 members of the actors' branch, a nominee in this category needs just over 200 votes to make the shortlist.

In the months ahead of the Oscars, which this year will be held on March 12, billboards in Los Angeles are plastered with advertisements for films as studios seek to persuade voting members.

There are also a host of parties and events aimed at generating a buzz.

Campaigns are often organised by professional companies and generally don't come cheap, so are usually the preserve of large studios. But *Leslie* was absent from this circuit.

Variety reported Friday that *Titanic* star Frances Fisher had posted on social media encouraging her fellow Academy members to nominate Riseborough.

"To my fellow Actors in The Academy - According to Pete Hammond writing for *Deadline*, Andrea Riseborough can secure an Oscar nomination if 218 (out of 1,302) actors in the Actors Branch nominated her in first position for Best Actress," she wrote on Instagram, according to *Variety*.



Ana de Armas



Michelle Yeoh



Andrea Riseborough



Michelle Williams



Cate Blanchett

INDIA

Two military jets crash, one pilot killed

The crash, apparently a mid-air collision, is the latest in a string of military aircraft accidents

New Delhi, India - Two Indian Air Force fighter jets crashed on Saturday, killing one pilot and injuring two others, in an apparent mid-air collision while on exercises south of the capital New Delhi.

The crash is the latest in a string of military aircraft accidents at a time when the government is trying to modernise its armed forces and meet India's complex security challenges. It involved a Russian-made Sukhoi Su-30, carrying two pilots, and a French-built Mirage 2000, operated by a third, and was reported by witnesses to police at around 10am (0430 GMT).

Both aircraft took off from the Gwalior air base, around 50km (30 miles) east of where they came down.

"The aircraft were on routine operational flying training mission," the country's air force said in a statement, adding that one of the three pilots was fatally injured.

An investigation was underway to determine the cause of the crash, it added.

The first plane hit the ground in the forests of Pahadgarh in central Madhya Pradesh state, around 300km south of New



Local rescue authorities and military officials inspecting wreckage of a crashed aircraft in Bharatpur district on Saturday (AFP)

Delhi.

"Two pilots were found near the crash site, who were later evacuated in an IAF chopper for treatment," Morena district police superintendent Ashutosh Bagri told AFP.

"Both of them are out of danger," he added.

The second jet crashed some distance away in Rajasthan state, and images from local

rescue authorities showed military officials inspecting mechanical wreckage strewn across the ground.

India has suffered a spate of military aviation accidents in re-

cent months.

Military overhaul

Five army soldiers were killed last October when their helicopter crashed in Arunachal

Pradesh state, near the country's militarised and disputed border with China.

It was the second military chopper crash in the state that month, coming weeks after a

Cheetah helicopter came down near the town of Tawang, killing its pilot.

India's defence chief, General Bipin Rawat, was among 13 people killed when his Russian-made Mi-17 helicopter crashed while transporting him to an air force base in December 2021.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is grappling with the urgent task of overhauling India's outdated armed forces.

Its military establishment is fretting over a growing assertiveness by China along its vast Himalayan frontier, which in 2019 sparked a lingering diplomatic freeze after a deadly high-altitude confrontation between troops of both countries.

India unveiled its first locally built aircraft carrier last year as part of government efforts to build an indigenous defence industry and reduce reliance on Russia, historically its most important arms supplier.

An effort to reform military recruitment to trim India's bloated defence payroll stalled last year after a backlash from aspiring soldiers, who burned train carriages and clashed with police in fierce protests.

AFP

Tripura Assembly polls: BJP releases list of 48 candidates

New Delhi, India - The Bharatiya Janata Party on Saturday announced its first list of 48 candidates for the Tripura Assembly polls, fielding Union minister Pratima Bhoumik from Dhanpur.

Six of the party's sitting MLAs have not been given tickets for the upcoming polls. Vimmi Majumdar, Subhash Chandra Das, Arun Chandra Bhowmik, Virendra Kishore Dev Burman, Parimal Debbarma, Vipul Kumar are those MLAs whose tickets have been struck off.

Chief Minister Dr Manik Saha will contest the polls from the Town Bordowali constituency. Party leaders Anil Baluni and Sambit Patra announced the candidates for the polls at a press conference in the party headquarters here.

For the first time, 11 women candidates have been given tickets in the state assembly



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) National President JP Nadda at the BJP central election committee meeting, at party headquarters, in New Delhi on Friday (ANI)

The central government has worked for the development of the North East... facilities made available to public

SAMBIT PATRA

election.

The women candidates include Union Minister Pratima

Bhowmik (Dhanpur), Santana Chakma (Pechanthal), Malina Devnath (Jubraj Nagar), Suchitra Dev Verma (Ambasa), Patal Kanya Jamatiya (Ompinagar), Antaradev Sarkar (Kamalasagar), Kalyani Rai (Teliamura), Hirmani Dev Verma (Golaghati), Meena Rani Sarkar (Badarghat) and Sapna Mazumdar (Rajnagar).

Out of 20 seats reserved for the Schedule Tribes, twelve candidates are to be announced soon.

Md Moboshar Ali who joined the party leaving the CPIM on Friday will contest from Kailashahar. The state BJP chief Rajib Bhattacharjee will contest the polls from Banamalipur.

