

RO11.3bn spending approved

BUDGET 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued a Royal Decree on Sunday ratifying the sultanate's state budget for 2023 with an estimated deficit of RO1.3bn or 3 per cent of the GDP.

The 2023 budget sees a total revenue of RO10.050bn, 5 per cent lower than the estimated revenue in 2022, and expenditure of RO11.350bn, which is 6.4 per cent lower than the previous year's estimated spending.

The decline in total estimated revenue was due to a projected decrease in gas revenue in 2023 following the establishment of Integrated Gas Company (IGC) with a view to realising a number of goals, the Ministry of Finance

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Deficit
RO1.3bn

Total revenue
RO10.050bn

Total expenditure
RO11.350bn

Oil revenue
RO5.320bn

Non-oil revenue
RO3.330bn

Development projects
RO900mn



said in a statement to ONA.

'These [goals] include the improvement of Oman's fiscal performance indicators by removing gas purchase and transport expenses from the state budget and transferring the net revenue from gas sales to the state treasury,' the ministry said.

In the 2023 budget, the oil revenue has been estimated at about RO5.320bn, registering an increase of 18 per cent compared to the budget of 2022.

The country's oil revenue constitutes about 53 per cent of the state's total revenue. This year's budget is based on an average oil price of US\$55 per barrel.

Gas revenue in this year's budget is estimated at RO1.4bn, thanks to the establishment of the Integrated Gas Company, which will purchase and sell gas and then transfer gas revenue directly to the treasury. Gas revenue constitutes 14 per cent of the state's total revenue.

On the other hand, non-oil

revenue in the approved budget of 2023 was estimated at RO3.330bn, down by 0.3 per cent from the 2022 budget estimates.

Current revenue in the state budget of 2023 is estimated to stand at about RO3.280bn. Of these, revenue from value-added taxes (VAT) and excise taxes is estimated at RO590mn, while income tax revenue (on profits of companies and institutions) is estimated at about RO560mn.

Revenue from the distribution of dividends from the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) is expected to stand at about RO800mn, while revenue from the government service fees are set to be at RO1.330bn.

Major expenditures

Oman's 2023 budget sees a total public spending of RO11.350bn, which is 6.4 per cent lower than the approved spending in the 2022 budget.

Continued on Page 04

His Majesty issues two Royal Decrees

Royal Decrees ascribe public utility status to two projects

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

Royal Decree No 2/2023 ascribes the public utility status to the project of constructing a flood protection dam in Wadi Adoubab (Project A1B) in the wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar.

Article 1 states that the project of constructing a dam for protection against floods in Wadi Adoubab (Project A1B) in the wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, as defined in the memo and diagram attached to this decree, is henceforth deemed a public utility project.

Article 2 stipulates that the authorities concerned may expropriate, through direct implementation, the properties and lands necessary for the aforementioned project, along with all the installations therein in accordance with the Public

Utility Expropriation Law promulgated by Royal Decree 64/78. **Article 3** says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 3/2023 ascribing the public utility status to the project of constructing a flood protection dam in Wadi Anaar for the Port of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar.

Article 1 states that the project of constructing a dam for protection against floods in Wadi Anaar and side protection for the Port of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, as defined in the memo and diagram attached to this decree, is henceforth deemed a public utility project. **Article 2** stipulates that the authorities concerned may expropriate, through direct implementation, the properties and lands necessary for the aforementioned project, along with all the installations therein in accordance with the Public

Utility Expropriation Law promulgated by Royal Decree 64/78. **Article 3** says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA



Naabi becomes first Omani to scale seven highest peaks



Five artists from Oman paint pain of displacement

Oman condoles after attack in Egyptian city

Muscat - The Foreign Ministry expressed Oman's condolences to the families of victims and the people of Egypt following an attack which targeted a security checkpoint in the city of Ismailia. It wished the injured a speedy recovery.

The ministry affirmed Oman's firm stance in condemning violence and terrorism in all its forms and motives.

At least four people were killed and 12 others wounded in an attack on a police checkpoint in the Egyptian Suez Canal city of Ismailia, according to officials.

The assault, which took place on Friday afternoon, left three police officers and a still unidentified person dead.

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7th January | 4:00 PM

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SEASON 2022 -2023



BEGINNING WITH HIGH HOPES

The New Year calls for some fresh resolutions, and in 2023, it's time to let go of the old and change the way we look at our future plans. What can we learn from a year like 2022, and what will 2023 likely hold? Lets hope for the best in 2023 and begin with optimism. Many in Oman have different resolutions but we all need some out-of-the-box resolutions, which would help us to become better. On what changes would *Muscat Daily* readers like to see in Oman in 2023, here is what they had to say:



Harun Islam
Salesman

I would love to see that there are more air services from Muscat to destinations around the world (mainly Asian cities) that are reasonably priced and that they don't fluctuate with seasons.

Hassam Mohammad
Tour guide

I want 2023 to be more tourist friendly, let there be no more restrictions like the last cou-

ple of years and let there be no more added formalities like PCR tests and hotel quarantine. Let the world see no more pandemic or lock-down. Also, I want visa on arrival for more countries. It is good both for the government and tourists.

B K Mandsaurwala
Private sector employee

Sturdy and beautiful mountains, mesmerising beaches, serene gardens and ethnic museums are enough to describe the Sultanate of Oman. It's sad, but a fact - in every wilayat, of late we

notice huge machines flattening mountains to accommodate maybe some industrial or residential requirements. I wish, if not stopped completely, at least the authorities will look into the matter and reduce the cutting of mountains.

Jay Prakash
Private sector employee

I wish people to change their behaviour towards the environment. They shouldn't litter our natural pristine beaches and the environment in general. Also I feel, more and more in-

stitutes should come up to give free coaching on swimming, yoga, unarmed combat and on other similar programmes for a better living. The budding writers should be given more chances to write in newspapers et cetera.

Khalid al Amri
Bank executive

I really want to see 2023 witness employment; let the oil prices be stable. The world these days is more interdependent; hence we need no more war (Ukraine), no more chaos (Iran). I would also love to see more young Omanis starting SMEs - mainly in the IT sector.

Sulaiman Salim
Businessman

I want to see more outdoor parks in the country. This year we witnessed many indoor parks. Though they are good, I would love to enjoy more in the open air than in any closed place paying exorbitant fees. In 2023, I would also love to see that there is some improvements in the drainage system to mitigate crisis during heavy rains.

Yousuf al Balushi
Cashier

I want to see more Omanis employed in private sector. It doesn't matter - whatever is the position, we must make a start. I hope 2023 gives us more chances for our professional growth. We want more chances in the science, IT and infrastructure sectors.



How can Oman make use of its pleasant winter season? What kind of activities can be planned to attract visitors?

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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

MoH launches health screening for early detection of NCDs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to detect non-communicable diseases (NCDs) early, the Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday started a new health service for citizens over 35 years of age.

The new service is part of a programme called 'Aphas ad Atman' or 'Check and Rest Assured'.

A statement issued by MoH said, 'The ministry will provide a new preventive health service to citizens who have completed 35 years of age, starting from Janu-

ary 1. The service aims to detect chronic diseases such as diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and obesity.'

The service will include conducting medical tests, such as checking lipids, urine, glucose, and measuring blood pressure. 'The ministry will set a treatment plan for the patient after the medical results,' it added.

The ministry urged citizens to go to the nearest health centre for check-ups and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

Non-communicable diseases are a major public health concern worldwide and in Oman too, at-

tributing to 72 per cent of deaths in the sultanate.

Despite the considerable progress made in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, the prevalence of NCDs continues to rise, leading to significant social and economic burdens due to morbidity, untimely deaths of those living with NCDs, and the cost of health services needed for treating NCDs, according to MoH.

In combatting the NCDs epidemic, surveillance plays a fundamental role and is a key constituent of evidence-based public health decision-making

and assessment of public health interventions.

The ministry has developed the 'National NCD Monitoring and Evaluation Framework on NCD' aligned with the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Monitoring Framework for NCDs and the National Action Plan on NCDs.

'This aims to provide a valid and reliable method to measure achievements, assess performances, and reflect changes associated with the introduction and upscaling of public health policies and interventions,' the ministry stated.

Muscat Municipality creates more paid parking zones

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has announced the conversion of some areas to paid parking zones in Muscat to meet the growing urbanisation and population density of the city from Sunday.

According to the administrative decision 151/2016 governing the use of public parking lots in Muscat, the use of parking lots near the building of the Directorate General of Labour Welfare of the Ministry of Labour in Ruwi will be against payments. Also, the new car parks at Al Khoud Souq and the ones behind the



Ooredoo store in the area will also be against payments.

Beneficiaries can reserve parking via SMS by sending a text to 90091 containing the car number and code and the time period required (multiples of 30 to a maximum of 300 minutes).

A beneficiary will then receive a confirmation SMS containing the ticket number, car number and code, date and time of the reservation.

If the beneficiary needs to extend the time period he/she should send another SMS to 90091 following the same steps.

Users can use Baladiyeti app to reserve a car park for hours and can also obtain or renew a parking permit, or inquire about or pay fines.

Beneficiaries can visit Muscat Municipality website <http://www.mm.gov.om/> to obtain or renew a parking permit or to inquire about or pay fines.



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Naabi becomes first Omani to scale seven highest peaks

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani mountaineer Suleiman bin Hamoud al Naabi has made Oman proud by climbing the world's seven highest peaks, with the latest achievement coming on December 24.

Naabi scaled the Mount Vinson, the highest peak in Antarctica at 4,892 metres, a day before Christmas, to be the first Omani to scale seven highest peaks viz., Mount Everest, Aconcagua, Denali, Kilimanjaro, Elbrus, Kosciuszko and Mount Vinson.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily* from Chile, Naabi said, "I managed to reach the South Pole on December 16 after skiing a distance of 120km. I completed the trip by going to the Mount Vinson Camp and climbing it on December 24.

"I proudly raised the flag of the Sultanate of Oman and the image of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik after the summit," he added.

Naabi began his adventure on December 2.

Talking about the challenges,



I am seeking to reach the North Pole to send a message to the world that Oman is a country of love and peace

SULEIMAN AL NAABI

he said that the low temperatures reaching -60°C, and the strong gust of winds were bone chilling.

"I almost had frozen finger tips. In addition, the lack of vision due to sudden snowfall with strong winds added to the challenge of reaching the South Pole and summiting Vinson."

The weight of his backpack, which was over 30kg, made the

whole trip a lot more challenging, the mountaineer said.

Naabi's adventure was part of the Explorer's Grand Slam programme under which climbers aim to reach the seven highest peaks (Everest, Aconcagua, Denali, Kilimanjaro, Elbrus, Vinson, and Puncak Jaya or Kosciuszko) on every continent and reach the South and North poles.

Besides the seven summits,

he also scaled the 4,807.81m Mount Blanc in France, the highest mountain in the Alps and in the western Europe.

Of the future, he said, "I am seeking to reach the North Pole to send a message to the world that Oman is a country of love and peace, and that Omani youth are capable of excelling and registering great achievements in all fields."

3 cruise ships bring 5,000 tourists to Muscat in one day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Port of Sultan Qaboos received 5,000 visitors that arrived on three cruise ships in one day, according to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

In a statement, the ministry said, 'On December 29, the Port

of Sultan Qaboos received three cruise ships *MSC Opera*, *Mein Schiff 6* and *Le bougainville* with 5,000 tourists onboard.'

The winter cruise tourism season (2022-2023) for Muscat began with the arrival of *Mein Schiff 6* at the Port Sultan Qaboos on October 28, bringing more than 2,100 tourists to

the city.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, 99 cruise ships visited the sultanate in the 2021/2022 season.

The sultanate recorded a 45 per cent increase in the number of cruise ship visitors from 193,000 in 2017-18 to 283,000 in 2018-19.



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Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/109	2022/MM/QS-90	Design and Construction of Storm Water Diversion Channel in Al Jiffnain, Seeb	25	21/01/2023	09/02/2023	First
PRE/22/178	2022/MM/QS-91	Requesting Licenses for Muscat Municipality Backup Solution	25	21/01/2023	09/02/2023	Excellent & First
PRE/22/179	2022/MM/QS-92	Consultancy Services for Supervision of the Construction of Link Road between Al Amerat Road to Al Joud Road Phase -1	25	21/01/2023	09/02/2023	First
PRE/22/180	2022/MM/QS-93	Consultancy Services for Supervision of the Construction of Dualization of Halban Street Phase-1	25	21/01/2023	09/02/2023	First
PRE/22/181	2022/MM/QS-94	Post-Contract Quantity Surveying Services for Construction of Dualization of Halban Street Phase-1	25	21/01/2023	09/02/2023	First

Tender Conditions :-
1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.

- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

Nights to dazzle with most intense meteor shower till January 5

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Astronomy enthusiasts in Oman are in for a treat as the first meteor shower of 2023 - also said to be one of the most intense ones this year - began its spectacular show in the night sky.

The meteor shower is expected to be visible in naked eyes in Oman till Thursday, said a senior member of the observatory unit of the Oman Astronomical Society.

"People in Oman can enjoy the Quadrantids meteor shower without the need of a telescope. It is expected to be among the strongest and most consistent ones, with intensity reaching a maximum of 110 meteors per hour on a clear night. The shower



will be at its peak on the night of January 3-4," Abdulwahab al Busaidi told *Muscat Daily*.

The Quadrantids are usually active between the end of December and the second week of January, with the peak hitting

around January 3-4.

"The spectacle will be visible from anywhere in the sultanate; but I always recommend everyone to watch such astronomical feats from dark places, far away from city lights," Busaidi suggested, pointing out that the light pollution takes away the beauty of celestial events.

"All you need is a location away from lights and you should be able to spot the shower. However, there will also be the Moon on the said dates, which will cause some distraction and make it tough to see in the later half of the night."

