

His Majesty receives credentials of envoys

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received, separately, at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday credentials of ambassadors of eight countries appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

Meeting His Majesty the Sultan on the sidelines of the credentials presentation ceremony, the ambassadors conveyed greetings of their countries' leaders and their best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty. They also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

They highlighted the great honour and delight at presenting their credentials to His Majesty the Sultan, and committed to exert sincere efforts to promote relations of their countries with Oman in various spheres in a manner that serves the joint interests of the Omani people and their countries' citizens.

His Majesty welcomed the ambassadors, expressing his gratitude for their leaders' greetings and best wishes. His Majesty affirmed that they would receive all support from him, the government and the Omani people to carry out their duties.

The ceremony was attended by the Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, the Foreign Minister, the Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman, the Head of the Royal Protocols and the Military Aides to His Majesty the Sultan.

See also Page 02



Dr Liane Saunders, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Sultanate of Oman



Christophe Ceska, Ambassador of the Republic of Austria to the Sultanate of Oman

MHUP invites families eligible for subsidised housing in Haitham City

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has reached out to 48,000 eligible families, offering them the opportunity to purchase a home in Sultan Haitham City at a subsidised rate.

This announcement precedes the upcoming commencement of residential unit sales in selected neighbourhoods of Phase 1 of Sultan Haitham City.

The ministry noted that opportunities are limited for those wishing to purchase from the 6,700 housing units in Phase 1, slated for construction from 2024 to 2030. Subsequent phases will offer additional opportunities for homeowners.

Sultan Haitham City is extending government-subsidised residential land grants to eligible buyers,

along with reduced-interest financing plans through both commercial and government banks.

For more information, MHUP has invited interested parties to visit the Future Legacy corner at Muscat City Centre, available until October 25.

Earlier this year, MHUP inked several agreements with government and private entities for the Phase 1 development. To assist with financing, a pact was signed to offer RO240mn in housing loans, benefiting 3,000 applicants with an increased loan limit of RO80,000, in association with Housing Bank of Oman.

Additional financial agreements were secured with major banks including Bank Muscat, Ahli Bank, Oman Arab Bank, National Bank of Oman, Sohar International Bank, Sohar Islamic Bank, Bank Dhofar and Alizz Islamic Bank. These partnerships will provide housing loans at a discounted 3.4% interest rate, aiding at least 150 loan recipients from Bank Muscat and 100 from each of the other banks.

Sultan Haitham City's development is planned in four stages. Phase 1, from 2024 to 2030, will feature 6,743 housing units, a private hospital, a fuel station, four schools, 19 commercial plots and other amenities.

Phase 2, from 2028 to 2035, will encompass 2.6mn sqm, housing over 23,000 residents in 4,200 units. Phase 3, from 2033 to 2040, will span 2.3mn sqm and accommodate over 21,000 people in 3,500 housing units.

The final phase, projected for 2038 to 2045, will unfold over approximately 5.5mn sqm and provide homes for over 26,000 individuals in 4,500 units.

Sayyid Fahd receives GCC audit chiefs

Muscat - H H Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received heads of GCC audit and accounting authorities on Wednesday who are holding their 20th meeting in the sultanate.

After a welcoming note, H H Sayyid Fahd underscored the significant role of GCC audit and accounting institutions in implementing the member states' plans and programmes and unifying visions with a view to upgrading performance and extending services to citizens in

a manner that secures public funds.

H H Sayyid Fahd stressed the need to enhance joint coordination between GCC regulatory bodies, benefit from their expertise and apply the outcome of relevant research and studies. He pointed out that Oman's State Audit Institution (SAI) is accorded full support by the government and underlined its effective contribution.

He added that SAI acts in cooperation with other establishments of the state to promote integrity.



Rare sighting of 3 Arabian leopards together in Dhofar



French journalists on a visit to Oman

Israel to allow aid into Gaza via Egypt

Tel Aviv, Israel - Israel would let aid enter Gaza via Egypt, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced on Wednesday, saying only 'food, water and medicine' would be allowed into the blockaded Palestinian enclave.