"The central government has worked for the development of the North East, whether it is cleanliness campaign, water supply, home arrangements and other facilities have been made available to the public through many schemes," Patra said.

ANI

Priyanka Gandhi joins Bharat Jodo Yatra in Awantipora

Pulwama, India - Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday joined Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra that resumed from the Chersoo village in Awantipora after being cancelled on Friday.

Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir Congress leader, Ghulam Ahmad Mir brushed off the rumours of people joining the yatra from the other side of the tunnel. People Democratic Party (PDP) chief Mehbooba Mufti also joined the yatra in Awantipora on Saturday.

Rahul Gandhi during his foot march in Pulwama stopped at the spot to pay homage to the bravehearts of the Pulwama terror attack during the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

As many as 40 jawans lost their lives in the Pulwama attack on February 14 in 2019 when terrorists in Kashmir attacked a CRPF convoy.

The Yatra is currently pass-



Rahul Gandhi with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra leads the Bharat Jodo Yatra amid tight security, at Awantipora, in Pulwama on Saturday (ANI)

ing through Jammu and Kashmir and would culminate in Srinagar on 30 January.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday wrote to Union Home Minister Amit Shah regarding the 'security lapse' incident of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi which took place on January 27 and sought his personal intervention in ensuring adequate security for the Bharat Jodo Yatra in Jammu

and Kashmir.

"We are expecting a huge gathering to join the yatra over the next two days and also the function that will be held on January 30 at Srinagar. Many senior Congress leaders and leaders of other important political parties are attending the culmination functions to be held on January 30," said Kharge in his letter.

ANI

Death toll in Afghanistan cold snap rises to 166

Kabul, Afghanistan - At least 166 people have died in a wave of bitterly cold weather sweeping Afghanistan, an official said on Saturday, as extreme conditions heaped misery on the poverty-stricken nation.

Afghanistan has been frozen by temperatures as low as -33 degrees Celsius (-27 degrees Fahrenheit) since January 10, combined with widespread snowfall, icy gales and regular electricity outages.

Aid agencies had warned before the cold snap that more than half of Afghanistan's 38mn people were facing hunger, while nearly four million children were suffering from malnutrition.

The disaster management

ministry said on Saturday the death toll had risen by 88 over the past week and now stood at 166, based on data from 24 of the nation's 34 provinces.

The deaths were caused by floods, fires and leaks from gas heaters that Afghan families use to heat their homes, ministry official Abdul Rahman Zahid said in a video statement. Some 100 homes were destroyed or damaged and nearly 80,000 livestock also died in the cold. The World Health Organization (WHO) said this week 17 people had died in a single village in north-eastern Badakhshan province due to an outbreak of 'acute respiratory infection'.

AFP

US Republican Party keeps Ronna McDaniel in top post

Dana Point, US - America's deeply divided Republican Party voted on Friday to keep its Donald Trump-backed national committee chair in place, in an election seen as a test of the former president's sway.

The GOP has been in disarray since a predicted 'red wave' failed to materialise in November elections, with the party eking out only a slim majority in the House, and failing to wrest control of the Senate from the Democrats. Senior figures blamed the poor showing on the calibre of candidates backed by Trump, many of whom appeared qualified solely by their endorsement of his discredited election conspiracy theories.

The party's 168-strong national committee huddled on Friday at a luxury resort in Dana Point, California, where incumb-



Republican Party chair Ronna McDaniel speaks after being re-elected, in Dana Point, California, on Friday (AFP)

ent chairwoman Ronna McDaniel - who was understood to be Trump's favoured choice - fended off a challenge from a lawyer backed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

"With all of us united, the Democrats are gonna hear us in

2024," said McDaniel, who garnered 111 votes against 51 for Harmeet Dhillon and just four for conspiracy-peddling pillow salesman Mike Lindell.

Trump took to his Truth Social microblog shortly after the result saying: "Congratulations

to Ronna McDaniel on her big WIN as RNC CHAIR."

Trump is the only declared candidate for the 2024 presidential election, but DeSantis, who handily won re-election as the stand-out Republican victor at the state level in November, is widely expected to throw his hat in the ring.

On the eve of the vote, he had backed Dhillon for the job, aligning himself with populist right-wing Republicans in Congress.

"I think we need a change, I think we need to get some new blood," he told Florida's Voice.

"I like what Harmeet Dhillon has said."

Speaking after the vote, Dhillon poured cold water on the idea of the fractious GOP coming together under McDaniel.

"Nobody's gonna unite around the party the way it is,

which is seemingly ignoring the grassroots of the party, refusing to take the steps necessary to help us actually win," she said.

"I think the party is going to have to deal with that fallout of being in a disconnect from the grassroots." Political scientist Wendy Schiller said the fight between Dhillon and McDaniel, amounted to a proxy battle between DeSantis and Trump.

By supporting the outsider who had the backing of the more extreme members of Congress, the Florida governor is trying to 'out-right-wing Donald Trump', she told AFP. "DeSantis is trying to project himself as a future leader of the party," Schiller said.

"There's no other reason for wanting to weigh in on this election, unless you're planning to run for president."