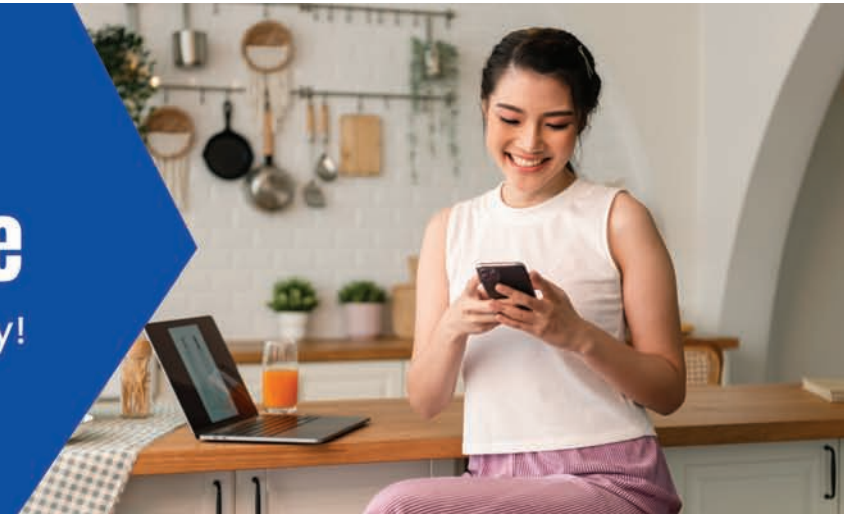
Explaining more about meteors, he said that they are pieces of debris that enter our planet's atmosphere at speeds up to 70km per second; vaporising in the process and causing streaks of light we call meteors.

"The Quadrantids is known for its sharp peak of a few hours, and the meteors appear to radiate from the constellation Boötes," Busaidi informed.

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MOH No: 558/2022

Oman records RO1.15bn budget surplus for 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has reported a budget surplus of RO1.146bn for the full year 2022 against an estimated deficit of RO1.550bn in the beginning of last year year, mainly due to higher oil and gas revenues.

'Preliminary results indicated that the state's general budget for the fiscal year 2022 witnessed remarkable positive development. The financial performance of the budget improved, recording an increase in revenues by 34.5 per cent compared to what was endorsed at the beginning of 2022, with expectations of achieving a financial surplus of about RO1.146bn,' the Ministry of Finance said in its 2023 budget statement to Oman News Agency.

The sultanate's total public revenues for the 2022 budget surged to RO14.234bn compared to the budget estimates of RO10.580bn, thanks to higher oil and gas income during the year.

'This rise [in revenues] is mainly attributed to the surge in average oil price to US\$94 per barrel during 2022 compared to US\$50 per barrel assumed in the 2022 budget estimates,' the



Oman's total public revenues for the year 2022 surged to RO14.234bn compared to 2022 budget estimate of RO10.580bn

ministry noted.

Oman's net oil revenues jumped by 66 per cent to RO7.457bn in 2022, while gas revenues rose 29 per cent to RO3.557bn.

'The 2022 budget achieved additional financial revenues as a result of the rise in global oil prices. This contributed to accelerating economic recovery and improving financial and economic indicators, by directing these additional financial revenues towards managing the lending portfolio, reducing public debt, enhancing social spending, and stimulating economic growth,' the Ministry of Finance said.

As Oman reported its first surplus since 2014, the government in 2022 did not resort to borrowing and withdrawing from

reserves to finance the deficit.

The additional financial revenues enabled the government to pay off part of the public debt and manage the lending portfolio. This contributed to reducing the total volume of public debt from RO20.8bn at the end of 2021 to RO17.7bn in 2022. The public debt ratio decreased in 2022 to reach about 43 per cent of the GDP compared to 83 per cent estimated in the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan.

Helped by improving fiscal position due to the government reforms and higher oil prices, the sultanate's sovereign credit ratings were upgraded by various global rating agencies in 2022.

Recently, S&P raised its foreign and local currency long-term sovereign credit ratings of Oman to 'BB' from 'BB-', the agency's second upgrade for Oman in 2022.

'Oman's fiscal and external positions are benefiting from government reforms and higher oil prices. In addition to rebuilding fiscal buffers on the back of windfall oil revenue, the Omani government has continued to reduce the budget's reliance on oil receipts, in line with its medium-term fiscal plan till 2025,' S&P said.

Oman establishes integrated company to manage gas assets

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Finance announced the establishment of the Integrated Gas Company (IGC) to manage the sultanate's natural gas assets, including exports and imports of gas and its relevant products.

The ministry on Thursday issued a decision establishing IGC and endorsing its Articles of Association. The ministry explained that Integrated Gas Company is a state-owned enterprise.

'The IGC will act on behalf of the government of Oman in the management of all allocations, assets, rights and obligations of natural gas purchase, sales, transport, imports and exports, as well as all relevant products,' the ministry said in a statement to Oman News Agency.

The ministry said that the IGC is entrusted with improving the fiscal performance of Oman by removing the expenses of gas purchase and transport from the state budget, while at the same time transferring net gas revenue to the treasury.

The new company will also enhance the efficiency of the gas sector, ensure the adherence of



Integrated Gas Company will implement government policies and plans related to gas prices and quotas allocated to each sector and undertake the selling of gas to gas-based industries

producers and consumers to the contracts and agreements signed in the gas sector.

IGC will also implement the government's policies and plans related to gas prices and quotas allocated to each sector and undertake the selling of gas to gas-

based industries.

Following the establishment of IGC, the sultanate's 2023 state budget has estimated a decline in gas revenues.

'The decline [in gas revenue] is due to the establishment of the Integrated Gas Company with a view to realising a number of goals. These include the improvement of Oman's fiscal performance indicators by removing gas purchase and transport expenses from the state budget and transferring the net revenues from gas sales to the state treasury,' the ministry said.

Gas revenues in the state budget 2023 are estimated at RO1.4bn, thanks to the establishment of Integrated Gas Company, which will purchase and sell gas and then transfer gas revenues directly into the treasury.

Gas revenues accounts for 14 per cent of total estimated revenues in 2023 budget.

Oman approves state budget for 2023

Continued from Page 01

Current expenditure in this year's budget was estimated to be RO8.620bn distributed as follows: 35 per cent in defence and security expenditures, 51 per cent in expenditures of civil ministries and 14 per cent in public debt service.

The allocations for the 'ministries and government units spending item' in the budget were raised by 2.7 per cent to about RO4.420bn, including the

cost of periodic allowance for the employees and for the promotions of employees.

In the item of public debt service expenses, a sum of RO1.2bn was endorsed by calculating the expected interest payments on existing and planned loans for 2023.

The 2023 budget has allocated a sum of RO900mn for the development projects.

Spending on contributions and other expenditures in the 2023 budget was estimated at

about RO1.830bn, which constitutes about 16 per cent of the total public spending.

This year's budget has two new items, namely, projects with a developmental impact (with a sum of RO200mn) and supporting the social protection system (with sum of RO384mn).

The total endorsed spending in the 2023 budget for social and basic sectors amounted to about RO4.3bn, or 38 per cent of the total public spending, distributed as follows: 44 per cent for the

education sector, 22 per cent for the social security and welfare, 12 per cent for the housing sector, and 22 per cent for the health sector.

The volume of investment spending financed by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in the 2023 budget was estimated at about RO1.9bn, while the contribution of the Energy Development Oman (EDO) in investment projects for oil and gas production was estimated at RO1.5bn.

CBO launches Wakala liquidity instrument

Muscat - The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has introduced Wakala Money Market Instrument on December 28, to support an effective management of liquidity by Islamic banks and Islamic banking windows in Oman.

This product is part of several Islamic liquidity management instruments that the Central Bank of Oman has developed for Islamic banking entities in Oman, that shall be introduced in phases, both for absorbing ex-



cess liquidity and for providing liquidity support.

Under Wakala money market product, Islamic banking entities

will place funds with the central bank in US dollar for a minimum duration of one day to maximum of three months, that shall be managed and invested by CBO in Sahria'a compliant instruments.

Furthermore, to develop these liquidity management instruments, the Central Bank of Oman has worked closely with its High Shari'a Supervisory Authority (HSSA), which has reviewed and approved all the product structures and relevant contracts.

India's Adani completes takeover of NDTV

Mumbai, India - Indian tycoon Gautam Adani on Friday secured a majority stake in leading news broadcaster NDTV, finalising a hostile takeover that has sparked press freedom fears in the world's biggest democracy.

Adani, 60, is the world's third-richest person, with an estimated net worth of US\$130bn and interests ranging from Australian coal mines to India's busiest ports.

His business empire first began buying up NDTV shares in August, a move its founders Prannoy and Radhika Roy said had come without their involvement or consent.

But after months of negotiations, the Roy family agreed to



sell most of their remaining equity, and the Adani Group said in a Friday stock market disclosure that its subsidiary RRRP had bought a 27.26 per cent stake in the company.

The latest purchase gives Adani's conglomerate a 64.71 per cent stake in NDTV, renowned for inviting government critics and its hard-hitting

reporting in a TV news landscape dominated by pro-Modi coverage.

Adani has pledged to guarantee the channel's editorial independence but also told the Financial Times last month that journalists should acknowledge when the government was performing well.

"Independence means if government has done something wrong, you say it's wrong," Adani told the British broadsheet.

"But at the same time, you should have courage when the government is doing the right thing every day. You have to also say that."

Under Modi, India has slipped 10 places in the Reporters With-

out Borders global press freedom ranking and is now 150 out of 180 surveyed countries.

Critical reporters often find themselves behind bars and hounded on social media by supporters of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Adani this year overtook fellow Indian Mukesh Ambani to become Asia's richest man, behind France's luxury goods mogul Bernard Arnault and Tesla boss Elon Musk.

But his group's growth into capital-intensive businesses has raised alarm, with analysts from Fitch Group's CreditSights warning in August that it was "deeply overleveraged".

AFF

OQ Gas Network launches its new corporate identity

Muscat - OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) has launched its new corporate identity. The new visual identity brings together the vision and mission of OQ, the global integrated energy group.

Many countries around the world seek to increasingly utilise conventional natural gas in their power and utilities service production such as factories and electricity power plants due to its role as an enabler of the energy transition that could generate benefits for the well-being of people.

In line with the integrated framework of all business lines under OQ Group, OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) is determined to



contribute to Oman's zero carbon target by 2050. Hence, the new OQGN brand identity comes to create synergy towards this aspiration. This is particularly reflected in the new identity design which is inspired by the mother brand focusing more on energy and integration; not to mention the emphasis on efficiency and environmental sustainability.

Mansoor bin Ali al Abdali, managing director of OQ Gas Network, said, "The launch of OQGN's new brand aims to support the vision of OQ as one of the biggest integrated groups operating in the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The new brand embodies the values of the group and underlines its commitment to delivering gas reliably and sustainably now and in the future."

He added, "The launch of the new brand is a very important milestone as we usher in a new chapter of growth. At OQGN we are proud to be a key enabler of sustained industrial growth and economic progress in Oman."

Stocks stumble to end 'miserable' 2022

New York, US – Global stock markets wrapped up their worst performances in years on Friday before heading into 2023 under recession fears following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, high inflation and rising interest rates.

Both US and European indices closed their final sessions of the year in the red.

For the year, Frankfurt was down more than 12 per cent and Paris lost 9.5 per cent for their worst performances since 2018. London, however, was up 0.9 per cent in 2022 as the energy sector was buoyed by soaring energy prices.

Wall Street saw its worst annual drop since 2008, with the S&P 500 index down around 20 per cent and the tech-heavy Nasdaq losing about 30 per cent for the year.

Equities were slammed as the US Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and Bank of England aggressively lifted interest rates in a bid to tackle rampant consumer price rises. The move carries the risk of sparking recession as higher borrowing costs slow economic activity.

US tech companies were hit particularly hard as they are usually boosted by lower interest rates. The MCSI World Equity



A trader reacts on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange at the closing bell on Friday in New York (AFP)

Index has lost almost a fifth in its worst annual performance since 2008, when markets were ravaged by the global financial crisis.

Asia-Pacific markets finished their last sessions mostly in the green on Friday. But for the year, Hong Kong

tanked 15.5 per cent and Shanghai dived 15.1 per cent in the biggest annual slumps since 2011 and 2018, respectively.

Covid spiked once more in China in December, after Beijing relaxed its strict curbs in the face of rare public outcry. The surge

has also prompted worries about the impact on stretched global supply chains.

Tokyo plunged 9.4 per cent in the first annual fall since 2018 but the Bank of Japan maintained its ultra-easy monetary policy, in contrast with other central banks, to help its fragile economy.

'Pitiful end to miserable year'

"It's shaping up to be a pitiful end to a miserable year in stock markets," OANDA trading platform analyst Craig Erlam told AFP.

He said 2022 had "brought an end to an era" of low interest rates that fueled tech and crypto booms.

"That's been replaced with soaring inflation and interest rates, immense economic uncertainty and the reshaping of energy markets in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine," Erlam added.

In commodities, oil prices rallied in 2022 with Brent gaining about 10 per cent and the West Texas Intermediate adding around seven percent.

However, they remain significantly below peaks struck in March on supply woes after key producer Russia invaded its

neighbor, sending natural gas prices also spiking.

Britain and other major economies now face the likely prospect of grim recessions next year, as consumers and businesses battle rampant inflation and rising rates after years of ultra-low borrowing costs.

"The most important take of the year is: the era of easy money ended, and ended for good," noted SwissQuote analyst Ipek Ozkardeskaya.

"And given that there is still plenty of cheap central bank liquidity waiting to be pulled back, the situation may not get better before it gets worse," she said.

"Recession, inflation, stagflation will likely dominate headlines next year."

London was down 0.8 per cent and Frankfurt shed 1.1 per cent in half-day sessions ahead of the New Year holiday. Paris closed 1.5 per cent lower.

On Wall Street, the Dow ended 0.2 per cent lower while the tech-heavy Nasdaq shed 0.1 per cent.

"It would appear that people have checked out for the year -- and have settled back into holiday mode for New Year celebrations," Erlam said.

AFP

China's manufacturing activity drops despite lifted Covid restrictions

Beijing, China – China's manufacturing activity contracted sharply in December for the third month in a row, according to official figures released Saturday, despite Beijing's loosening of Covid restrictions at the beginning of the month.

The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) – a key gauge of manufacturing in the world's second-biggest economy – came in at 47 points, down from November's 48 and well below the 50-point mark separating growth from contraction, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics.

For more than two years, China had insisted on a zero-Covid strategy of stamping out outbreaks with strict quarantines, lockdowns and mass testing -- a headline policy that reverberated across the global economy.

On December 7, Beijing abruptly loosened pandemic restrictions, but despite that, the country is still struggling to recover due to a surge in Covid cases.

"In December, due to the impact of the epidemic and other factors... China's economic prosperity has generally declined," NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe said in a statement.

"The epidemic has had a significant impact on business production and demand, staff presence, logistics and distribu-



The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) - a key gauge of manufacturing in the world's second-biggest economy - came in at 47 points

tion."

The index has not been in positive territory since September, and December's figure was lower than the 47.8 reading predicted by Bloomberg analysts.