'In light of (US) President (Joe) Biden's demand, Israel would not foil the supply of humanitarian aid via Egypt,' the prime minister's office said, announcing a cabinet decision.

The statement noted that aid

to civilians in the southern Gaza Strip would be allowed 'so long as these supplies do not reach Hamas' which rules Gaza.

Biden to work for Palestinian state

During his state visit to Israel on Wednesday, Biden renewed commitment on an elusive goal of creating a Palestinian state even as he offered robust support to Israel after the October 7 attacks. "As hard as it is, we must keep

pursuing peace; we must keep pursuing a path so that Israel and the Palestinian people can both live safely in security and dignity and in peace," said Biden.

"For me, that means a two-state solution," he said as he closed a solidarity visit to Israel.

Hospital bombing

Based on aerial images and intercepted communications, US intelligence shows Israel was not to blame for a strike on a Gaza hospital that killed hundreds, the White House said.

"While we continue to collect information, our current assessment, based on analysis of overhead imagery, intercepts and open source information, is that Israel is not responsible for the explosion at the hospital in Gaza yesterday," National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said on social media.

AFP

See also Page 07

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SCAN ME

His Majesty receives credentials of envoys

Continued from Page 01



Dr Mohammed Ali Boughazi, Ambassador of Algeria



Noralizan Abdula Momin, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam



Hajer Amr al Nami, Ambassador of Libya



Dirk Lölke, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany



Fatma Mohammed Rajab, Ambassador of the United Republic of Tanzania



Raul Hernandez, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines

Omanis abroad to vote in Majlis A'Shura elections on Sunday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani citizens living abroad will vote in the Majlis A'Shura's tenth-term elections via the 'Intakhib' app on Sunday. The residents will exercise their franchise the following Sunday - October 29.

Developed to meet the global security standards, the Ministry of Interior's Intakhib app ensures a secure and confidential voting process. The app functions on NFC-enabled smartphones and is accessible to those with valid identity cards listed in the Electoral Register.

The ministry previously revealed the final list of candidates on its election website - <http://www.elections.om>. As per the details released by the ministry, a record number of 753,690 registered voters will take part in the exercise to elect 90 members from 843 candidates. There are 32 women in the fray, the ministry added.

Prepared across multiple dimensions - administrative, technical, legal, and media - the Ministry of Interior confirmed its readiness to oversee the elections.



This ministry's action involves implementation of updates and improvements in various election-related software and procedures, in partnership with relevant authorities.

The ministry has also rolled out more than 12 electronic services, such as a complete electoral roll, candidate lists, and the real-time voting counts, to streamline the electoral process.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis A'shura, noted with happiness the enthusiastic participation from both candidates and voters, signalling people's interest in the elections.

He pointed out that the new term of the Shura aims to trans-

form in structure and function, in alignment with Oman's future visions and plans.

According to Nadabi, the Intakhib app allows candidates to comply with electoral advertising rules while offering voters the opportunity to follow and interact with candidates.

This digital engagement, he emphasised, is crucial for assessing Oman's progress in the field of digital governance.

He also mentioned that the new term would be significant at the national level as it aims to further implement the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040, the tenth Five-Year Plan, and lays the groundwork for the eleventh Five-Year Plan.

Unusual October heat delays residents' plan for autumn fun

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Even though the month of October is coming to an end, the unyielding heat in Oman is showing no sign of abating, with temperatures rising to nearly 40 degrees in various parts.

Contrary to usual climate patterns by which temperatures begin to cool down by the end of September, this year's persistent heatwave is hindering the onset of the fall season.

Saleem Busaidi, an employee of a hospital in Ghubra, said, "October is generally a time for cooler weather and a pleasant shift from summer to autumn. However, an unusual weather pattern has taken hold this year, disrupting what many had anticipated.