AFP

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

GRAND ARYNA

Sabalenka beats Elena Rybakina to win her first Grand Slam crown, at Australian Open

Melbourne, Australia - An emotional Aryna Sabalenka battled back from a set down to beat Elena Rybakina and win the Australian Open on Saturday for her first Grand Slam title.

The hard-hitting Belarusian collapsed to the court in tears after winning 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 against the Wimbledon champion in a 2hr 28min arm-wrestle on Rod Laver Arena.

The 24-year-old Sabalenka wiped away tears before getting a warm hug from Moscow-born Rybakina, who played a full part in a thrilling match between two of the most powerful hitters in the women's game.

Sabalenka, the fifth seed, then ran to her player's box to celebrate with her team.

"Thank you, my team, the craziest team on the tour. We've been through a lot of I would say downs last year," Sabalenka said, addressing her team after receiving the trophy.

"Thank you so much for what you are doing for me. I love you guys."

She added: "I want to congratulate Elena for an incredible two weeks. You're such a great player and of course we are going to

have many more battles, hopefully in finals of the Grand Slams."

It was a fitting finale to two weeks of drama at Melbourne Park, highlighted by brutal groundstrokes, precision serving and wonderful rallies from two players at the top of their game.

Nerve-shredding
Rybakina cruised through the

An ace took her to 5-3 and Rybakina held to force Sabalenka to test her nerves and serve for the championship.

She was up to the challenge, but needed four nerve-shredding match points after a display where she hit an astonishing 51 winners and 17 aces to edge past the big-serving Rybakina.

Sabalenka will now rise to sec-

I want to congratulate Elena for an incredible two weeks. You're such a great player and we are going to have many more battles, hopefully in finals of the Grand Slams

ARYNA SABALENKA

first set in 34 minutes but Sabalenka scrapped her way back in a 57-minute second set to take it to a nervy decider.

It was then a case of which of the big servers would blink first in a toe-to-toe battle.

At 3-3 Rybakina - who represents Kazakhstan - could not find enough first serves and though she saved two break points, a third was too much and Sabalenka had the finish line in sight.

ond in the world, equalling her career high.

Rybakina will have the consolation of breaking into the top 10 for the first time, after reaching her second Grand Slam final in seven months.

She was awarded no ranking points for her Wimbledon win because of the ban on Russian and Belarusian players there.

New ground
Both players broke new ground



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka celebrates with the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup after defeating Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina in the final on Saturday (AFP)



Aryna Sabalenka (L) embraces Elena Rybakina after the final

in Melbourne this year.

Rybakina's previous Australian Open best was a third-round appearance in 2020, while Sabalenka had exited in the

fourth round in 2021 and 2022.

Sabalenka served first in the final and let out a nervous laugh as she immediately double-faulted.

It was the sort of start that might have induced a bout of nerves in the Sabalenka of 2022, when she dished up 428 double faults, 151 more than any other player on the women's tour.

But not this year. Her new-found confidence enabled her to respond immediately with an ace and roll through to hold.

Rybakina had served more aces than any other player, 45, in her run to the final and she rattled off three more in a row to level at 1-1. Rybakina fought back from 0-40 to deuce in the next when a second Sabalenka double fault opened the door.

She stepped through when Sabalenka went wide and consolidated to lead 3-1, then served out with ease to take the first set. It was the first set that Sa-

balenka had dropped in 2023.

The second set started in similar fashion, Sabalenka holding but under pressure on her serve.

She showed guts at 1-1 to hold with two aces before forcing a break of her own with her heavy groundstrokes to lead 3-1.

Another double fault gave Rybakina an immediate break back point which Sabalenka saved with a power-packed backhand winner and a scream of "Come on!" before getting to 4-1.

Sabalenka, having visibly picked up the pace, took the set.

The third set was heart-thumpingly tight, both players creating chances only to see their opponent fight back, until Sabalenka finally secured her dream.

AFP

Djokovic riding high in pursuit of 22nd Slam title and top ranking

Melbourne, Australia - Novak Djokovic has won all nine of his previous Australian Open finals so confidence is sky-high as he bids to equal Rafael Nadal's Grand Slam record and return to world number one.

That makes the Serb heavy favourite but in Stefanos Tsitsipas his invincibility will face a major test when they meet in the Melbourne Park title match on Sunday.

While Djokovic is into a record 33rd Grand Slam final and bidding to equal Nadal's 22 major crowns, the Greek third seed will play only his second.

Adding spice to the show-down, the winner will become world number one, dethroning Spanish teenager Carlos Alcaraz.

That is added incentive for Djokovic, who last held the top ranking in June.

"Winning Grand Slams and being the number one in the world are probably the two biggest peaks that you can climb as a professional tennis player,"



Novak Djokovic in action against Tommy Paul in the semi-final (AFP)

the 35-year-old said.

In Tsitsipas's only previous Grand Slam final, at Roland Garros in 2021, he fell to Djokovic in five sets after holding a 2-0 lead.

But the 24-year-old believes

he has matured as a player and a person and is now better suited to the big stage in his quest to become the first Greek player to win a Grand Slam title.

"I couldn't be more ready for

this moment," said Tsitsipas. "This is a very humbling opportunity for me, being in the finals here means a lot."