Zhao, however, struck a note of optimism in his statement.

"As the epidemic situation gradually improves, the market trend is expected to pick up later," he wrote.

China's zero-Covid strategy

was based on widespread testing, strict monitoring of movement, and quarantine for those testing positive.

Those measures, which led to unannounced plant closures, disrupted supply chains and forced some companies to close permanently.

For its part, the non-manufacturing PMI – which includes the services and construction sectors – also contracted further this month, to 41.6 points from 46.7 in November.

The government has set a growth target of about 5.5 per cent this year, after reaching its goal of over 8 per cent in 2021.

But many economists now consider the 2022 target unrealistic.

China will unveil its gross domestic product (GDP) performance for the year in January.

AFP

Croatia adopts euro currency

Croatia on Sunday switched to the euro currency and entered Europe's passport-free zone – two major milestones for the country after joining the European Union nearly a decade ago.

At midnight, the Balkan nation bid farewell to its kuna currency and became the 20th member of the eurozone.

It is now the 27th nation in the passport-free Schengen zone, the world's largest, which enables more than 400 million people to move freely around its members.

"It is the season of new beginnings. And there is no place in Europe where this is more true than here in Croatia," tweeted EU chief Ursula von der Leyen, as she arrived in Croatia to mark the occasion.

She met Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and Slovenian President Nataša Pirc Musar at a border crossing with EU member Slovenia, and was then to head on to Zagreb.

Experts say the adoption of the euro will help shield Croatia's economy at a time when inflation is soaring worldwide after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent food and fuel prices through the roof.

But feelings among Croatians are mixed.

While they welcome the end of border controls, some fear the euro switch will lead to an increase in the cost of living as



Clients wait in line to enter a bank and withdraw cash in the center of Zagreb on December 30, 2022 (AFP)

businesses round up prices when they convert them.

"It will be difficult. Prices that are already high will become even higher," said Ivana Tonic, a teacher from Zagreb.

'Elite club'

But tourist agency employee Marko Pavic said Croatia was joining "an elite club".

"The euro was already a value measure -- psychologically it's nothing new -- while entry into Schengen is fantastic news for tourism," he told AFP.

Use of the euro is already widespread in Croatia.

Croatians have long valued their most precious assets such

as cars and apartments in euros, displaying a lack of confidence in the local currency.

About 80 percent of bank deposits are denominated in euros and Zagreb's main trading partners are in the eurozone.

Officials have defended the decision to join the eurozone and Schengen, saying that the country thus completes its full EU integration.

Croatia, a former Yugoslav republic of 3.9mn people that fought a war of independence in the 1990s, joined the European Union in 2013.

Experts say the adoption of the euro will lower borrowing conditions amid economic hard-

ship.

Croatia's inflation rate reached 13.5 per cent in November compared to 10 per cent in the eurozone.

Analysts stress that eastern EU members with currencies outside of the eurozone, such as Poland or Hungary, have been even more vulnerable to surging inflation.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday hailed Croatia's switch to the euro, describing it as a "stable and solid" currency that had contributed to Europe's resilience in facing the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

AFP

Iran replaces central bank chief as rial hits record low

Tehran, Iran – Sanctions-hit Iran replaced the head of the central bank, state media reported, as the value of the local currency plunged to new lows.

"After accepting the resignation of Ali Salehabadi, the government board elected Mohammad Reza Farzin as the new head of the central bank," state TV said.

The move came as the rial shed nearly a third of its value on the parallel market in the past two months, from around 330,000 to 430,000 to the dollar, with inflation skyrocketing.

It comes as the country has been rocked by months of

protests triggered by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini on September 16.

Iran has been slapped with rounds of US sanctions since 2018 when then-president Donald Trump withdrew his country from the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers.

The agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to guarantee that Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon -- something it has always denied wanting to do.

AFP

Finland gets floating terminal to replace Russian gas

Helenski, Finland – An offshore natural gas terminal has arrived in Finland as part of the country's efforts to replace Russian supplies after Moscow stopped deliveries, the Finnish gas grid operator said Wednesday.

Almost as long as three football fields, the Exemplar vessel, which has arrived in Inkoo port in southern Finland, will allow the country to turn liquefied natural gas (LNG) imported from other countries back into its gas form.

"The gas can come from anywhere in the world where LNG is supplied, but not from Russia," Gasgrid CEO Olli Sipilä told AFP.

Russia stopped supplying natural gas to neighbouring Finland via pipeline in May, after the



Nordic country refused to pay the supplier in rubles.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Moscow told clients from "unfriendly countries" -- including EU member states -- to

pay for gas in rubles, a way to sidestep Western financial sanctions against its central bank.

To make up for the shortfall and rid itself from the depending on Russian gas, Finland at the

same time announced it had signed a 10-year lease agreement for the LNG terminal ship with US-based Excelerate Energy.

"The floating terminal vessel turned out to be the fastest and most effective solution to phase out dependency on Russian gas in Finland and to ensure the continuity of gas supplies in Finland," grid operator Gasgrid said in a statement.

Exemplar, which is scheduled to remain in the port for the next 10 years, is a Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) that transforms LNG carried by a tanker and injects it into the pipeline network.

Gasgrid said the aim is for the terminal to supply Finnish house-

holds, industry and energy producers by mid-January.

The terminal will also enable deliveries to the Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – and to Poland through the Balticconnector pipeline, which links Finland and Estonia.

Gazprom said in May it had supplied 1.49bn cubic metres of natural gas to Finland in 2021, equal to about two thirds of the country's gas consumption.

However, natural gas only accounted for around eight percent of Finland's energy supply.

According to Statistics Finland, the main domestic electricity sources were nuclear, hydro and wind power.

AFP

Bank Muscat celebrates partner successes

In line with the bank’s commitment to further strengthen its relationship and support to partners, Bank Muscat recently hosted a special event to celebrate the achievements of new and used vehicle dealers in the automobile sector.

The event was attended by Ahmed Faqir al Bulushi, chief banking officer, Bank Muscat, and a number of representatives from auto dealerships from across Oman. This event was part of the bank’s constant initiatives targeted at enhancing partnership and cooperation with customers and partners and share ideas and feedback in line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’.

Speaking on the occasion, Saleh Mohammed al Maaini, deputy general manager – Capital Regions, Bank Muscat, said, “We are delighted to host our valued partners today as we constantly endeavour to celebrate this partnership and cooperation. Our partners play a huge role in helping the bank to provide the best offers, services, and facilities for its valued customers and give them the chance to own their dream cars. This success in the field would not have been possible without the cooperation, trust and partnership between the bank and all car companies, agencies and galleries in various governorates.”

Maaini further elaborated, “Throughout four decades, the bank was keen to develop banking services and facilities for individuals and improving the quality of the various products



offered to enhance financial inclusion and offer a wide range of options to meet customers’ needs and aspirations. We are proud of the success we have achieved in this field, and we are pleased with the positive feedback and trust in the bank’s services and products. The bank is keen to further continue to provide its valued customers the best services possible.”

Radhiya Hassan al Lawatiya, head of Sales, Bank Muscat, said, “Bank Muscat is committed towards maintaining a strong relationship with car companies, agencies and galleries across the sultanate in order to develop services, facilities and offers to

meet the current and future needs of customers. Working towards achieving this goal, the bank launched, in 2003, its Sayyarati financing product to help customers own their dream cars and benefit from the different facilities and easy procedures this product provides.

“Customers can obtain all of these services by visiting any Bank Muscat’s branch or one of Sayyarati centers in Al Wattayah in Muscat Governorate and Salalah in Dhofar Governorate. We appreciate this partnership and confidence in the services and facilities the bank offers which aim to contribute in the development of the automotive sector in the country.”

Radhiya added, “The pandemic affected economies around the world and, thus, affected various sectors and markets, including the automobile sector. However, with the expected improvement of the economy, the markets will further continue to recover. According to the statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information, the total number of vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman, by the end of October 2022, reached 1,593,897 vehicles, and this confirms that these numbers are increasing compared to previous years, for both new and used cars.

“The lending portfolio in car sales is also witnessing growth compared to last year, which can be seen as a result of all efforts contributing to the stability of the sector. We are happy to continue organising such events.”



‘Hilia’ opens third outlet

‘Hilia’, a leading silver Jewellery brand for men and women in Oman, has opened the doors of its third showroom at the sultanate’s largest shopping destination – the Mall of Oman. The opening was held under the auspicious of H E Faisal Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The outlet’s launch ceremony commenced with a brief introductory presentation about the

brand, its history and development, right up to the opening of its first outlet. Subsequently, Salim al Numan, CEO of Hilia detailed the brand’s journey, right from the opening of its first showroom in Al Hail back in 2017, to the second branch in Al Araiimi Boulevard in 2019.

“The success of ‘Hilia’ and its ability to expand its customer reach and market presence in a short time, is based on our strategy of continuous growth and

development. Equipped with innovative solutions and rich expertise in the silver industry, we aim to provide a world-class customer service experience and exquisite offerings of silver Jewellery in Oman,” he said.

“Our Mall of Oman outlet offers a distinctive collection of men and women’s silver jewellery, coupled with high-quality services from our experienced Omani staff to ensure a seamless end-to-end experience.”

Alizz Islamic Shari’a Supervisory Board discusses new products

Sheikh Essam al Enezi, chairman of the Sharia Supervisory Board at Alizz Islamic Bank, thanked the employees of the bank’s internal Shari’a Audit & Compliance department for their efforts and roles in ensuring the bank’s adherence to the controls and standards of Islamic Shari’a in all banking transactions.

Islamic Sharia is the pillar on which banking products and services are based on in Islamic banks, and the guidance of Shari’a has created honest and transparent transactions that are compatible with the needs of the society and customers.

Islamic Banking is witnessing an increasing demand due to its compatibility with the Shari’a regulatory requirements that give customers peace of mind and reassurance, a press release



said.

The fourth and final meeting of the Sharia Supervisory Board this year, was chaired by Dr Enezi in the presence of the members of the board - Sheikh Ahmed Subhi al Ayadi and Sheikh Ibrahim bin Nasser al Sawafi, and Ali bin Saif al Mani, general manager.

The Board discussed a plan to

launch new products during the upcoming year that meets the growing need of customers to receive innovative products that are compatible with Islamic Shari’a, desiring to place a diverse suite of Islamic products and services in their hands. It also discussed the plans of the Shari’ Audit and Compliance department for the year 2023.

Issa Bin Salim al Riyami, head of Shari’a Audit and Compliance said “Any achieved success comes as a result of the focused efforts of everyone in the Shari’a Board. The past period witnessed comprehensive reviews of all banking transactions that Alizz Islamic Bank offers to its customers to ensure its commitment to that.”

Omantel Innovation Labs announces startups



Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the names of the Omani startups selected for the 2nd cohort of the Omantel Accelerator programme managed by the Omantel Innovation Labs.

Cohort 2 of the Omantel Accelerator will include three startups that were selected from more than 100 startups that applied online after a public call for

applications. These startups were selected after a rigorous selection process that included bootcamps and interviews with experts from within and outside Omantel, a press release said.

The selected startups are

AirGo, iON and Touchpoynts which helps technology professionals enhance the customer journey.

AirGo is a modern high-tech enterprise founded in 2020 to lead the drone industry in the

Sultanate of Oman by offering intelligent services and products. AirGo provides an Unmanned Traffic Management System named Tahleeq in Oman. It operates as a platform-as-a-service that enables businesses, governmental entities, and educational institutions to avoid the operating risk, regulatory challenges, and capital expenses associated with drone operations.

iON is a social commerce platform that helps sellers achieve higher conversion rate by providing them with the ability to post products/services on social media, create and customise private online stores, manage product inventory, payments and shipping from multiple sales channels, and a customer chat centre under different social media platforms.



Audi Oman announces exclusive new offers

Audi Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has announced an exclusive offer on dynamic and efficient top-range Audi models.

Audi Oman is extending a VAT free benefit on Audi models and other offers include five-year service or 75,000km, three-year unlimited mileage warranty, five-year roadside assistance, free first year registration, free window tint, special government

privilege applicable and easy trade-in facilities for all Oman vehicles, a press release said.

The offer on 2022 models is valid until January 9 and is not in conjunction with any other deals.

Christian Nehme, general manage, said, “We continuously strive to add value to customers in every way and this campaign assures our dedication to understand their requirement.”

AJIA launches the New BMW 7 Series



Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, successfully launched the new BMW 7 Series. The complete luxury segment was presented at the event, including the new BMW X7 and BMW 8 Series.

At the official unveiling event in Oman, the all-new BMW 7 Series made its first appearance with Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, as the BMW Group brings forward a new era with sustainability and digitalization at its core, a press release said.

Featuring a modern aesthetic in its renewed exterior and interior, the BMW 7 Series celebrates 45 years of success since its initial debut with the inclusion of a range of new advancements.

Forged from a rich design heritage, the new BMW 7 Series incorporates a modern style that focuses on the essentials in both its exterior and interior design.

Bold and brilliant from every angle, the BMW 7 Series and its ground-breaking evolution bring forward the unwavering sense of luxury, featuring Swarovski crystals embedded across the front lights.

Innovative options such as the BMW Theatre Screen, the multi-sensory vehicle experience BMW iDrive with the latest generation of BMW Operating System 8 combine with the BMW Curved Display and the Manoeuvre Assistant for automated parking and manoeuvring to provide a luxurious yet user-friendly driving experience.

Speaking on the success of the launch, Rachid Zamani, managing director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, said, "The unveiling of the all-new BMW 7 Series this evening has been truly exciting for us. It has been an absolute privilege to be involved with the journey of the next step in the BMW Group's flagship model's history. The innovation and creativity that has gone into this latest model has been truly revolutionary and we look forward to seeing the models take the roads of Oman very soon."

PASI signs agreement with Bank Muscat

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) signed an agreement with Bank Muscat for the introduction of collections of contributions through Direct Debit solution.

This solution will help enhance the efficiency of revenues and expenditures, minimise the time and effort spent on managing and collecting contributions, and help handling the challenges of installment checks. It aims to shift from manual to automated work methods that are more efficient and accurate, and it can be accessed through various channels. It will also help customers pay their contributions in timely manners, as well as enhance constructive partnership with local banks in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement was signed by Dr Faisal Abdullah al Farsi, general manager, Public Authority for Social Insurance, and Ilham Murtadha aAl Hamaid, general manager - Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, a press release said.



PASI is the public authority in the sultanate, providing social protection to the insured Omani citizens and their dependents. It attaches great importance to technological developments to provide high quality insurance services to customers. Digital services have witnessed a remarkable development over the past few years. It offers ease, speed and high security, and it

provides innovative smart systems available in new advanced applications and software.