"My air conditioner runs constantly, except for the early morning hours when I offer my prayers. This lingering heat could be due to global warming."



An official from the Meteorological Department confirmed that the region is experiencing high atmospheric pressure. "Even though it is receding, the wind filling the void is causing the temperature rise," he explained.

"While high pressure is a contributing factor, the roots of this extraordinary heatwave are complex, encompassing various atmospheric conditions and climatic events."

The official added that in all his years of tracking weather patterns, "we have seldom witnessed such a prolonged heatwave".

This extended heat has far-

reaching implications for residents. Normally by mid-October, people begin planning for fall and winter activities, shifting from their summer attire to winter clothes. Unfortunately, this year's high temperature has put such preparations on hold, generating frustration.

Shabeer Khan, from Pakistan, said, "The heat has substantially curtailed outdoor gatherings, sports, and picnics, as the afternoon temperatures are still very high. Even barbecue events, typically a favourite activity this season, are a challenge due to the hot weather. People are still keeping indoors, away from the relentless heat."



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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 09:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/DGKH-41/3953/2023	Provision of Maintenance Services for Fire Extinguishers and Hose Reel for a Period of TWO (2) Years at Directorate General of Khoula Hospital	30/October/2023	22/November/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25,000

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> .
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



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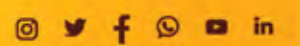
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Rare sighting of 3 Arabian leopards together in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Environment Authority (EA) has captured footage of three adult Arabian leopards walking together in Dhofar for the first time. An official from the authority stated that the rare sighting of three adult Arabian leopards together was captured by camera traps in the mountains of the governorate. "Monitoring Arabian leopards in their natural habitat has been challenging due to their dwindling numbers, leading the International Union for Conservation of Nature to classify these as critically endangered."

The sightings are an indication of Oman's successful efforts to conserve this rare species, while highlighting the active involvement and awareness of the local community, which has been instrumental in the success of these conservation measures.

Monitoring Arabian leopards in their natural habitat has been challenging due to their dwindling numbers

EA OFFICIAL

Moreover, it suggests a robust ecological system and biodiversity in Dhofar. "The team overseeing this project is analysing the data thoroughly to deepen scientific studies and conduct precise field surveys. The aim is to better understand the behaviour of this elusive animal and verify whether the leopards sighted belong to the same family," the official elaborated. "EA's efforts are designed to

adapt the Arabian Leopard Project's management strategy to protect this critically endangered species from extinction." The Arabian leopard is legally protected by Ministerial Decree 101/02 and several Royal Decrees, which prohibit its hunting or capture. Under Royal Decree 6/2003, the penalty for hunting or capturing Arabian leopards includes imprisonment for a minimum of six months and maximum five years, and a fine ranging between RO1,000 and RO5,000. In November 2020, the Office for Conservation of Environment found the first scientific evidence of the Arabian leopard's presence in two separate locations west of Dhalkut. There are fewer than 200 Arabian leopards in the wild. Studies conducted in Oman estimate there are between 44 and 58 of these in the sultanate.

MTCIT improves vehicular movement on Batinah road with tunnels, bridges

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) is currently working on improving the efficiency of Al Batinah Main Road. Construction is in progress for five box tunnels to improve vehicular movement at various locations - Al Muladda in the wilayat of Musannah; Al Subaikhi, Al Khubba and Dhayan al Bawarih in the wilayat of Suwaiq; and Al Buraik in the wilayat of Khaboura. In the last decade, as part of the Batinah Main Road Development Project, MTCIT completed 18 bridges and tunnels. This work was carried out in three distinct



phases. The first phase involved constructing four bridges in the wilayat of Barka, specifically in Asim, Al Haram, Al Numan and Al Sawadi. The second phase entailed the