Fourth seed Djokovic, who missed last year's event when he

was deported over his Covid vaccination stance, said he was eager to see what his opponent would bring to the table.

"I'm of course very satisfied and pleased to be in another Grand Slam final. This is exactly what I've imagined and hoped will happen when I came to Australia," he said.

"I think that the experience of being in this particular situation and circumstances before helps.

"I think also the fact that I never lost the Australian Open final definitely serves as a great confidence-booster prior to Sunday."

Djokovic is strong favourite given his vast experience on the Melbourne hardcourts and also holding a 10-2 career record over Tsitsipas.

Djokovic is looking forward to a carnival atmosphere.

"Serbian and Greek communities, are big, for sure. The Serbs and Greeks historically get along very well," said Djokovic.

AFP

Australian Open chief tells Djokovic family: 'Be really careful'

Melbourne, Australia - Australian Open chief Craig Tiley on Saturday advised Novak Djokovic's family to be "really careful" of people using the tournament's global exposure as a platform for "disruptive"

The family were very good. They were upset that it was taken that way.

CRAIG TILEY

purposes. It follows a video posted on a pro-Russian YouTube account showing Djokovic's father Srdjan posing in Melbourne Park with a fan holding a Russian flag that featured the face of Vladimir Putin.

It sparked a backlash from Ukraine and led to calls for Djokovic senior to be banned from the tournament.

He decided to skip his son's semi-final victory on Friday and it remains to be seen if he will be at Sunday's final.

"My advice is that you have to be really careful because if this is an event of global significance, it's a platform," Tiley said he told Djokovic family.

"When you have hundreds of thousands of people come through the gate, you're going to naturally have some people that are coming here with an intention to be disruptive, and don't get yourself caught in the middle of that.

"And they completely understand that," he added. "The family were very good. They were upset that it was taken that way. There was no intention of it."

AFP

Tsitsipas - Melbourne finalist who was 'a few breaths from dying'

Melbourne, Australia - Stefanos Tsitsipas will become Greece's first Grand Slam champion and a world number one if he wins the Australian Open final on Sunday - he will have his father to thank if he does.

There are not many athletes whose careers and outlooks have been forged by near-death experiences, but the 24-year-old world number four is an exception.

In 2015, while taking part in a

third-tier event in Crete, a teenage Tsitsipas and a friend went swimming and almost fatally misjudged the strength of the currents.

The two boys were just moments from being swept away until Tsitsipas's father Apostolos, who is also his coach, dived in to haul them to safety.

"We couldn't breathe, I felt awful to be inside the water and was terrified. I didn't know how all this was going to end," Tsitsi-

"That was the day I saw life with a different perspective. I remember after that how much psychologically it changed me

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS

pas once recalled.

"My father saw us from afar and he jumped in, started swimming towards us and pushed us towards the beach. I was just a few breaths away from dying.

"If we were supposed to die and lose our lives that day, we would have to do it together. My father was a hero.

"That was the day I saw life with a different perspective. I re-

member after that how much psychologically it changed me."

Sport is in his genes. Life-saving Apostolos is his coach while mother Julia Salnikova is an ex-tennis pro.

His grandfather, Sergei Salnikov, was a 1956 Olympic gold medallist in football playing for the Soviet Union.

And since turning pro in 2016, Tsitsipas's career has been on a steadily upward curve.

AFP



Stefanos Tsitsipas



Moises Caicedo

Caicedo makes public plea to Brighton for Arsenal move

London, United Kingdom - Moises Caicedo has pleaded with Brighton to accept a club record transfer fee amid interest from Arsenal in the midfielder.

The Premier League leaders have reportedly seen a £60 million (\$74 million) bid turned down for the Ecuadorian international.

"I am proud to be able to bring in a record transfer fee for Brighton which would allow them to rein-vest it and help the club continue to be successful," Caicedo tweeted on Friday.

"The fans have taken me into their hearts and they will always be in my heart so I hope they can understand why I want to take up this magnificent opportunity," Brighton manager Roberto De

Zerbi is determined to keep the 21-year-old at least until the end of the season.

"He's a good guy. He's focused only on Brighton. I hope he can stay with us until the end of the season because in my opinion, it's the best solution for him, for us," De Zerbi told reporters on Friday.

"I spoke with him Wednesday and I told him my opinion. I think it's always difficult to change during a season. For our way, it's important for him to stay another four months with us."

Brighton have already sold Belgium forward Leandro Trossard to Arsenal for £27 million during the current January transfer window.

AFP

AKE SAVES CITY

Dutch defender scores the winner as Manchester City edge Arsenal in FA Cup

Manchester, United Kingdom - Mikel Arteta said Arsenal need to learn to be ruthless against Manchester City after Nathan Ake's goal earned Pep Guardiola's men a 1-0 win in the FA Cup fourth round on Friday.

The sides will meet twice more in the next three months in the Premier League with the title on the line.

Arsenal lead City by five points at the top of the table and Arteta believes the Gunners have to put the defending English champions to the sword when they have the chance.

The Arsenal boss showed a first league title in 19 years is his priority by making six changes with Martin Odegaard and Gabriel Martinelli among those left on the bench.