PASI is committed to contributing to digital transformation to help achieve strategic goals in line with the government's guidelines. Throughout the past years, the public authority has implemented various policies and projects which aim to simplify procedures and make them

faster.

Bank Muscat has been a pioneer in Oman in implementing digital banking solutions and is focused on helping corporates to make a smooth transition towards efficient tech-focused processes. Through this collaboration, PASI will offer collections of contribution to corporates, ministries and institutions through the Direct Debit solution.

Apollo Hospital pledges to continue mission

V T Saileswaran, Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Oman, has reiterated the group's commitment to continue its mission in Oman

"At Apollo Hospital, we consider it our privilege to care for our patients, and I am humbled by the confidence you place in us as you make what may be the single most important decision of your life. We have remained devoted to our mission of saving lives and placed the patient at the centre of everything we do.

"I would like to add that the team at Apollo Hospitals Oman, who devote so much time and energy to assist our patients in overcoming their specific health challenges, are the heart and soul of our organisation which has touched over 3 million lives over the past 18 years. The lives of our



V T Saileswaran

patients are profoundly improved each day, thanks to the efforts of these doctors, nurses, paramedics and all other staff who combine the miracle of empathy with the marvel of technology."

He further stated, that after the COVID-19 pandemic scare, the medical team went through a roller coaster ride and faced many challenges. However, in the new normal,

while everyone was focused on market driven cost-cutting strategies, the group embarked on a new chapter of growth and launched its latest healthcare facility - Apollo Super Speciality Hospital, Al Hail (ASSH) - which provides world class medical treatment in Orthopedics, Gastroenterology, Urology, Obstetrics and Gynecology amongst all other major specialties, he said.

"We are committed to the people of Oman and are absolutely confident of meeting Oman's expanding healthcare demand. We will continue to invest in integrated patient-centered care; highest standards of clinical excellence, best professionals, latest technology and world class infrastructure to ensure you have access to the best medical care at most affordable prices."



NBO recognised by MoSD for empowering disabled persons

In recognition of its commitment towards empowering communities, National Bank of Oman (NBO) was recently awarded by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) for supporting people with disabilities across Oman.

The accolade was awarded during a ceremony organised by MoSD on the occasion of the United Nations-sanctioned International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all

spheres of society. The event was held under the auspices of H E Dr Laila Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, while it was sponsored by NBO, a press release said.

NBO aims to support and empower all members of the communities in which it operates, which is in line with its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme. The bank's CSR activities include efforts to support and promote a society that is inclusive of people with disabilities and that aims to further increase

their participation in public life. Last year, NBO was awarded by MoSD for supporting people with disabilities in Oman as well.

Through its active CSR programme, NBO continues to fulfil its commitment to make a positive impact on society. Its CSR activities, which are carried out throughout the year, include a variety of educational and youth-led programmes, donations and sponsorships, all reflecting the bank's core values and aimed at supporting those in need in particular.

UAE's first NH Collection hotel to open in Feb

UAE-headquartered upscale real estate developer, Seven Tides, has confirmed that the Emirates' first NH Collection hotel will open its doors to the public in February 2023.

NH Collection Dubai The Palm is a 533-key property located on Seven Tides' Seven Palm development - a two-tower complex that overlooks the lagoon of Dubai's world-famous Palm Jumeirah, a press release said.

Operated by Minor Hotels



and adjacent to Seven Palm Residences, the tower housing NH Collection Dubai The Palm will offer a diverse range of high-end accommodation, amenities and

food and beverage venues to guests, residents and visitors.

Ghanim Bin Sulayem, operations director, Seven Tides, said, "This project will deliver exceptional guest experiences, including spectacular views of the Arabian Gulf and the Dubai skyline, as well as access to landmarks and attractions across our emirate and beyond. We are confident this complex will add significant value to Dubai's thriving real estate landscape.

"NH Collection Dubai The

Palm will feature an extensive range of premium facilities, including our 45-metre rooftop infinity pool, a fully-equipped fitness centre, a kids' club, an NH Collection Spa and much more", added Bin Sulayem.

The hotel includes 227 guest rooms and suites as well as 306 studios and apartments. Guests will be able to choose from 11 room categories, and those who opt for top-end accommodation will also gain exclusive access to NH Collection Premium Lounge.

MSC World Europa calls on Mina Rashid

After serving as a floating hotel during the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the MSC World Europa, a futuristic, lower-carbon-fuelled cruise ship, made its first call at Mina Rashid on the 21st of December 2022.

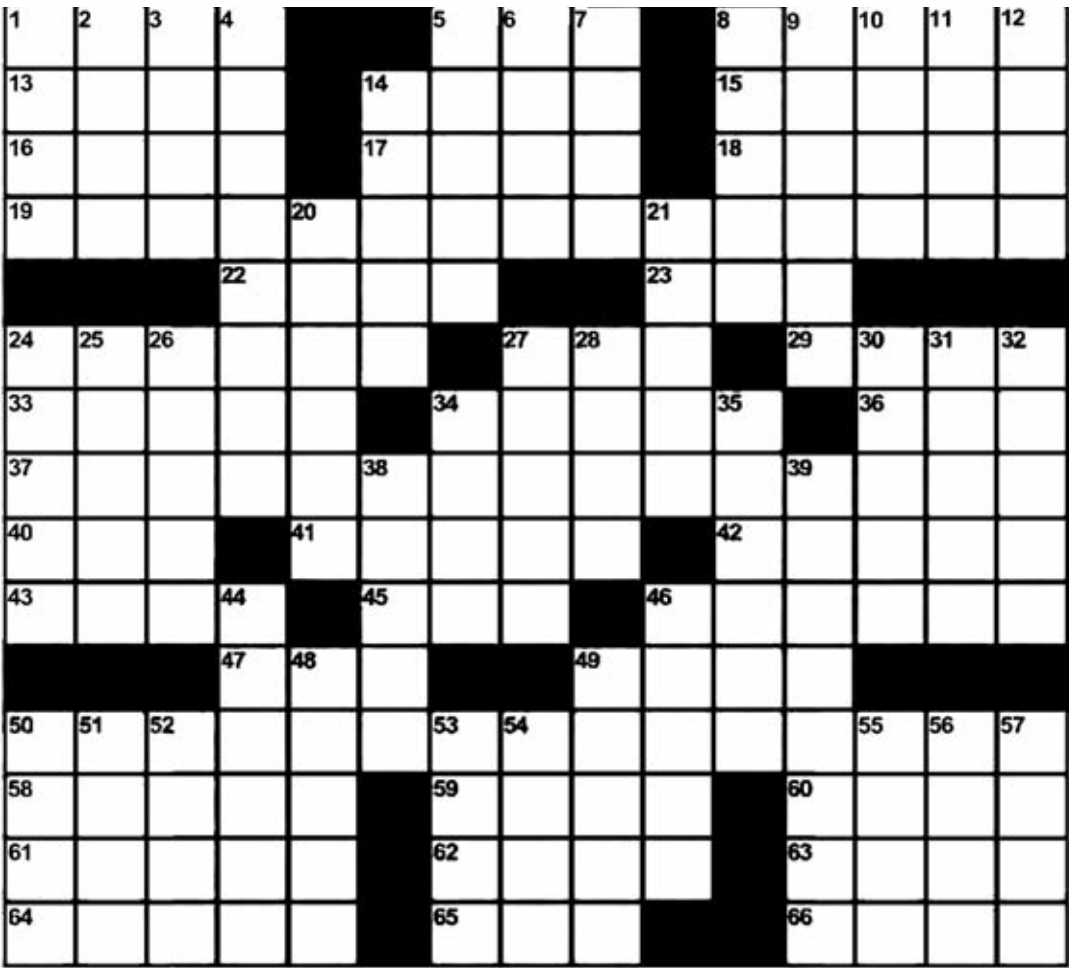
The vessel began its new winter season with a 4-night sail from Doha to Dubai, reinforcing Mina Rashid and the Emirate's position as the region's most preferred destination for leisure

marine activities, a press release said

Carrying over 4,500 passengers, the vessel and its crew, led by Captain Marco Massa, were welcomed by Esam Ahmad, senior manager - Business management, P&O Marinas. The captain was presented with a custom-made plaque celebrating the event, in front of senior officials representing MSC and DP World.



DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Cereal grains
5) Grazing ground
8) Noticeably shocked
13) Mingle-mangle
14) Improvise musically
15) Something to work for
16) Duck's home
17) Mayberry drunkard
18) Man with a mission?
19) Not be taken in
22) Green gem
23) Hawaiian gift
24) Chinese government offices
27) Monopoly token
29) Birds that sound de-serving?
33) Prefix with "men-tioned"
34) Bettered, as skills
36) Awed answer
37) Is hardly angelic
40) Noise of disapproval
41) Make fun of
42) Gov't interest bearer
43)_ran
45) Feeling of anger
46) Move unsteadily
47) Dust remover

49) Adventurous
50) Have a different opin-ion of
58) Keyboard key
59) 1996 presidential candidate
60) Small combo
61) Past its prime
62) Costly
63) Not yet a marquis
64) Trucker's expenses
65) Done with a wink
66) Not the original color

DOWN

1) "My bad"
2) Soothing succulent
3) Fork feature
4) Fountain worker of old
5) Cafe concoction
6) Arabian chieftain
7) It abuts the bema
8) Copious
9) Water polo position
10) Sheriff Taylor of May-berry
11) "Scope" prefix
12) Storm centers
14) Annuls
20) Most together men-tally

21) Make changes to
24) Big Three conference site
25) Run_ of the law (com-mit crimes)
26) Makes irrelevant, as a debating point
27) It may be taken for a ride
28) Poker starter
30) Mechanical being
31) Nick of Hollywood
32) Complete and utter
34) Wintry frost
35) "This I gotta hear!"
38) Pretend to have, as an illness
39) Like a first draft
44) "1984" author
46) Babel had one
48) Buenos_
49) Secure, as a sailor's rope
50) Optional part of a suit
51) "What's gotten_ you?"
52) And others, for short
53) Does simple arith-metic

54) Holiday song
55) Not black or white
56) Engage for work
57) Gave an account

NOTE PAD

IBEAM INEPT OHM
DIANA TORAH FAA
STRANGETALE FBI
TIME RABID
PEWTERS HAMLET
ONEILL PAYOLA
SNITS LINES TNT
EURO SEEKS SNOW
RID CHARS THERE
DROOPS BROWSE
DRYROT DEEPSET
BREED TEEN
YEA ODDSANDENDS
TAM BINAL ETUDE
EDS APART DANTE

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Sometimes acting in a traditional way isn't terribly rewarding. Doing something the same way over and over again, following the path of what has gone before, or doing whatever has always been done just because it's always been done that way can be a total drag. Luckily, you've got more than a few bright and fresh new ideas swimming around in your head, and today is a great time to try some on for size. Step out of the status quo and move on to a new path.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Has your pride recently suffered a bit of a blow? The best way to rebuild your ego is to get right back in the saddle. Return to the scene of the crime and try, try again. Did you get shot down after asking someone out? Ask someone else out. They're likely to say yes. If you're struggling with a new hobby, you have to keep at it. Practice, practice, practice. That is the only way to win or achieve any great goals in life.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Having a healthy debate with a person you don't usually connect with very well should be a goal for you today. This type of discussion can challenge your intellect and offer you a great deal of satisfaction whether you end up winning the argument or not. So don't be afraid to ruffle a few feathers. Start a conversation about a controversial topic. Sometimes the best conversations are the ones you have with a person who totally disagrees with you.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

There might be a bit of a power struggle going on early in the day, but it will be a playful one. Someone has an agenda that isn't too popular with the group, but you will have a good suggestion that can help folks come together. Your ability to play peacemaker is especially strong today, so be confident that you can help find solutions in politically tricky situations. By the end of today you can step back into the background and have your regular life back.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you keep doing the same things over and over again, you're not going to learn anything new. Today, you owe it to yourself to mix up your usual routine and delve into some foreign territory. Whether you simply take a different route to work or decide to embark on a whole new career altogether, your day will be a lot more interesting if you alter your usual method of doing things. Flexibility is something you have to exercise every once in a while or you'll get stuck in a rut.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You should be prepared to take over for a floundering group today. The members of this group aren't quite as mature as you are, and they need to be led along like children in kindergarten. You need to be the grown-up in this particular scenario, and you shouldn't feel like you have to sugarcoat what you have to say. Tell it like it is. You'll waste less time and get more accomplished. Making everyone feel comfortable isn't your responsibility.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

You might not be the smartest person in the room today, but your intellectual prowess will distinguish you. Speak up when a bad idea is being offered up for a vote. Use all your diplomatic ways to charm everyone into seeing things in a more productive way (your way). As long as you assume everyone is at least as smart as you, there is no way you can offend others. And if anyone's ego gets a bit bruised in the process, that's their problem, not yours.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Are you growing impatient with someone? If you feel that by this point certain milestones should have been achieved but haven't, today is the day to speak up. Chances are this person is completely unaware of your frustration. Step outside of yourself and realize that all your internal dialogue is silent. No one else can hear it unless you voice it. Have the courage to speak your mind and try to speed them along. They're more willing than you realize.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

With all the uncertainty going on in your life right now, you need the comfort of home, friends, and family to keep you feeling grounded. Set aside some extended time, like a long weekend, if possible, to hunker down at home. Skip the adventures right now and get back in touch with the simpler things in life. Your people would love a chance to spend more time with you. Some of your relationships could use an infusion of new energy, and the timing is perfect for that now.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You already realize that just doing what feels right isn't the best way to run your life, but today, you really need to focus on staying rooted in reality. Try to go for intellect rather than emotion when you're connecting with people. Don't just look in their eyes and try to sense their intentions You have to listen to what they say and completely understand their meaning. The time for guessing or assuming is over. You need to know who you're dealing with

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Take a look around your home today and identify the rooms or areas that could use some improvement in either structure or décor. Your creativity is bubbling over right now, and working on sprucing up your environment would be a great way to exercise that energy. This is a wonderful day to start on any new projects that involve painting, cooking, or creating. Anything that requires you to express you own aesthetic is going to be a fun project that yields impressive results.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Things are getting a bit stale right now, and you need to make some room in your life for new ideas and people, so get cleaning! You know deep down that in your heart there are more than a few old exes, forgotten dreams, and outdated philosophies that need to get tossed. Don't worry. Saying goodbye to your dreams now doesn't mean you're saying goodbye forever. It just means you're shifting your focus to more productive areas of your life.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Where is the United Kingdom's National Space Centre?