construction of three bridges - in Al Bidiya in the wilayat of Suwaiq, and Sur al Shayadi and Majz in the wilayat of Saham. In the third phase, seven tunnels were opened to traffic at various locations - Kasbayat al Bu Said, Dale Abdel Salam, Makhilif, Al Zahia, Al Naami, Sur Bani Hammad and Saih al Salihat (Farafara). Additionally, the ministry completed four bridges in Barka, Sohar, Salan and Falaj al Qabail. The new infrastructure has improved the movement of traffic at roundabouts in these locations. In collaboration with the Secretariat General of the Tender Board, MTCIT has recently cleared a project to finalise the remaining segments of the Phase 1 of the Batinah Coastal Road. This project includes building of a bridge over Suwaiq Roundabout on the Batinah Main Road, with construction scheduled to commence early next year.

Dakhliyah gets dialysis unit; Suwaiq hospital nears completion

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health has commenced construction of a dialysis unit in the wilayat of Adam, Dakhliyah. Simultaneously, construction is making significant progress at Al Suwaiq Hospital in North Batinah. Co-funded by Petroleum Development Oman and CC Energy, the dialysis unit will cater to patients residing both within and outside the wilayat. Walid al Mahrouqi, Administrative Services Supervisor for Health Services in Adam, emphasised that the project is crucial given the growing number of kidney patients. "The new facility will not only benefit Adam but also ease the burden on existing dialysis units in the wilayats of Nizwa, Bahla and Samail." Funded by the Ministry of Health, Al Suwaiq Hospital has

a budget of RO75mn. According to Hamad Hareb al Alawi, Project Manager of the hospital, the main building's structural work is complete, accounting for a total project completion rate of 50%. Built on 287,000sqm, the facility will cover 47,357sqm of built-up area and provide 550 parking spaces. Alawi also stated that construction is progressing on supplementary buildings, including a services building, a medical gas warehouse and a waste management building. The hospital will have a variety of departments and specialities, including adult and neonatal intensive care units, a unit for premature infants, a dialysis unit, rehabilitation ward, dental care and cardiac care, among other clinical facilities. Upon completion, the hospital will offer a capacity of 256 beds.

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AUCTION

Auction for the Sale of International Renewable Energy Certificates (I-RECs) from Dhofar Wind IPP

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Company), a member of Nama Group, has recently completed its registration with the International Renewable Energy Certificate (I-REC) Standard for the 50-megawatt (MW) utility-scale wind power project located in Dhofar, the Sultanate of Oman. The Company is commencing its first auction for the sale of the I-RECs of the Dhofar wind farm whereby local entities will have the opportunity to purchase I-RECs to demonstrate that they are meeting their own renewable energy procurement requirements or reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Auction Publication Date	22 nd October 2023
Auction Deadline	16 th November 2023
Instructions to Auction	The auction instruction documents can be accessed electronically, following a registration process, through the Company website: 
Queries	For any queries about the auction process please e-mail: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Additional Information	- Local entities who are interested in bidding for I-RECS will need to register on the Company e-tendering system - Auction submission is electronic and to be done through the Company e-tendering system - Local entities who submit their bid will be required to provide an original cheque to the Company, which should be delivered and addressed to: c/o Procurement Officer 5th Floor, Building 5, Muscat Grand Mall, Tilal Complex Tel.: +968 24508400



Sultan Qaboos University

TENDERS NOTICE

The investment & Revenue Department at Sultan Qaboos University Invites the companies to submit their quotations for these Tenders on the 34th graduation ceremony of Sultan Qaboos University. To be held on 10/12/2023 and 13/12/2023 as follows:

S/N	Type of Business	Event Site	Date of site visit	Tender #	The last date for collecting the Document	The last date for submission of the quotations
1	Selling flowers, sweets and gifts	The Open Theater	23/10/2023 09:00 am	SQU.IRD. 3/23	29/10/2023	12/11/2023
2	Selling specialty coffee	The Open Theater	23/10/2023 09:00 am	SQU.IRD. 4/23		