But the visitors still had chances early on as Takehiro Tomiyasu and Leandro Trossard on his full debut forced Stefan Ortega into flying saves.

"Really disappointed. I think we could have got much more out of the game," said Arteta.

"We had big situations in the game and we didn't put them away. In the big moments, in big matches you have to make the difference. That is how you win these games."

City were also far from their free-flowing best with Erling Haaland often manhandled by Rob Holding before the break.

The Norwegian saw an ambitious overhead kick from long range cleared by Tomiyasu with Arsenal goalkeeper Matt Turner stranded before Kevin De Bruyne



Manchester City's Nathan Ake celebrates after scoring against Arsenal in their English FA Cup fourth-round match at the Etihad Stadium on Friday (AFP)

curled City's best effort of the first half inches wide.

Guardiola had made just one outfield change from City's 3-0 win over Wolves.

However, it was his one of his substitutes, Julian Alvarez, that brought a lacklustre second half to life 26 minutes from time.

The Argentine's long-range

effort cannoned back off the post and from the rebound Jack Grealish's pass picked out Ake, who curled into the far corner.

"It was the first one I ever scored with my right foot so pleased with that," said Ake.

Arteta responded by throwing on Martinelli, Odegaard and Oleksandr Zinchenko.

The visitors nearly hit back immediately as only a brilliant clearance from Aymeric Laporte denied Eddie Nketiah a tap in.

But Arsenal failed to create another chance to equalise as City laid down a marker on the challengers to their crown as the dominant force in English football.

"A tight game against a really difficult opponent and we won it," said Guardiola, who had billed the clash as a barometer of whether his side could reel in Arsenal in the title race. The sides meet again at the Emirates on February 15 before a rematch at the Etihad on April 26.

AFP

Atletico hit out at Real Madrid 'influence' on Spanish referees

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid CEO Miguel Angel Gil Marin complained that Real Madrid's "huge influence" exerts pressure on Spanish referees after his side's Copa del Rey defeat, a suggestion dismissed by the victors.

Los Blancos beat Atletico in the cup quarter-final derby clash on Thursday night and Atletico were convinced that Dani Ceballos should have been sent off at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"I have full respect for all the officials and I am convinced they always have the best of intentions, but anyone looking in from the outside can see that for decades the same thing almost always happens," said Gil Marin in a statement late Friday.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't surprise anybody anymore, it isn't news. It's very clear and you just have to look back at history.

"Madrid are a club with a huge influence, with a lot of interests



Atletico Madrid feel Real Madrid's Dani Ceballos, (R) celebrating with Karim Benzema after the Frenchman scored in extra-time in their Copa del Rey match, should have been sent off

around them. They create so much pressure that it's normal that it affects the people who have to take decisions."

The officials are "aware of what awaits them if they harm

them with a mistake, or even if they get something right. We often see a campaign against whoever they believe has hurt them," Gil Marin added.

Atletico had Stefan Savic sent

off in extra-time in the 3-1 defeat but were angry that Ceballos was not shown a second yellow card in the second half of the regulation 90 minutes.

AFP

Szoboszlai double helps Leipzig close gap on Bayern

Berlin, Germany - Dominik Szoboszlai scored twice as RB Leipzig beat Stuttgart 2-1 on Friday to move within one point of Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich.

Marco Rose's men climbed to second in the table after extending their unbeaten run to 16 matches in all competitions.

Two straight draws for Bayern, including against Leipzig, since the restart of the Bundesliga following the winter break have slowed their march towards an 11th successive title.

The Bavarians host fourth-placed Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday.

"It feels good, we're in a really good place," Leipzig right-back Benjamin Henrichs told DAZN.

"We haven't lost for a very long time and that speaks volumes."

Leipzig took the lead in the



RB Leipzig's Dominik Szoboszlai (C) celebrates after the match

25th minute at the Red Bull Arena as Szoboszlai's powerful 35-yard free-kick bounced past visiting goalkeeper Florian Muller. The Hungarian winger had previously scored only one league goal this season but he found the net again shortly after half-time. There was nothing Muller could have done to keep

out Szoboszlai's wonderful volley from the edge of the box.

Stuttgart gave themselves hope of a comeback when Chris Fuhrich scored a penalty midway through the second period.

But Leipzig held on to boost their hopes of a first Bundesliga title and leave Stuttgart mired in relegation trouble.

Top names on radar as Brazil open door to breaking foreign coach taboo

Sao Paulo, Brazil - More than two decades since their last World Cup triumph and without a local consensus pick, Brazil are considering breaking an unwritten taboo: hiring a foreign coach.

After six years in the job, Tite left the Brazil post last month following the Selecao's World Cup quarter-final exit against Croatia.

Despite knowing for some time before the Qatar showpiece that Tite was leaving, Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) president Ednaldo Rodrigues still has not found a replacement.

Now he is widening his search.

"We have no nationality prejudices," he said on January 17.

"We want it to be a respected

coach who can bring a level of play worthy of the athletes. We want to do what Brazil have always tried to do: to be very attacking."

Apart from England, who hired Swede Sven Goran Eriksson and Fabio Capello of Italy in the 2000s, almost no other major footballing nation has had a foreign coach in decades.