A. Bristol
B. Runnymede
C. Cardiff
D. Leicester

02. What does a copywriter do, such as Peter Wimsey in Dorothy Sayers's book "Murder Must Advertise"

A. Researches legal permissions to use text or graphic material
B. Creates text for marketing
C. Finds text to copy
D. Copies out texts

03. Which production company is behind the UK TV comedy series "Whose Line Is It Anyway" (1988-1999) and "Have I Got News for You" (1990-present)?

A. Hartswood Films
B. All3Media
C. Hat Trick Productions
D. Shed Media

Answers: 1.D 2.B 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

N	G	O	I
I	R	I	U
O	S	O	T
D	N	W	S

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Pope leads New Year's services with homage to 'beloved' Benedict

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis hailed the 'beloved' Benedict XVI on Sunday as he addressed thousands of Catholics in New Year's Day services at the Vatican, the day after his predecessor died aged 95.

"Today we entrust the beloved pope emeritus Benedict XVI to the most holy mother (the Virgin Mary), to accompany him in his passage from this world to God," Francis said at a mass for peace at St Peter's Basilica.

Later, delivering his Sunday Angelus prayer in front of thousands gathered in St Peter's Square, the pope bowed his head in a moment of silence in memory of the late pontiff.

"Let us all join together, with one heart and one soul, in thanking God for the gift of this faithful servant of the Gospel and of the Church," he said.

Benedict, a conservative intellectual who in 2013 became the first pontiff in six centuries to resign, died on Saturday at his home in a monastery inside the grounds of the Vatican.

His body will be moved on Monday morning to St Peter's Basilica, where for three days the public will be able to pay their respects before a funeral on Thursday overseen by Francis.

The ceremony will be 'solemn but simple', the Vatican has said, after which he will be buried in the papal tombs under St Peter's Basilica.

The last papal funeral, of



Pope Francis kisses a representation of the baby Jesus Christ as he leads the service marking the World Day of Peace at St Peter's Basilica, in The Vatican on Sunday (AFP)

John Paul II in 2005, drew a million faithful and heads of state from around the world, although Benedict was a more divisive figure.

A brilliant theologian, he alienated many Catholics with his staunch defence of traditional values and as pope struggled to impose his authority on the church as it battled a string of crises, including over clerical sex abuse.

Most of those gathered at the Vatican on Sunday were on long-planned holidays, but many nevertheless welcomed the opportunity to pay tribute to Benedict.

Paola Filippa, a 58-year-old

Italian teacher visiting Rome for Christmas, praised 'a simple, humble and great man. Great in faith, life, simplicity and love'.

Two men in white

Tributes had poured in on Saturday from around the world, from Catholic US President Joe Biden, who praised Benedict's 'devotion to the Church', to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who hailed him as a 'defender of traditional Christian values'.

His death brought to an end an unprecedented situation in which two 'men in white' - Benedict and Francis - had co-existed within the walls of the tiny city-state.

Benedict's health had been declining for a long time, and he had almost entirely withdrawn from public view.

Francis, 86, has raised the prospect that he might follow Benedict's example and step down if he became unable to carry out his duties.

In July, suffering knee problems that have forced him to rely on a wheelchair, he admitted he needed to slow down or think about stepping aside.

And earlier in December, the Argentine revealed he had signed a resignation letter when he took office should poor health prevent him from carrying out his duties.

God's Rottweiler

Born on April 16, 1927, in Markt am Inn, in Bavaria, Benedict was 78 when he became the first German pope of the modern era - an election he later said felt 'like the guillotine'.

Unlike his successor, a Jesuit who delights in being among his flock, Benedict was more at home with his books, a cat-lover who delighted in study and playing the piano.

He was dubbed 'God's Rottweiler' in a previous post as chief doctrinal enforcer, and fiercely defended traditional Catholic teaching on abortion, euthanasia and gay marriage.

But as pope he struggled to contain numerous scandals in the church.

Benedict was the first pope to meet with victims of clerical child sex abuse, but critics said he did not go far enough in addressing the problem and decades of cover-ups.

There were other controversies, from comments that angered the Muslim world to a money-laundering scandal at the Vatican bank and a personal humiliation when, in 2012, his butler leaked secret papers to the media.

After he quit, Benedict remained a flag-bearer for the conservative wing of the church.

With his death, those who battled Francis' more liberal outlook 'lose a living symbol', noted Italian Vatican observer Marco Politi.

AFP



Members of the Lebanese Army deploy as families await news of their relatives at the port in the northern city of Tripoli, on Sunday (AFP)

Two people dead, 200 rescued in Lebanon migrant boat sinking: Army

Tripoli, Lebanon - Two migrants died and another 200 were rescued on Saturday when their boat sank off Lebanon's northern coast, from where increasing numbers make the risky journey to flee a collapsed economy.

An AFP correspondent in the impoverished port city of Tripoli said men, women and children - mostly refugees from Syria but also about 50 Lebanese - were on board the vessel when it got into difficulty.

"Three naval ships, accompanied by another from UNIFIL (the UN mission in Lebanon), arrived at the site... off Selaata and personnel saved some 200 people," the army said on Twitter.

A separate tweet said two people had died.

Earlier, the army said a naval patrol had been dispatched to rescue the vessel packed with people attempting to 'illegally leave Lebanese waters'.

On Twitter, UNIFIL confirmed it was assisting the Lebanese Navy 'in search and rescue operation at sea between Beirut & Tripoli where a boat in distress with a large number of people on board was found.'

Dozens of relatives of those rescued streamed into Tripoli port to await their return to shore, AFP's correspondent said.

Lebanon is mired in what the World Bank describes as one of the worst economic crises in modern history. The country also hosts more than a million refugees from Syria's civil war.

It was once just a launchpad for foreign migrants, but nearly three years of economic collapse have left Lebanon's own citizens

increasingly joining Syrian and Palestinian refugees clamouring to leave by dangerous sea routes.

"We can no longer live in this country - or Syria," said Younes Jomaa, a Syrian originating from Idlib and a brother of one of the surviving migrants.

They are among millions displaced over more than a decade by Syria's war.

"I had planned to go with my brother, but was unable to get enough money together," Jomaa said, adding that his brother had taken on debt to fund his voyage.

Three naval ships, accompanied by another from UN mission arrived at the site... saved some 200 people

In late September around 100 migrants died when their boat sank off the Syrian coast after departing from Lebanon, in one of the deadliest such episodes.

Migrants departing from Lebanon head for Europe, with one of the of the main destinations being Cyprus, only 175km (110 miles) away.

The UN's refugee agency UNHCR has said at least 1,570 individuals, including 186 Lebanese nationals, had embarked or tried to embark on illicit sea journeys from Lebanon between January and November 2021.

AFP

Militiaman killed in central Iran protest: State media

Tehran, Iran - A member of Iran's security forces has been shot dead during protests in the city of Semirom, state media said on Sunday, more than 100 days after Mahsa Amini's death sparked nationwide unrest.

Iran has been rocked by protests - dubbed 'riots' by the authorities - since Amini, 22, died in custody on September 16 following her arrest for an alleged breach of the country's strict dress code for women.

"A Basij member was killed in the city of Semirom by armed criminals," official news agency IRNA reported, referring to the paramilitary force

linked to the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

IRNA said protesters had gathered late on Saturday in the city, about 470km (290 miles) south of the capital Tehran in the central Isfahan province.

They rallied in front of the regional administration building and other locations in Semirom, it added.

"Security forces were deployed to establish order in the city and, in some cases, clashes occurred with several rioters," the report said.

Iranian officials say hundreds of people have been killed in the nationwide unrest,

including members of the security forces, and thousands arrested. Tehran accuses hostile foreign powers and opposition groups of stoking the unrest. Last month, Iran executed two men, both 23, who had been convicted of attacks against security forces in connection with the protests.

The judiciary has said nine others have been sentenced to death. Campaigners said this week dozens of protesters also face charges that carry a potential death sentence.

Footballers arrested at mixed party

Meanwhile, authorities have

arrested football players who attended a mixed party east of Tehran, local media reported on Sunday, without identifying them or giving their exact number. "Several current and former players of one of Tehran's prominent football clubs were arrested last night (Saturday) at a mixed party in the city of Damavand," Tasnim news agency said.

"Some of these players were in an abnormal state due to alcohol consumption," it added. Iranian law only permits non-Muslims to consume alcohol for religious purposes. Dancing with the opposite gender is forbidden.

The Islamic republic has been rocked by unrest since the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, 22, following her arrest for an alleged breach of the strict dress code for women. Iranian officials say hundreds of people have been killed in the unrest, including members of the security forces, and thousands have been arrested.

A number of current and former footballers as well as other athletes and prominent figures have been detained or questioned by the authorities after voicing support for the protests.

AFP

Kabul: Many killed in blast near military airfield

Kabul, Afghanistan - An explosion at the entrance to a military airfield in the Afghan capital killed and wounded several people on Sunday, an official told AFP.

The cause of the blast at the gate of the facility next to Kabul's international airport was unclear, interior ministry spokesman Abdul Nafy Takor said.

"A number of our compatriots have been martyred and wounded in the blast," Takor said, adding that authorities were investigating the incident. The Taliban authorities claim to have improved security since storming back to power in August 2021 but there have been scores of bomb blasts and attacks, many claimed by the local chapter of the Islamic State group.

AFP

EU urges Rwanda to stop supporting M23 rebels in DR Congo

Kinshasa, DR Congo - The European Union on Saturday urged Rwanda to stop supporting the M23 rebel group, which has captured swathes of territory in North Kivu province in neighbouring DR Congo.

The DRC - along with the United States and several European countries - has repeatedly accused its smaller central African neighbour Rwanda of backing the M23, although Kigali denies the charge.

The Tutsi rebel group has in recent months advanced to within a few dozen kilometres of provincial capital Goma.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Saturday that the European bloc had urged Rwanda to 'stop supporting the M23 and use all means to press the M23 to comply with the decisions taken by the EAC (East African Community)' and at a November summit in Angola.

"It also firmly urges all states of the region to prevent the pro-



The European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell (AFP)

vision of any support to armed groups active in the DRC," said Borrell.

He called on Kinshasa to 'take all measures necessary to protect the civilian population in its territory'.

Under heavy international

pressure to disarm, M23 joined a ceremony last week to deliver the strategic town of Kibumba to an East African military force as a 'goodwill gesture' for peace.

The EAC also said the group had to withdraw to the border

between the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda.

However, the Congolese army promptly dubbed the Kibumba handover a 'sham'.

UN experts' report

Borrell's comments came after a

EU also urges all states of the region to prevent the provision of any support to armed groups in DRC

JOSEP BORRELL

UN experts' report on DR Congo indicated it had collected proof of 'direct intervention' by Rwandan defence forces inside DRC territory between at least November 2021 and last October.

The experts' report says Rwandan troops launched oper-

ations to reinforce the M23 against the mainly Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) - notably by supplying weapons, ammunition and uniforms.

Kigali sees the FDLR as a threat which justifies interventions inside the DRC.

Rwanda has also accused the DRC - where presidential elections are due next December - of using the conflict for political purposes as well as of 'fabricating' a November massacre of at least 131 civilians.

A UN probe blamed the deaths on M23 rebels.

Prior to the massacre, Angola had been mediating peace talks designed to pave the way for a truce agreement.

Kinshasa calls for sanctions

In a statement on Saturday, Kinshasa welcomed the findings of the UN experts, which it said 'put an end to the lies and ma-

nipulations' of Rwanda.

Given the gravity of the allegations, it called for the UN Security Council to examine the experts' report with a view to possible sanctions against Rwanda.

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame meanwhile, blamed Kinshasa for the chaos in its war-torn eastern regions in his new year address.

"After spending tens of billions of dollars on peacekeeping over the past two decades, the security situation in Eastern Congo is worse than ever," Kagame said in a statement on Saturday.

"To explain this failure, some in the international community blame Rwanda, even though they know very well that the true responsibility lies primarily with the government of the DRC.

"It is high time that the unwarranted vilification of Rwanda stopped."

AFP

World steps into 2023 after turbulent year

2022 was marked by war in Europe, stinging price rises and the deaths of Queen Elizabeth and Pele

New York, US - The world's eight billion people on Saturday ushered in 2023, bidding farewell to a turbulent 12 months marked by war in Europe, stinging price rises, Lionel Messi's World Cup glory and the deaths of Queen Elizabeth, Pele and former pope Benedict.

Many were ready to set aside pinched budgets and a virus that is increasingly forgotten but not gone, and embrace a party atmosphere on New Year's Eve after a few pandemic-dampened years.

In New York, confetti rained down on crowds after the famous ball drop in Times Square, a tradition that dates back to 1907, with visitors from across the world waiting for hours in the chilly rain to take part.

Thronges of people packed Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana Beach - up to two million were expected - for music and fireworks, without the coronavirus safety measures of the past few years.

The festivities came only hours before Brazil inaugurates new president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Sunday, following his razor-thin win in October polls.

After the widely criticised pandemic policies of outgoing Presi-



Lebanese revelers release a sky lantern as they celebrate the New Year in the capital Beirut's Martyrs Square early on Sunday (AFP)

dent Jair Bolsonaro, Copacabana partygoer Ana Carolina Rodrigues - wearing the evening's traditional white - says she hopes 2023 brings a new government that 'looks more at people's health'.

Across the Atlantic, Parisians - and a 'normal' amount of tourists, comparable to 2018 or 2019, according to officials - took

the opportunity to crowd together shoulder-to-shoulder for a fireworks show along the Champs-Elysees.

Police said about a million people showed up for the celebration, where children in pushchairs and partiers with champagne were equally visible. "We're here for the ambience, to have a good time and to be to-

gether," said 19-year-old student Ilyes Hachelef. "And it's beautiful!" Hours earlier, Sydney became one of the first major cities to ring in 2023, restaking its claim as the 'New Year's Eve capital of the world' after two years of lockdowns and coronavirus-muted festivities with a fireworks display over the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

'Year of Ukraine'

For some, 2022 was a year of Wordle, the Great Resignation, a new Taylor Swift album, an Oscar slap and billionaire meltdowns.

It also saw the deaths of Queen Elizabeth II, Brazilian football icon Pele, Mikhail Gorbachev, Jiang Zemin and Shinzo Abe. Former pope Benedict XVI

also died on New Year's Eve. The global population surpassed the historic milestone of eight billion people in November. But 2022 is most likely to be remembered for armed conflict returning to Europe - a continent that was the crucible of two world wars.