- The priority will be for the Small and Medium Establishments (SME), which fulfils the quality requirements. All classes of companies can also apply for these Tenders.
- Tenderers who wish to participate in this Tender may collect Tender Documents from The Section of Revenue And Expenditures at the Investment & Revenue Department, Sultan Qaboos University, during the working hours for an amount of OR.25 for each tender document (non-refundable). The last date for Collecting the Document is on Sunday, 29/10/2023.
- The Site Visit for the selected shop is necessary. It will be on the above mentioned date and the assembly point will be at the Investment & Revenue Department.
- The last date for submission of the quotation on Sunday, 12/11/2023 The quotations should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Director of The Investment & Revenue Department, located on the first floor of the commercial building at Sultan Qaboos University and deposited in the Tender Box kept in the Department, before 11:00 a.m.
- The exterior of the envelope should be marked with the name and number of the Tender being presented and should bear no identification or mark of the Tenderer.
- The Tenderer should prepare the Site in accordance with the health requirements of Muscat Municipality and the requirements of civil defense in cooperation with the concerned authorities.
- Sultan Qaboos University reserves the right to reject any quotation not fulfilling the requirements and does not bid itself to accept the highest rent or any other quotations.
- Graduation ceremony dates are subject to change.

The Investment & Revenue Department
P.O BOX 50, P.C. 123, ALKHOD, SULTANATE OF OMAN
Tel: 24142685- 24142684 - mobile: 93900477
Email: investment@squ.edu.om



MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,704.127
Sensex	65,877.02
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India	216.34
Pakistan	726.80
Bangladesh	286.43
Philippines	147.80
Sri Lanka	843.74

*Rates as on October 19
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

US tightens curbs on AI chip exports to China

The United States on Tuesday said it was tightening curbs on exports of state-of-the-art AI chips to China, sending the share price of Nvidia and other semiconductor companies plummeting on Wall Street.

The measures are the latest chapter in the policy started under the Trump administration to limit Beijing's ability to gain ground and become a leading tech economy.

"Today's updated rules will increase the effectiveness of our controls and further shut off pathways to evade our restrictions," said US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

The new rules tighten measures taken a year ago that banned the sale to China of microchips that are crucial to the manufacturing of powerful AI systems.

But calls to further close the supply chain grew after the world discovered the powers of AI with the launch of ChatGPT.

Attention has been focused on Nvidia's industry-leading H100 chip, which is crucial for the creation of generative AI, the technology behind ChatGPT and other powerful systems.

United Finance announces robust third-quarter results

Muscat - United Finance Company unveiled its initial unaudited financial results for the third quarter of 2023, showcasing commendable growth across pivotal financial metrics.

United Finance's total assets recorded a noteworthy increase of 13.9%, reaching RO101.567mn at the end of the third quarter of 2023. The company's total income surged by 25% year-on-year to



RO7.469mn in the third quarter of this year, while operating income rose by 38% to RO2.497mn.

The company's net profit after tax and provisions reported a 24.5% ascent, underscoring the company's robust performance and financial vigour, according to a press release.

Deeply rooted in its mission, United Finance remains stead-

fast in its commitment to simplifying lives and helping people to achieve and offering responsive and bespoke financial solutions.

"These figures accentuate our unwavering dedication to be the go-to finance partner, furnishing individuals and businesses with the necessary tools to elevate their experiences," said Nasser al Rashdi, chief executive officer of United Finance Company.

United Finance said that the success of the third quarter stands as a testament to the company's allegiance to its vision and its relentless drive to enable clients to 'Do more. Experience more'. With an optimistic future on the horizon and being true to its ethos of 'Achieve more', United Finance is geared up for unparalleled success in the sultanate's financial sector.