Brazil's World Cup drought - stretching back to their dazzling triumph in 2002 with a three-pronged attack comprised of Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Rivaldo - has forced the record five-time world champions to cast the net farther afield.

There are potential Brazilian candidates, but none have garnered



Brazilian press have proposed Jose Mourinho as a candidate

nered widespread support.

"We have good quality, but before we used to produce more coaches than now," Luiz Felipe Scolari, the 2002 title-winning coach, said recently.

We want it to be a respected coach who can bring a level of play worthy of the athletes. We want to do what Brazil have always tried to do: to be very attacking

EDNALDO RODRIGUES

"The new generation ... haven't won enough trophies."

Brazilian press have been proposing numerous possible candidates.

Spaniards Pep Guardiola and Luis Enrique, Italy's Carlo Ancelotti, Frenchman Zinedine Zidane, Jose Mourinho of Portugal and even Argentine Mauricio Pochettino.

Manchester City's Guardiola and Ancelotti of Real Madrid have both ruled themselves out, although the Spaniard did say a couple of years ago that he fancied leading a national team when he leaves the English champions.

"Since the end of last year I think I've heard 26 names. We will go after some of them," said Rodrigues, who hopes to have the new man in place by March.

But it is not easy hiring a world class coach when top European clubs can pay such inflated wages and offer the chance to compete for the Champions League or national titles.

It is also not easy to convince the Brazilian fans to accept a "gringo" in charge of the Selecao.

A poll in December found 48 percent were against the idea, with only 41 percent in favor.

AFP



UNSTOPPABLE

Local star Abdullah al Rawahi wins Oman International Rally for the second time

Abdullah al Rawahi in action at the Oman International Rally

Muscat: The Oman Rally Team's Abdullah al Rawahi and Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud clinched victory in the Oman International Rally for the second time in three years on Saturday. After pre-event favourite Nasser Saleh al Attiyah crashed on the opening super special stage, Al Rawahi hit the front on the first of a dozen gravel stages in the Sultanate of Oman and stayed clear of major trouble, punctures aside, to guide his Skoda Fabia Evo to victory by the margin of 6min 35.6sec. The feat meant the Omani became one of only 15 drivers ever to win more than one round of the FIA Middle



East Rally Championship. "It was a great feeling to win my home rally for the first time two years ago and to do it again is very special," said Al Rawahi. "This is a perfect start to the championship for us and I would like to thank Ata for his efforts and the team for giving me such a strong car on what was a diffi-

This is a perfect start to the championship for us and I would like to thank Ata for his efforts and the team for giving me such a strong car on what was a difficult rally

ABDULLAH AL RAWAHI

cult rally." The fastest time on the final stage enabled Petr Kacirek and Petra Rihakova to see off a late challenge from Al Attiyah for second overall and the Czech crew duly sealed the runner-up spot in their Duck Racing Skoda Fabia. Al Attiyah and Andorra-based co-driver Mathieu Baumel won 11

of the 13 special stages, but the costly error on the first stage damaged the Volkswagen Golf's radiator and a subsequent time penalty for a seat belt infringement meant the task was ultimately too much for the Qatari to challenge for the win. Al Attiyah reached the finish at the Muscat Drift Arena in third

overall to keep the defence of his regional title firmly on track. He may well have caught Kacirek and snatched second had he not suffered a rear right puncture and driven 17km on the shredding tyre to the finish of the final stage. "After what happened on Thursday, I suppose I am happy enough with the result," said Al Attiyah. "Meshari al Thefiri and his Qatari co-driver Nasser al Kuwari were passed by Al Attiyah on the afternoon's loop of stages but the Kuwaiti managed to finish fourth overall and confirm victory in the MERC2 category in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X.

Oman Cricket's grassroots programme is on a strong wicket, says Varun Khimji

Muscat: Oman Cricket (OC) has been keen on developing cricket at the grassroots level in the Sultanate of Oman among local and expatriate schoolchildren over the past year. Various programmes and initiatives have been implemented by OC and to ensure the continuity is maintained, a pilot programme in Muscat-based schools, and a training camp under the guidance of legendary South African Gary Kirsten has been organised. Providing further details on the ambitious grassroots programme, Varun Khimji, advisor to Oman Cricket, said: "Oman Cricket, at the moment, has initiated a grassroots programme with an aim to broaden the exposure of the game of cricket among the youth of Oman.

"We have started coaching sessions at couple of schools - The Sultan's School and Cheltenham - with many more schools to be included in the coming semesters. The coaching programmes are run by the coaching staff of our established Oman Cricket Academy (OCA).

"It allows the children to experience the game in the best possible environment, where they are able to learn the right skills and have a correct mindset of the game. We feel that our grassroots programme is on a strong wicket." Varun added: "The programme caters to age-group from 7-16 years. It is the perfect time to identify talents for the future. Our ultimate goal is

to provide our national team with a pool of talents that can represent the country at global level." The OC advisor said: "Our grassroots initiatives are in line with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth's vision to enhance Sultanate of Oman's sporting capabilities. Under the dynamic leadership of His



Varun Khimji



Gary Kirsten

Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, the support of the sports ministry has been vital to us in the growth of the game in the country. "We are delighted to host the legendary South African cricketer and a World Cup-winning coach, Gary Kirsten," he said.