"It was our year. Year of Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address on Saturday, reflecting on his country's war effort throughout the year.

More than 300 days into Russia's botched invasion of Ukraine, about 7,000 civilians have been killed and 10,000 more injured, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. About 16mn Ukrainians have fled their homes.

For those who remain, an 11pm to 5am curfew will be in place amid periodic blackouts and Russian missile barrages.

The latest Russian strikes on Ukraine on Saturday claimed at least one more life and wounded several others, said Ukrainian officials, while an explosion was heard in Kyiv just after the New Year. "We do not know for sure what the new year 2023 will bring us," Zelensky said, promis-

ing that Ukrainians would fight on and offering a wish for 'victory' in 2023. In Kyiv, filmmaker Yaroslav Mutenko, 23, was defiant after a shell hit the four-star Hotel Alfavito near his apartment, insisting the blast would not stop him from partying.

"Our enemies, the Russians, can destroy our calm but they cannot destroy our spirit," he said.

London fireworks

There seemed to be a dulled appetite for grand celebrations in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Moscow canceled its traditional fireworks show, as Putin said in a New Year's address that 'moral, historical rightness' is on Russia's side as the country faces international condemnation over the war.

London was meanwhile welcoming crowds to its official New Year's Eve fireworks display for the first time since the pandemic.

One place that wasn't joining in the pyrotechnics was the English seaside town of Scarborough, which called off its display in order not to disturb 'Thor' the walrus, who recently appeared in the harbour.

AFP

Colombia agrees to six-month ceasefire with main armed groups

Bogotá, Colombia - Colombia's government has agreed to a six-month ceasefire with the five largest armed groups operating in the country, President Gustavo Petro announced on New Year's Eve.

The truce was the main objective of Petro's 'total peace' policy, which aims to end the country's armed conflict, which has persisted despite the dissolution of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2017.

The armed groups still operating in Colombia, the world's largest cocaine producer, are locked in deadly disputes over drug trafficking revenues and other illegal businesses, according to the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Indepaz), an independent think tank.

"We have agreed to a bilateral ceasefire with the ELN, the Second Marquetalia, the Central



Colombia's President Gustavo Petro (AFP)

General Staff, the AGC and the Self-Defense Forces of the Sierra Nevada from January 1 to June 30, 2023, extendable depending on progress in the negotiations," Petro tweeted.

Despite the government's efforts to negotiate with Colombia's various armed groups, which include a combined total of more than 10,000 fighters, it has so far failed to contain the

spiral of violence engulfing the country. Indepaz recorded nearly 100 massacres last year.

50 years of conflict

The National Liberation Army (ELN), the last recognised insurgency in the country, has been negotiating with the government since November.

The Segunda Marquetalia and Estado Mayor Central groups -

splinter factions of FARC which broke from the 2016 peace pact - have held separate talks with the government.

AGC, the country's largest drug gang, is made up of the remnants of extreme right-wing paramilitaries that demobilised in the early 2000s.

The government is offering the groups 'benevolent treatment from the judicial point of view' for the armed actors 'in exchange for a surrender of assets, a dismantling of these organisations and the possibility that they stop exercising these illicit economies', Senator Ivan Cepeda recently told AFP.

Some dissidents refused to lay down their arms alongside their FARC comrades six years ago, when the fearsome rebel army signed the deal with Bogota to end more than five decades of conflict.

AFP

Danish queen Margrethe says she is 'hurt' by rift over titles

Copenhagen, Denmark - Denmark's Queen Margrethe said on Saturday she was saddened by a rift that has emerged in the royal family following her decision to strip four of her grandchildren of their titles.

The 82-year-old monarch announced in September that the four children of her youngest son, 53-year-old Prince Joachim, would no longer be able to use the title of prince and princess after January 1.

She has said the decision was intended to allow Nikolai, 23, Felix, 20 - born from Joachim's first marriage - and Henrik, 13, and Athena, 10, to live normal lives without royal obligations.

But the decision sparked unprecedented royal drama in Copenhagen, with an enraged Prince Joachim seeing it as a snub.

Speaking in a televised New Year's address on Saturday, the



Queen Margrethe II of Denmark

queen said: "That the relationship with Prince Joachim and (his wife) Princess Marie has run into difficulties hurts me.

"Difficulties and disagreements can arise in any family, including mine. The whole country has witnessed this," she said.

She added that she was 'sure that the family can enter the new

year together with confidence, understanding and new courage'.

After the queen's announcement in September, Joachim's first wife Alexandra told tabloid B.T. she was 'shocked', while her eldest son Nikolai told media he was 'very bewildered'.

Meanwhile Joachim's wife Princess Marie said the couple's relationship with Crown Prince Frederik - heir apparent to the throne - and his Australian-born wife Mary was 'complicated'.

The outpourings have sparked surprise in the Scandinavian country, coming just days after the hugely popular royal family had celebrated the queen's 50th anniversary on the throne with pomp and smiles.

The queen's move followed a trend among other European royal families to slim down their monarchies, including in Sweden and in Britain.

AFP

Kim calls for 'exponential increase' of N Korea's nuclear arsenal

Seoul, South Korea - Kim Jong Un has called for an 'exponential' increase in North Korea's nuclear arsenal, including mass producing tactical nuclear weapons and developing new missiles for nuclear counterstrikes, state media said on Sunday.

In a report at the end of a key party meeting in Pyongyang, Kim said the country must 'overwhelmingly beef up the military muscle' in 2023 in response to what it called US and South Korean hostility, the official KCNA reported.

Claiming that Washington and Seoul were set on 'isolating and stifling' the North, Kim said his country would focus on the 'mass-producing of tactical nuclear weapons' and develop 'another ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) system whose main mission is quick nuclear counterstrike'.

Such goals form the 'main orientation' of the 2023 nuclear and defence strategy, the report said.

Military tensions on the Korean peninsula rose sharply in 2022 as the North conducted sanctions-busting weapons tests



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attending a ceremony of donating 600mm Super-large Multiple Launch Rocket System in the yard of the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea in Pyongyang on Saturday (AFP)

nearly every month, including firing its most advanced ICBM ever.

It capped the record-breaking year of launches by firing three short range ballistic missiles early on Saturday, and conducting another rare late-night launch at 2:50am (1750 GMT Saturday)

on Sunday, Seoul's military said.

The official KCNA reported on Sunday that the launches had been 'a test-fire of the super-large multiple rocket launchers'.

In a separate KCNA report, Kim said the weapons put South Korea 'as a whole within the

range of strike and (were) capable of carrying (a) tactical nuclear warhead'.

North Korea was emphasising 'the possibility of actual action', said Yang Moo-jin, professor at Seoul's University of North Korean Studies.

"North Korea is signalling a tactical shift of indirectly pressuring the United States by pressuring South Korea and escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula starting this year."

Seoul's defence ministry called North Korea's latest threats

'provocative rhetoric that seriously damages the peace and stability on the Korean peninsula' and urged Pyongyang to immediately give up its nuclear programmes. "We sternly warn that if North Korea attempts to use nuclear weapons, the Kim Jong Un regime will face an end," the ministry added in a statement.

The launches come just days after Seoul scrambled fighter jets as five North Korean drones made an incursion into the South's airspace on Monday.

Another Ukraine?

Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Kyungnam University, said that the North's latest statement indicated 'they are preparing for the possibility of actual war beyond the collapse of inter-Korean relations'. He warned that if the United States and South Korea responded, as was likely, by further ramping up military drills, tensions between the two Koreas would reach 'an unprecedented level' in 2023.

"It would indeed be a reasonable prediction that the Korean peninsula could become a sec-

ond Ukraine if the situation is mismanaged," he added.

In 2022, Kim said he wanted his country to have the world's most powerful nuclear force and declared the North an 'irreversible' nuclear state.

North Korea has talked about mass producing nuclear weapons before, said Go Myong-hyun, researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

"The intention is that if North Korea mass produces nuclear weapons, even without aggressive provocations, the United States will have no choice but to someday recognise North Korea as a nuclear state," he told AFP. The reports come at the end of a major party meeting in Pyongyang at which Kim and other senior officials outlined 2023 goals in key areas including diplomacy, security and the economy.

In past years, Kim had delivered a speech on January 1, but he recently dropped the tradition in favour of making announcements at the year-end plenary meeting.

AFP

Russia's New Year raids on Ukraine kill 3, wound dozens

Kyiv, Ukraine – Russia's New Year assault on Ukraine left three people dead and wounded another 50 as Moscow on Sunday claimed to have thwarted Kyiv's 'terror attacks' on the homeland.

The Ukrainian capital and other cities came under fire from missiles and Iranian-made drones.

The Ukrainian air force said on Sunday 45 Iranian-made drones had been destroyed overnight.

Thirteen were shot down at the end of 2022 and another 32 after midnight, the air force said.

Andriy Nebitov, the head of the Kyiv police, posted on Facebook a picture of wreckage of a downed drone that featured the words 'Happy New Year' in Russian.

"That is everything you need to know about the terror state and its army," he wrote.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of President Volodymyr Zelensky's office, said two people died in Kyiv and the southern region of Kherson and 50 more, including children, were injured as a result of the Russian strikes.

A 22-year-old woman was badly wounded in the western city of Khmelnytskyi and later died from her wounds, governor Sergiy Gamaliy.

On New Year's Eve, Russian artillery hit the village of Naddniprianske outside the southern city of Kherson, severely wounding a 13-year-old and his 12-year-old sister, the



A MIG-29 Ukrainian fighter jet is seen flying over eastern Ukraine on Sunday (AFP)

The Ukrainian air force said 45 Iranian-made drones had been destroyed overnight. Thirteen were shot down at the end of 2022 and another 32 after midnight, the airforce said

Ukrainian presidency said.

The Russian pounding also left the city of Kherson and the surrounding settlements without electricity on Saturday night, the presidency added.

Russian forces in November withdrew from Kherson, the only

regional capital that was held by Moscow, but has continued to batter the city ever since.

In the eastern region of Donetsk, pro-Russian separatist authorities said Ukrainian shelling killed a civilian in the town of Yasynuvata.

The attacks came as President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine enters its 11th month.

"Moral, historical rightness is on our side," Putin declared as he delivered his midnight address standing among men and women dressed in military uniform.

After a series of humiliating military defeats, Russia in October began targeting Ukraine's infrastructure, leaving millions in the cold and dark.

'Terror attacks'
Moscow said on Sunday its New

Year attacks on Ukraine targeted the pro-Western country's drone production.

Russia's defence ministry said a strike hit 'the facilities of the military-industrial complex of Ukraine' which is involved in the production of drones.

'Storage facilities and launch sites' for the drones have also been destroyed, the ministry said in a statement.

"The aim of the strike was achieved," the statement said.

"The plans of the Kyiv regime to carry out terror attacks against Russia in the near future have been thwarted."

Russia has accused Ukraine of targeting its domestic military sites and infrastructure.

Russian forces on Thursday shot down a drone near Engels, a base for Russia's strategic aircraft, located hundreds of kilometres from the Ukraine border.

Russia also said on Monday it downed a drone over Engels airfield and that falling debris killed three people.

In early December, Moscow said Ukraine's Soviet-made drones had attacked that base and another in the Ryazan region, leaving three people dead.

The Engels drone raids were the deepest reported strikes into Russian territory since the start of Moscow's offensive in Ukraine on February 24.

Kviy has a policy of not claiming responsibility for such raids.

AFP



Passengers wait for information about their flights at terminal 3 of Ninoy International Airport in Pasay, Metro Manila on Sunday (AFP)

Power outage: 56,000 affected at airports in Philippines

Manila, Philippines – Tens of thousands of travellers were stranded at Philippine airports on Sunday after a power outage knocked out communication and radar equipment at the country's busiest hub in Manila, forcing hundreds of flights to be cancelled, delayed or diverted.

Aviation authorities detected a 'technical issue' on Sunday morning involving the air traffic management centre at Manila's domestic and international airport. More than 360 flights in and out of Manila were cancelled, diverted or delayed, affecting around 56,000 passengers.

The outage hit as many people began returning to the capital for work and school after the Christmas and New Year break.

There were chaotic scenes at check-in counters across the country as thousands of people tried to re-book tickets or find when their flights might take off.

Others who had boarded their aircraft before the glitch was announced waited for hours and were then disembarked. Airport officials did not initially specify the cause of the problem.

But transportation department secretary Jaime Bautista said the air traffic management centre, which controls inbound and outbound flights, 'went down' due to a power outage that resulted in the loss of communication, radio, radar and internet. "The secondary problem was the power surge due to the power outage which affected the equipment," he said.

Airport authorities said the air traffic management system was partially restored by 4pm (0800 GMT) and flights were beginning to take off and land in Manila.

AFP

Uganda: Children among 9 dead in New Year stampede

Kampala, Uganda – At least nine people died, most aged between 10 and 20, in a shopping mall crush as revellers rang in the New Year in Uganda's capital, police said on Sunday.

After fireworks outside the Freedom City mall in Kampala, 'a stampede ensued, resulting in the instant deaths of five people and injuries to several others', national police spokesman Luke Owoyesigiyire said. Four others died on their way to hospital 'largely due to suffocation'.

"Emergency responders arrived on the scene and transported the injured individuals to the hospital, where nine were confirmed dead," said Owoyesigiyire.

'Rash' acts and 'negligence' led to the tragedy, he added.

The celebrations to welcome in 2023 were the first in the east African country in three years, after restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and security issues.

Most of the dead were juveniles, ages 10, 11 14 and 20.

AFP

45,000 migrants crossed Channel to UK last year

London, UK – More than 45,000 migrants crossed the Channel to the UK from mainland Europe in 2022, surpassing the previous year's record by more than 17,000, according to government figures released on Sunday.

The issue has become a huge political problem for the Conservative government, which has promised to bring down illegal immigration and break the smuggling gangs that carry out the crossings.

In total, 45,756 people made the dangerous small-boat crossing of one of the world's busiest shipping lanes last year, compared with 28,526 in 2021.

Four people died last month when a small boat packed with migrants capsized in freezing temperatures in the Channel.

A fishing boat in the area plucked 43 people from the frigid waters.

That incident occurred just over a year after at least 27 people drowned when their dinghy capsized, a disaster that sparked soul-searching on both sides of the Channel.

2022 also saw the highest ever single-day total of migrants making the crossing, with 1,295 making the journey on August 22.