OAB's RO50mn bonds issue oversubscribed

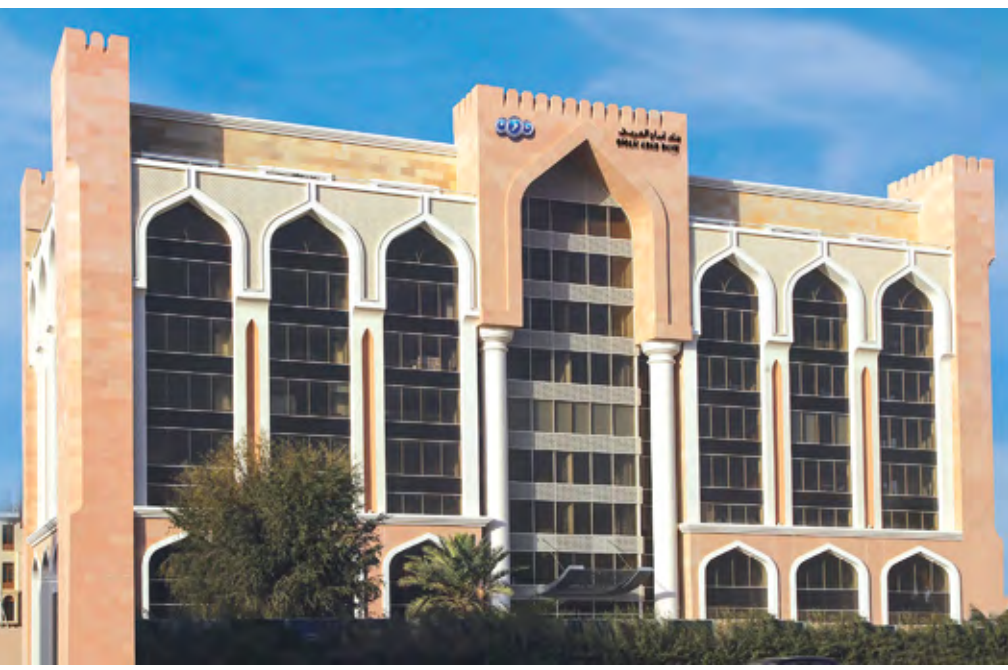
Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has successfully closed a new RO40mn subordinated perpetual additional tier 1 bond issuance with a green shoe option of RO10mn to meet strong investor demand.

The bond attracted an overwhelming response from investors and was oversubscribed by 60%, Oman Arab Bank said in a press statement.

The bonds will carry a coupon rate of 7.00% per annum for the first five years and will be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said, "Our recent bond offering has been met with great success, drawing substantial and diversified investor interest at a very competitive price. The exceptional demand is a testament to the confidence and trust investors have in the bank's growth potential and its capabilities. We are committed to diversify our funding sources



OAB says bond issuance was designed to increase the bank's capital and enhance its ability to service its obligations

capital and enhance its ability to service its obligations.

Oman Arab Bank has been working domestically, regionally and internationally on bonds offerings for many years; this included the first issuance of additional tier 1 perpetual bonds of RO30mn listed on the MSX on December 29, 2016.

According to Oman Arab Bank, the bond issuance was designed to increase the bank's



The agreements were signed by Saad al Kaabi and Wael Sawan, CEO of Shell, at a special event held in Doha (QatarEnergies)

Qatar signs 27-year gas deal with Shell

Doha, Qatar - Qatar has agreed to supply British firm Shell with natural gas for 27 years, the Gulf emirate's state-owned energy company announced on Wednesday.

Since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last year, European countries have scrambled to replace lost deliveries of natural gas from Russia.

Qatar will supply 3.5mn tonnes of gas a year under the deal, QatarEnergy said, following two agreements with Shell for a share of the Gulf state's huge North Field gas expansion project.

North Field East.

Deliveries of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Rotterdam are expected to begin in 2026.

The deal with Shell is equal in length to an agreement with France's TotalEnergies announced earlier this month for a 27-year supply of natural gas.

Qatar will supply 3.5mn tonnes of gas a year under the deal, following two agreements with Shell for a share of North Field gas expansion project

Omantel wins SAMENA telecom award for best 5G adoption in sultanate

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the sultanate, was recently declared the winner of the Lead Award: SAMENA Telecom Award for Best 5G Adoption at a ceremony held in Dubai last week.