New Zealand down India in T20 opener

Ranchi, India - Opener Devon Conway and Daryl Mitchell hit quickfire fifties to set up a convincing 21-run victory for New Zealand in the first T20 international against India on Friday. Left-hander Conway made 52 off 35 balls and Mitchell smashed an unbeaten 59 as the Kiwis posted 176-6 after being invited to bat first in Ranchi. New Zealand, who suffered a 3-0 whitewash in the one-day internationals, restricted the hosts to 155-9 and took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Skipper Mitchell Santner stood out with figures of 2-11 with his left-arm spin while fel-

low spinner Michael Bracewell and fast bowler Lockie Ferguson also took two wickets each. "I think it was a bit of a shock, how much it spun in the second innings," said Santner. "After lots of runs in the ODI series, it was nice to see the ball turn." The Black Caps started strongly after being invited to bat first, with Finn Allen striking four fours and two sixes in a brisk 35. Spinner Washington Sundar cut short Allen's stay as the batsman mistimed a hit to deep mid-wicket, and struck again in the over to get Mark Chapman caught and bowled for nought. Conway took his time before

he changed gears and smashed tearaway quick Umran Malik for two fours and a six in the eighth over. Conway kept up the charge with Glenn Phillips as the pair put on 60 before left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav broke through with the wicket of Phillips for 17. Conway raised his fifty in 31 balls and found another attacking partner in Mitchell, who hit five sixes in his 30-ball blitz, as they added 36 for the fourth wicket. Left-arm pace bowler Arshdeep Singh finally got Conway out in the 18th over, but was then hammered for three sixes and a

four by Mitchell in a 27-run final over. "It was nice to contribute to the score and then I think the boys bowled really well," said man of the match Mitchell. "I think Devon batted well and allowed us to build." In reply, India lost their top three batsmen with just 15 on the board in 3.1 overs with off-spinner Bracewell striking first as he bowled the left-handed Ishan Kishan for four. Two more wickets in the next two overs put India in trouble before Suryakumar Yadav (47) and Hardik Pandya (21) briefly put the chase back on track.



New Zealand's players celebrate their win against India in their first T20 in Ranchi on Friday (AFP)

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Indian male, Diploma, Degree in Civil, having 2-3 years experience including 10 months experience in Oman also having Oman Drivers licence looking for a suitable civil Supervisor job. Mobile no : 78608219 , email : shahrukh9722@gmail.com

FOR RENT

Flat in Darsait, 4 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, kitchen, with a small sea view, near the Indian School. RO240 per month. There is also a room with a bathroom and a kitchen for rent, at RO100 riyals per month, with electricity and water. Contact: +968-99315986

CLEANING SERVICES

Cleaning services - Carpet, Sofa Shampooings, pest control, anti termite treatment, supply of cleaning staff, office boys, supply of loading & unloading staff. Contact: Al Muhur Trading: 95506360, 94214747

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories: Situations Wanted/ Accommodation Wanted or Available/ Sale of Household Items/ Car for Sale or Wanted/ Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35) Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346

Vacancy

Vacancy open for 10 housekeeping female cleaners for a mall. Interested candidates pls apply immediately on email: **businessfm00@gmail.com** Visa, accommodation and food will be provided.

Send your request for Birthday/ Anniversary wishes to **wish@apexmedia.co.om** with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)

WJ Towell Group Company



Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat **9014 6672, 9679 0684**
Sohar **9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325**

www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease



أوربيت ORBIT

Car Rental & Lease



FOR RENT

Available 2100 sq meter best in class Warehouse cum office Space, fully furnished ready to use, Located at Prime area of Ghala in the heart of the city having easy access to airport & express Way.

Contact: Girish Sewani - 93893596

CELLULOID EVOLUTION



BALANCING
ART AND COMMERCE

From *The Sixth Sense* to *Old*, director M Night Shyamalan has had a unique string of hits, but these days he works outside the Hollywood studio system, which he says has grown 'sick'.

Balancing art and commerce has always been the great game of Hollywood and few have played it as well as Shyamalan, who returns to cinemas next week with the apocalyptic horror tale, *Knock at the Cabin*.

Still just 52, he has been cranking out box office hits every couple of years since the iconic *The Sixth Sense* in 1999, through *Unbreakable*, *Signs*, *Split*, and many more. They have been almost entirely original, rarely based on pre-existing franchises or superhero characters that the major studios now rely upon.

Watching how Hollywood has evolved in that time has left him deeply disillusioned.

"If you look at the industry right now... there are movies that feel incestuous... It's just Hollywood talking to themselves," he told AFP. "And then there are movies where they're saying: the audience is dumb so we're going to take all the soul out and we're just going to do it by numbers," he said. "These are signs of complete dysfunction."

He looks back in wonder at his breakthrough year in 1999, when studios backed several highly original films such as *American Beauty*, *Magnolia*, *Being John Malkovich* and *The Insider*.

"The industry was different then. It was aimed at - how do you get the best storytellers to tell stories for the widest audience?