AFP



This file photo shows migrants, picked up at sea being helped by a member of the UK Border Force to disembark from a boat, in the Marina at the Dover port, on the south-east coast of England on May 3, 2022 (AFP)

Lula da Silva returns for third term as Brazil president

Brasilia, Brazil – Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is set to be inaugurated on Sunday for a third term as Brazilian president, in a ceremony snubbed by outgoing leader Jair Bolsonaro, underlining the deep divisions the veteran leftist inherits.

The swearing-in will cap a remarkable political comeback for 77-year-old Lula, who returns to the presidential palace in Brasilia less than five years after being jailed on controversial, since-quashed corruption charges.

In a sign of the scars that remain from Lula's brutal election showdown with far-right ex-army captain Bolsonaro in October, security will be exceptionally tight at the pomp-filled ceremony in the capital.

Some 8,000 police - including more than 1,000 federal officers, a record deployment for a presidential inauguration in Brazil - will provide security.

The stepped up measures come after a Bolsonaro supporter was arrested last week for planting a tanker truck rigged with explosives near the Brasilia

airport, a plot he said aimed to 'sow chaos' in the South American country.

Bolsonaro himself left Brazil for the US state of Florida on Friday - reportedly to avoid having to hand the presidential sash to his bitter enemy, as tradition dictates. The snub has hardly dampened the party spirit for Lula and the 300,000 people expected at the ceremony and a massive concert that will feature acts ranging from samba legend Martinho da Vila to drag queen Pablo Vittar.

Thousands of Lula supporters have been flooding the capital, traveling by plane, car and even bicycle to camp out near the Esplanade of Ministries.

Foreign dignitaries including 17 heads of state will also be in attendance as Lula, who previously led the country through a watershed boom from 2003 to 2010, takes the oath of office for a new four-year term at 3pm (1800 GMT).

They include the presidents of a raft of Latin American countries, Germany, Portugal and the



Indigenous people, who support President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, sing and dance upon arrival to the Esplanada dos Ministerios to attend his inauguration ceremony in Brasilia on Sunday (AFP)

king of Spain.

After being sworn in before Congress, Lula will travel by car - traditionally a black convertible Rolls Royce, though officials said that could be changed for security reasons - to the ultra-modern capital's presidential palace, the

Planalto.

There he will walk up a ramp to the entrance and receive the gold- and diamond-embroidered presidential sash. Organisers of the ceremony - led by first lady-to-be Rosangela 'Janja' da Silva - have maintained a mystery

around who will give Lula the sash in Bolsonaro's absence.

It will be the first time since the end of Brazil's 1965-1985 military dictatorship that an incoming president does not receive the yellow-and-green sash from his predecessor.

Pressing to-do list

Lula faces numerous urgent challenges for Latin America's biggest economy, which looks little like the commodities-fueled dynamo he presided over in the 2000s.

They include rebooting economic growth, curbing rampant destruction of the Amazon rainforest and delivering on his ambitious poverty- and inequality-fighting agenda.

An estimated 30mn of Brazil's 215mn people are living in hunger, and the economy is still struggling to recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

Vice president-elect Geraldo Alckmin described the incoming

administration's task as 'herculean'. Lula will face a Congress dominated by Bolsonaro's conservative allies.

He is also dogged by far-right hardliners who have been rallying outside army bases calling for a military intervention to keep him from power ever since he narrowly won the October 30 runoff election, 50.9 per cent to 49.1 per cent. "He will have to act assertively in his first 100 days to show where Lula Part Three is headed," said political scientist Leandro Consentino of the Insper institute in Sao Paulo.

"His election win was very tight, and he'll face a divided country and a combative opposition. He'll have to lead a national unity government and restore the peace."

Markets are meanwhile watching nervously how Lula will fund his promised social spending given Brazil's overstretched government finances. "Our priority will be taking care of the poorest, the neediest, of working people," Lula said recently.

AFP

Thousands of Lula supporters have been flooding the capital, traveling by plane, car and even bicycle

NEW YEAR, NEW HOPES

Pakistan and New Zealand seek Test turnaround in 2023 as second match starts in Karachi on Monday

Karachi, Pakistan - A draw last week having stopped a run of defeats for Pakistan and New Zealand, both sides will be seeking to go one better in the second and final Test in Karachi starting Monday.

The tame draw halted Pakistan's four-Test losing streak at home including their first-ever 3-0 whitewash by England.

New Zealand also arrived in Pakistan on the back of a 3-0 drubbing by England.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam vowed his team will play "positive and aggressive cricket" after they finished 2022 without a Test win at home.

"We need to take things session-by-session and day-by-day," he said.

"We're working on it. It's not that we need to play different cricket."

New Zealand were in a good position to win the first Test on the final day with Pakistan on 77-2, needing 97 runs to avoid an innings defeat.

But Saud Shakeel, who scored 55 not out, and Mohammad Wasim with 43 averted the danger with a 71-run eighth wicket stand eating up time and overs to salvage a draw.

Pakistan declared on 311-8 but a target of 138 in 15 overs under fading light was tough for New Zealand, who finished on 59-1.

"We need to credit New Zealand with the way they



Pakistan Babar Azam with New Zealand's Devon Conway at the end of their first Test against New Zealand at the National Stadium in Karachi on Friday (AFP)

played and dominated," said Azam, who finished the year as the highest scorer in Tests with 1,184 in nine matches.

The National Stadium pitch helped slow bowlers as 23 of the 28 wickets in the first Test went to the spinners.

At the same venue but on a different pitch, New Zealand will also look for a win after going without in their last five Tests.

"It does look different from the first Test... It has a bit more moisture," said batting coach Luke Ronchi on Sunday.

"The preparations are shorter than normal, obviously we had just a two-day turnaround. "It's going to be a hard slog to

get a result, you have to bat really well and need to take 20 wickets."

Pakistan will look to bring in pacer Naseem Shah or Hasan Ali, while New Zealand may consider Matt Henry in place of a spinner if they find the pitch suitable for pace.

We need to take things session-by-session and day-by-day. We're working on it

BABAR AZAM

Teams (from):

Pakistan: Babar Azam (captain), Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Kamran Ghulam, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan, Mohammad Wasim, Naseem Shah, Nauman Ali, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Agha Salman, Saud Shakeel, Shan Masood, Zahid Mahmood

New Zealand: Tim Southee (captain), Michael Bracewell, Tom Blundell, Devon Conway, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Ajaz Patel, Glenn Phillips, Ish Sodhi, Blair Tickner, Neil Wagner, Kane Williamson, Will Young

AFP



Rishabh Pant

Pant recovering, likely to miss Australia Tests

New Delhi, India - Indian cricketer Rishabh Pant is in "high spirits" and recovering from surgery after his horror car crash but will likely miss the upcoming Test series against Australia, media reports said Sunday.

The star wicketkeeper-batsman suffered several injuries when his Mercedes SUV crashed into the median before dawn on Friday as he was travelling alone from New Delhi to his hometown Roorkee, a few hours north of the Indian capital.

His car immediately caught fire and the 25-year-old was rescued by a bus driver and conductor on the highway.

Pant "is in high spirits and responding well to treatment... He underwent a plastic surgery on his left eyebrow where he suffered a cut in the accident," Shyam Sharma of the Delhi and District Cricket Association told The Times of India.

The cricketer also suffered a ligament injury in his right knee, hurt his wrist, ankle, and has abrasion injuries on his back, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a statement.

Sharma said the BCCI was monitoring Pant's treatment and was in "constant touch" with his medical team.

"As far as the ligament injury in his right knee is concerned, he

will take some time to recover. He will be provided the best possible treatment," he added.

A BCCI staffer quoted by the Press Trust of India news agency said Pant faced a prolonged absence from competitive cricket and would likely miss the four-Test Australia series at home starting February 9.

A maverick batsman, Pant is the mainstay of the Test squad and has played a key role in some of India's most memorable wins in the last three years.

But his white-ball form has been inconsistent lately and Pant was left out of the squad for the T20 and ODI tour by Sri Lanka starting next week.

The wicketkeeper's omission came days after his match-winning innings of 93 in the second Test against Bangladesh, helping India secure a 2-0 series whitewash. Fans and members of India's cricket fraternity have expressed shock at the news and wished Pant a speedy recovery.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Friday he was distressed by the accident and had prayed for Pant's good health.

Bus driver Sushil Kumar and his conductor, who helped Pant out of his car, have been hailed as heroes for their response to the near-fatal crash.

AFP

Easy wins for Ruud, Kvitova at United Cup

Brisbane, Australia - World number three Casper Ruud cruised past Thiago Monteiro in straight sets but it was in vain as Norway crashed in their mixed teams United Cup tie against Brazil in Brisbane on Sunday.

After the Brazilians won both opening singles rubbers Saturday, Ruud's 6-3, 6-2 victory brought his country back into contention.

But the comeback was short-lived with the South Americans taking the tie when Laura Pigossi outlasted Ulrikke Eikeri 6-3, 6-4 in almost two hours at Pat Rafter Arena. Brazil won the mixed doubles to give them a 4-1 win.

Ruud was far too consistent for the 71st ranked Monteiro, who made 27 unforced errors, wrapping up a dominant win in only 70 minutes to at least give him confidence heading into the new season.

"It was a must-win match for Norway so I was maybe feeling



Petra Kvitova hits a return against Laura Siegemund (AFP)

the pressure a little bit," Ruud said. "But I was able to come out with a good start."

The Norwegian was a runner-up at last year's French and US Opens and said he was feeling confident ahead of the Australian Open later this month where he will bid to win a first Grand Slam title.

He did not play at Melbourne

Park last year after rolling his ankle the day before his first match and said he wanted to make amends.

"I always feel very motivated coming down here playing in Australia. Last year was a bit unfortunate," he said.

In Sydney, two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova proved too strong for Germany's

Laura Siegemund, romping home 6-4, 6-2. It ensured the Czech Republic won the tie with an unassailable 3-0 lead, having lost their opening clash with the United States 4-1.

German Oscar Otte defeated Dalibor Srvcina 7-6 (7/1), 6-2 and Germany won the mixed doubles, but the Czechs won the tie 3-2.

Harriet Dart missed a chance to close out victory for Britain over Spain - and a semi-final spot - with an eager Rafael Nadal in the team box continually urging on his Iberian compatriots.

Dart took a 6-7(6/8), 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 loss to Paula Badosa, who cramped in the second set but apparently helped cure her ills with swigs of pickle juice along with ice massages.

After failing twice to serve for the second set, Badosa finally gave Spain their first point of the tie with victory in three hours.

The No. 13 cleaned up her

serving in her first match of the season after seven double-faults in the opening set.

Dan Evans put things right for the Brits, defeating Albert Ramos-Vinolas 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 to clinch a final four spot 3-1.

Evans, who had felt poorly coming into the event, said team support from the bench was key.

"I don't feel my strongest, but we have a great team behind us," he said after firing an ace on second match point.

"It would have been tough to throw in the towel with the team behind me.

"We're into the semis, we've done unbelievably well on court."

In Perth, Belgium and Bulgaria were locked at 2-2 heading into the mixed doubles.

Elise Mertens beat Gergana Topalova 6-4, 3-6, 6-0 before Bulgaria levelled the tie when Dimitar Kuzmanov downed Zizou Bergs 6-2, 6-0.

AFP

Andreescu makes gritty comeback to beat Muguruza in Adelaide

Adelaide, Australia - Bianca Andreescu staged a dramatic comeback Sunday to topple Garbine Muguruza in a battle of former Grand Slam champions on day one of the Adelaide International. The Canadian, who won the 2019 US Open, was crushed in the first set and slipped 2-5 behind in the second before surging home 0-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 to get her 2023 season off to a winning start.

It maintained her perfect record against two-time Grand Slam winner and former world number one Muguruza, improving to 3-0.

"In the second set I really had to change my game plan," said the 22-year-old, who has slipped to 46 in the world.

"I told myself to go for it, what-



Canada's Bianca Andreescu celebrates winning her first-round match against Spain's Garbine Muguruza in Adelaide on Sunday (AFP)

ever happens happens. I put more returns in the court, more serves in the court. I'm so glad I pulled that out, I have no idea how."

Spain's Muguruza, who won the French Open in 2016 and Wimbledon a year later, claimed the first set in commanding fashion, outnumbering Andreescu in winners eight to two, not facing a break point.

Andreescu started the second set more strongly, only for Muguruza to break for 4-2 then consolidate for 5-2 with serve.

But she couldn't close out the victory and Andreescu took it to a tie-break where a sizzling backhand winner gave her pivotal 4-2 lead. A demoralised Muguruza had no answers as the Canadian

swept her aside in the third set to set up a second-round clash against either fourth seed Veronika Kudermetova or Amanda Anisimova.

In other singles action, Estonian veteran Kaia Kanepi also came from behind to outlast Belarusian Aliaksandra Sasnovich 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 and will next meet either Ekaterina Alexandrova or Marketa Vondrousova.

Americans Shelby Rogers and Claire Liu also progressed.

Top-ranked Novak Djokovic headlines the men's field and is set to play France's Constant Lesstienne on Monday in his first match in Australia since being deported last year over his Covid-19 vaccination stance.

AFP

127

SCORED 127 GOALS IN A CALENDAR YEAR IN 1959

77

BRAZIL'S ALL-TIME LEADING SCORER, WITH 77 GOALS

17

PELE IS THE YOUNGEST GOALSCORER IN A WORLD CUP FINAL AND YOUNGEST WORLD CUP WINNER WHEN HE TOOK THE WORLD BY STORM AT THE AGE OF 17 IN 1958

3

PELE IS THE ONLY PLAYER TO HAVE WON THREE WORLD CUPS. HE WON HIS FIRST IN 1958 AS A 17-YEAR-OLD. PELE'S BRAZIL ALSO WON THE TITLE IN 1962 AND 1970

1,281

PELE HAS 1281 CAREER GOALS IN 1,363 MATCHES

OCTOBER 21, 1940 – DECEMBER 29, 2022

KING OF HEARTS

PELE, WHO PASSED AWAY ON DECEMBER 29, 2022, WAS THE BEST-LOVED FOOTBALLER EVER BESIDES BEING THE ETERNAL KING OF THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

Rio De Janeiro, Brazil – Pele, the legendary Brazilian who passed away on 29 December 2022, was the best-loved footballer of his or any other generation, the eternal master of the beautiful game.

He won the World Cup with Brazil in 1958, 1962 and 1970, his sumptuous range of skills making him the embodiment of his country's golden age of football.

When he finally retired in 1977, Pele had scored more than 1,000 goals.