HOLLYWOOD HAS
BECOME COMPLETELY
DYSFUNCTIONAL:
SHYAMALAN

KNOCK AT
THE CABIN

Knock at the Cabin, based on the cabin-in-the-woods mystery-thriller novel, presents a scenario: a family — two fathers (Jonathan Groff and Ben Aldridge) and their daughter (Kristen Cui) — are vacationing in a remote cabin in a rural area when they are set upon by a group of home invaders. They claim not to be threatening, but they tie up the parents and present the family with an impossible question.



US filmmaker M Night Shyamalan poses during a photocall for his movie 'Knock At The Cabin' in Paris

I found the only way is to leave the system and pay for it myself... to make small movies but take huge risks

M NIGHT SHYAMALAN

That's not the case now," Shyamalan said.

Huge risks

His response has been to go it alone, even if that means giving up on big budgets.

"I found the only way is to leave the system and pay for it myself... to make small movies but take huge risks - not having to ask whether they like having a gay couple at the centre, or whether I should hire a wrestler..." he said, adding, "This is my way of staying healthy after spending a long time in a kind of sick industry," he added.

Knock at the Cabin stars former wrestler Dave Bautista in the story of a family isolated in the woods who are taken hostage by an armed group and told they must sacrifice one of their own to avert the apocalypse.

At the core, said Shyamalan, is a question that resonates in 'our post-truth era: do we trust each other?'

"Does the husband believe in the other husband? Do they believe what the strangers are saying? Do we believe in our society and what we're seeing?"

And of course, being a Shyamalan film, there are plenty of twists, which he still loves to write.

"That's the fun part!" he said. "Even until late in the writing of the movie I was like, how many times can I flip you back and forth? Because I had thought of another way, and I was worried the audience are going to get whiplash if I do one more," he said.

AFP

new

Move over mayo!
PERinaise has arrived!

Distributed by

Please contact
+968 22060236/237

SOLO EXHIBITION

A MYSTICAL COLLECTION OF AROUND 30 ABSTRACTS BY SENIOR INDIAN ARTIST, KANAK MITRA, WILL BE OPENED AT MATTI SIRVIO ART GALLERIA ON FRIDAY. THE SOLO EXHIBITION TITLED 'COLOURS OF LIFE' REFLECTS THE ARTIST'S DEEP-ROOTED CREATIVITY WHICH HAS TAKEN ON MULTIPLE FORMS IN HIS OWN LIFE



UNKNOWN JOURNEY OF CREATIVITY




My artworks dictate the treatment as they progress. It is an unknown journey of joy and creativity
KANAK MITRA

Hubert Vaz

Every section of each painting of this Indian artist has points to ponder and every painting has a complex, yet thought-provoking, message. And when he puts a collection of his artworks together, the result is magical.

Kanak Mitra, a seasoned Indian artist who has been residing and teaching art in Oman for the past few decades, now comes forth with a unique solo exhibition titled Colours of Life which will be inaugurated by Maryam al Zadjali, popular Omani artist and former director of Omani Society for Fine Arts, at Matti Sirvio Art Galleria on February 3. The guest of honour will be Dr J Retnakumar, founder and chairman of Bhavalaya Art and Culture Foundation, and an ardent art lover.

A round of the gallery when Mitra's exhibition is on is in itself a lesson in abstract painting. Every frame is vibrant, every frame is layered with details in bold hues, every frame speaks to the viewer. While each of Mitra's canvases has a clear message, closer inspection takes one into a story or a reflection that is either an eye-opener or a pointer to some issue that needs introspection.

In a chat with Muscat Daily, Mitra shared the essence of

his skill unleashed in this exhibition. Excerpts:

For how long have you worked in this collection?
I have been working on this collection for the last 3-4 years. Most of it was done during the time of lockdown in Muscat, due to the pandemic which held sway from 2019 till 2022. The creative process became more active because of having a peaceful art corner, more free time and space, though the pain, suffering, anxiety, and uncertainty of the pandemic were present every moment. Very few works will be in this exhibition from my old collections.

What is the central message of this exhibition?
I wish to convey the message of creativity, the joy of creativity. I think truly creative people are blessed. They are happy they make others happy. Creativity is not restricted to art, music or dance, but any other field of individual choice. I believe in the phrase - Do what you love to do.

Do you visualise your abstracts before you start a painting or does the artwork dictate the treatment as it progresses?
No. I do not visualise my abstracts before I start a painting. You are correct. My artworks dictate the treatment as they progress. It is an unknown journey of joy and creativity.

You are interested in music and dance, too, do those also find expression in your work?
Definitely. My interest in music and dance does find an expression in my artworks because they remain in my subconscious mind hidden and I am not aware of those while drawing and painting.

What do you see as the main difference in creative art and creative performance?
I see no difference, except for the medium of expression.

What advice would you like to give budding artists in Oman who love abstract painting?
My advice to budding artists in Oman is - There is no shortcut to the success. If you have achieved something through a shortcut, then you have to return back through the shortcut. Do really understand what 'Abstract Art' is and then enjoy the creative process.

Did you ever get out of two dimensional canvasses and tried multi-dimensional artworks that appeals to all senses?
No. That is altogether a different field in the world of art.