He scored 77 for Brazil, a mark only equalled at the recent World Cup by Neymar.

But his impact on his sport went far beyond the pitch as he also became a money-making phenomenon, lending his name to sportswear, credit cards and watches among an array of products.

Born Edson Arantes do Nascimento in October 1940, Pele played his first game for Santos as a 15-year-old in 1956.

He earned a call-up to the national team a year later, scoring on his debut against Argentina. In 1958 he was picked for the World Cup in Sweden.

His participation at the finals had been a matter of fierce debate in Brazil, with many critics questioning whether the slender-framed teenager was ready for the physical demands of the tournament.

Nursing a knee injury on arrival in Sweden, Pele was unavailable for Brazil's opening two matches.

He might also have been forced to sit out their third, against the Soviet Union, had coach Vicente Feola decided to heed the advice of a team psychologist who had urged that Pele was "infantile" and not fit for duty.

In the event Feola opted to play the youngster, and it paid off. Working in tandem with Garrincha and his famously bent legs, Pele gave a virtuoso display as the Soviets were vanquished 2-0.

Once in the team, Pele made it impossible for him to be removed. A winning goal in the quarter-final against Wales and a hat-trick in the 5-2 semi-final victory over France were followed by two more in the final win over Sweden.

Still only 17, Pele had become the

youngest World Cup winner in history. The next two tournaments, however, were to be unhappy experiences.

Twenty-one by the time of the 1962 World Cup in Chile, an older, stronger Pele had been expected to take the tournament by storm.

He gave a tantalising glimpse of what he was capable of with an electric individual goal against Mexico in Brazil's opening 2-0 win.

But he aggravated an existing injury in

the second game, against the Czechs, and was forced to sit out the remainder of the tournament as his countrymen successfully defended their title.

Pele's frustration that injury had limited his appearances in Chile were nothing compared to the sickening disappointment of England in 1966 where, unprotected by referees, he was literally kicked out of the tournament.

Brutally assaulted by Bulgaria's defence in the first game to the extent that he was

forced to miss the second match, the nadir came against Portugal.

Two crippling challenges by Joao Moraes left a tearful Pele being carried from the Goodison Park pitch in Liverpool swearing never to play in a World Cup again.

"I don't want to finish my life as an invalid," he said.

Synonymous with beautiful game

Thankfully, Pele's disconsolate vow was to prove an empty threat. He returned four years later in Mexico to spearhead what is regarded as the greatest team of all time.

Where 1966 had been viewed as a victory for cynicism, the 1970 tournament, and Pele and Brazil's winning contribution to it, have become synonymous with the beautiful game.

It is a testament to the quality of Pele's play in Mexico that he is remembered for the goals he didn't score as much as for the ones he did.

An outrageous attempt to lob Czechoslovakia's goalkeeper from inside his own half and a magical dummy against Uruguay in the semi-finals are among the finest moments of World Cup history.

Though he was to continue playing club football for his beloved Santos and later the New York Cosmos, Pele retired from international duty in 1971, making an emotional farewell in front of 180,000 fans at the Maracana in Rio de Janeiro.

"Pele was the most complete player I've ever seen," England's Bobby Moore recalled later. "He had everything."

AFP

‘Historic moment’: Saudis flock to buy Ronaldo shirts

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Only hours after Cristiano Ronaldo penned a two-year contract with Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr, crowds flocked to a football kit store in Riyadh to buy the five-time Ballon d'Or winner's new club jersey.

Abdulmohsen al Ayyban, 41, and his nine-year old son, Nayef, were among those queueing at Al Nassr club's official kit store on Saturday where clerks were busy pressing Ronaldo's name onto t-shirts.

"We are witnessing a historic moment," Al Ayyban told AFP of the deal which he believes "will elevate the Saudi football league".

Ronaldo on Friday signed for Al Nassr until June 2025 in a deal believed to be worth more than 200 million euros.

A wide smile stretched across

Nayef's face as he proudly held his new jersey aloft.

For the young Saudi, a dream has come true.

"I have always wanted Al Nassr to acquire the best player in the world," he said. "I will make sure to watch all his games at the stadium."

Ronaldo, 37, is expected to appear before fans next Thursday, an official from the Al Nassr club told AFP.

For Saudi Arabia, Ronaldo is the latest high-priced sporting jewel acquired to add lustre to their international image.

At home, the deal further fuelled national fervour that spiked after the kingdom defeated eventual winners Argentina in the early stages of the 2022 World Cup, a victory hailed as one of greatest shocks in the tournament's history.



Cristiano Ronaldo is presented with Al Nassr's number seven jersey by club president Musalli al Muammar in Madrid on Friday (AFP)

An unprecedented rush at the Al Nassr kit store started as soon as reports of the deal were

leaked to the local press on Friday night - hours before the official announcement.

Abdulqader, the store manager said queues snaked all the way outside the shop and have only grown since.

T-shirt stocks have nearly emptied, pushing customers to bring in their own to have the player's name printed on them - a process which will take up to two days.

"I have never seen anything like this in my life," Abdulqader told AFP.

Social media explosion

Inside the store, a festive mood prevailed, as Lebanese, Egyptian and Chinese nationals bolstered the massive number of Saudis hoping to get their Ronaldo merch.

"I have been a fan of Ronaldo since I was a child and now the Saudi club I support has bought

him... my joy is doubled," said Saudi university student Mohammad al Johni, decked out in the Al Nassr club's official shirt.

"I will be the first person attending his welcoming ceremony," the 23-year-old added.

Rakan Mohammad, a 21-year-old university student, echoed the excitement.

"The deal confirms the value of the Al Nassr club," he said. "Enthusiasm and expectations are high."

On social media networks, Al Nassr's channels saw a major boost.

Millions of new users followed the club's Instagram page, bringing the total tally to nearly 4 million, up from around 800,000 prior to the announcement.

"The impact of the deal has already been felt, even before Ronaldo arrives in Saudi Arabia,"

Ahmed Al Zabani, a 19-year-old Saudi university student told AFP.

"The impact will continue to grow in the days to come".

Many Saudis took to social media to praise the move.

"The dream has become a reality," read an Instagram post by a shop printing Ronaldo t-shirts in the colours of the Al Nasser team.

The comments quickly flooded in with customers requesting shirts in their size.

"A picture for the history books," wrote one Saudi user on Twitter, captioning an image of Ronaldo holding up his Al Nasser jersey.

Ronaldo heads to the Gulf after a year that saw him relegated to the bench for Portugal and cut adrift by Manchester United.

AFP

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS



Workers wearing protective masks and suits help Chinese travellers leaving the arrival hall of Rome Fiumicino International Airport, near Rome, Dec. 29, 2022 after being tested for the COVID-19 coronavirus

The flurry of global travel restrictions began as countries anticipated a surge in Chinese visitors after Beijing announced mandatory quarantine for inbound passengers would end on January 8.

The World Health Organization has called the precautionary measures 'understandable' in light of the lack of outbreak information provided by Beijing. But the European branch of the International Airports Council - which represents more than 500 airports in 55 European countries -- said the restrictions were not justified or risk-based.

European countries will meet next week to discuss a joint response to

vide necessary assistance based on humanitarian concerns," but did not specify what kind of aid might be extended to Beijing, which considers the self-ruled island a breakaway province.

In a televised New Year address, Chinese President Xi Jinping, however, struck an optimistic note. "Epidemic prevention and control is entering a new phase... Everyone is working resolutely, and the light of hope is right in front of us," Xi said in a speech broadcast on state media on Saturday.

It was Xi's second time commenting on the outbreak this week. On Monday, he had called for measures



2A medical worker takes a swab sample from a resident to test for COVID-19, after the government eased restrictions, in Wuhan, Hubei province

CHINA CAUTION

MORE COUNTRIES ROLL OUT CHINA TRAVELLER CHECKS AMID COVID-19 SURGE

Travellers from China now face restrictions when entering more than a dozen countries as concern grows over its surge in COVID-19 cases, with Australia the latest to demand a negative test before arrival.

Last month, Beijing abruptly began dismantling its 'Zero-Covid' containment policy of lockdowns and mass testing, three years after the coronavirus first emerged in the city of Wuhan.

As COVID-19 overwhelms Chinese hospitals and crematoriums, of-

ficials have insisted that the wave is 'under control' despite acknowledging that the true scale of infections is impossible to track.

Australia's health minister on Sunday cited Beijing's lack of comprehensive information about COVID-19 cases as the reasoning behind the travel requirement, which will take effect on January 5. "The move will safeguard Australia from the risk of potential new emerging variants," he said.

In recent days, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France,

Italy, Spain, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have also imposed either a negative COVID-19 test requirement or testing upon arrival for travellers from China.

Canada cited 'the limited epidemiological and viral genomic sequence data available' on recent COVID-19 cases in China for its negative test demand.

Meanwhile, Morocco moved to ban all arrivals from China on Saturday, to avoid a new wave of contaminations in Morocco and all its consequences.

the issue, with incoming EU presidency holder Sweden saying it was seeking a common policy for the entire EU when it comes to the introduction of possible entry restrictions.

Light of hope'

While a few major Chinese cities seem to be emerging from the current wave of infections, under-sourced smaller cities and rural areas have been hit especially hard.

In response to the outbreak, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen said on Sunday that she is "willing to pro-

to 'effectively protect people's lives'.

Despite the jump in infections, large crowds still gathered for New Year's Eve celebrations in Shanghai and Wuhan, although some social media users said the festivities seemed more subdued than in past years.

China on Sunday reported more than 5,100 new infections and one death linked to COVID-19 out of its population of 1.4 billion - but the figures appear to be out of step with the reality on the ground.

AFP

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تعلن دائرة الملكية الفكرية عن طلب تسجيل العلامة التجارية المقبولة وفقاً لأحكام قانون (نظام) العلامات التجارية لدول مجلس التعاون لدول الخليج العربية الصادر بالمرسوم السلطاني رقم 33 / 2017

طلب تسجيل العلامة التجارية رقم : 156263

تصنيف : 37 صيانة وإصلاح السيارات

باسم : واحة الفوارس الحديثة للتجارة

تاريخ الإيداع : 11/08/2022



NAME CHANGE

I, ABHINAV (holder of Indian Passport No. M2927156) son of SURENDER having permanent address 5-4-579, KATTAL MANDI, NAMPALLY STATION ROAD, HYDERABAD (complete postal address in India) and presently residing in 119, AL ARAGAN COMPLEX, QURM STREET, MUSCAT, SULTANATE OF OMAN (complete postal address in Oman) intend to change my name from ABHINAV (Old name) to ABHINAV ARYA (New name) for all purpose. Any objection towards my name change may please be communicated to the Embassy Of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, PO Box No: 1727, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.



Farideh Zariv

19TH ASIAN ART BIENNALE

The month-long 19th Asian Art Biennale (December 8, 2022 – January 7, 2023) currently underway in Dhaka, Bangladesh, showcases 712 artworks by artists from 114 countries, including five artists from Oman, and focuses upon displacement and ‘unhomeliness’ around the world

A BRUSH WITH
unhomeliness



Halima al Bulushi



Hubert Vaz

Five artists from Oman recently visited Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh to participate in the month-long 19th Asian Art Biennale which was inaugurated by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the National Theatre Auditorium of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy on December 8.

The participant artists from Oman included Halima al Bulushi, Said al Alawi, Khalil al Khalbani, and Dr Nasser Palangi and Farideh Zariv (both Australian-Iranian artists residing in Oman), all of whom presented their artworks conforming to the theme – Home and Displacement – which was chosen to pay tribute to the victims of forced displacement everywhere in the world and to pledge to stand by them, so that those still alive do not become forgotten souls.

This 19th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh 2022 has been dedicated to the founding president of Bangladesh - Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who is a much revered figure in the country. The biennale fo-



Said al Alawi

cuses on the complexities that the globalised world is witnessing where, on one hand economic and other classes of migrants establish their presence in different cultural landscapes, and, on the other forced displacement is uprooting entire communities from their lands and planting them in far-

away places.

‘While the concept of home and homeliness has always been a stable signifier of social condition, displacement destabilises it and forces a new understanding of such terms as ‘unhomeliness’ and ethnic cleansing, the organisers of the event say, posing questions,

such as, ‘How does an artist react when home for many becomes a distant memory, or a constant reminder of trauma to be lived over and over again? What emotions does exile evoke? How do exile and displacement impact human creativity? Above all, at a time when rights the media picks up a terrorist attack or hate crime in Europe for a worldwide coverage, why are these unfortunate people consigned to media oblivion? How do they figure in official discourses - in art and literature? These questions were considered crucial to engage artists and the biennale was designed to allow Asian artists to respond to them in their own creative way.

The biennale was also open to delving into other options, such as the fast-track developments in communication technology, the expansion of the visual media and urbanisation, the rise of ideologies in our time or the ‘disappearance of green’ from our lives. As some artists explored these options, they managed to link with the main theme.

Hosted by the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA), the

main exhibition showcased 712 pieces of artwork created by 493 artists from 114 countries, including 149 Bangladeshi artists.

On display were a variety of art-forms including paintings, prints, photographs, installation, performance art, sculpture and new media art created by the participating artists from across the globe. A two day seminar was also held as part of the biennale, on the theme of ‘Home and Displacement’, with participation from a number of art-critics, jury members, and observers from Bangladesh and abroad.

Speaking about her participation, Farideh Zariv, Australian-Iranian artist residing in Oman with her husband Dr Nasser Palangi, said, “In my opinion, art biennials can be a place to exchange artistic ideas, teach new methods and materials and use them in presenting artworks with different styles and techniques of today’s world; it is also a place to connect, collaborate and educate each other about evolving concepts in creativity.”

She further said, “The Dhaka biennale was so interesting for me

as it was for the first time I participated in a biennale, and in Bangladesh. I managed to meet many artists from Bhutan, Nepal, Senegal, Italy, Sudan, Spain, Germany, Africa, Pakistan, China, America, and Europe, and shared my experiences with them. I also go to learn a lot from them. During cultural activity, we also got to learn about other cultures.”

She noted that textile art was very popular in Bangladesh and one of the key aspects that impacts the country’s economy. “You could see it everywhere and in everyone’s clothes, with unique colours and designs,” she said, adding that young Bangladeshi artists brought out the contemporary concept through installations and performances.

The international artists, she said, were appreciative of her fusion photography, as well as those of the Omani artists present. The participants also got an opportunity to visit places of interest in Dhaka, especially the US Museum of Art, besides other contemporary museums, as well as a one-day trip aboard a cruise ship to go around the city.



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