The award was in recognition of Omantel's outstanding success in adopting and rapidly extending the 5G network, since the launch of the advanced technology in the sultanate at the end of 2019.

Omantel's 5G network now accounts for more than 68.18% of total wireless traffic and 88.03% of total fixed wireless access traffic - making it the only operator in Oman to achieve these figures in 5G deployment



smartphone applications, smart surveillance systems, and the Internet of Things. We also provide smart city services and mobile communications solutions. All these are part of our strategy to boost digital transformation in the sultanate and contribute to realising the goals of Oman Vision 2040."

"The robustness of Omantel's ecosystem is unparalleled in the region, consolidating our position as a leading company not only locally, but also regionally and internationally. We are excited to offer solutions in new areas covering smart public infrastructure, smart building management solutions, digital banking, healthcare infrastructure, high-performance computing, artificial intelligence solutions, machine learning, big data analysis, deep learning, and smart contracts," he said.

Omantel seeks to reimagine the future and with the tremendous transformation underway, the company is leveraging the unlimited benefits of 5G technology to empower organisations to develop their business models and launch new solutions in the market.

Also, Omantel is working with diverse business sectors and partners to expand the scope of digital transformation in the sultanate. The most prominent of these initiatives is Omantel's collaboration with Hutchison Ports Sohar and Huawei to launch a number of smart port management services, the first of its kind in the Middle East, in addition to its collaboration with Huawei and Oman Oil Marketing Company to successfully launch the first smart fifth-generation outlet in Oman.

and among the best 5G operators in the region.

Talal al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, said, "We are honored to receive this prestigious award from the largest professional association of the telecom sector in

the MENA region. Our growth was driven by our partnerships with government institutions and private sector companies, with Omantel providing them with modern systems and technologies such as 5G, in addition to

Most global stock markets drop on fears of broader Middle East war

London, UK - Global stock markets mostly fell Wednesday on fears that the Israel-Hamas conflict could spill over into a regional war after a strike at a Gaza hospital dealt a blow to President Joe Biden's diplomatic drive.

European markets fell across the board with London also dented by news of stubbornly high UK inflation.

Asian markets mostly dropped, with Hong Kong,

Shanghai, Singapore, Mumbai, Jakarta, Taipei and Manila all down.

Sydney, Seoul, Wellington and Bangkok edged up. Tokyo was flat.

US stocks slipped into the red in early trading Wednesday as investors digested earnings reports while keeping one eye warily on the ongoing fighting in the Middle East.

US President Joe Biden trav-



eled to Israel shortly after a strike on a hospital in the Gaza Strip, which the Hamas-run health ministry say killed at least 471 people. Shortly after trading began on Wall Street, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.3% at 33,911.74.

The broad-based S&P 500 was down 0.4% at 4,354.77, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite index was trading down 0.5% at 13,472.48.

"Equity traders are really not very good at factoring in geopolitical events, such as the type that we're seeing in the Middle East, because the cause and effect is not particularly clear," Steve Sosnick from Interactive Brokers told AFP.

"Ultimately, equity markets and stocks do have to worry about what's going on in bond markets and what's going on in commodity markets, particularly

oil," he continued.

"They're all unsettled, and so as a result, you get this unsettled feeling in the market." Among individual stocks, United Airlines saw its share price fall more than seven per cent after reporting earnings for the third quarter.

The US airline warned that the conflict could cause a prolonged pause on routes into Tel Aviv, which would hit its profitability.

AFP



Oil prices up over rising tensions in Middle East

London, UK – Oil prices rose on Wednesday over concerns of escalating geopolitical tensions after Israel's attacks in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza, while a drop in US crude oil stocks also improved market demand optimism in the world's largest oil-consuming country.

International benchmark crude Brent traded at \$91.44 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 1.71% gain from the closing price of \$89.90 a barrel in the previous trading session on Tuesday.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at the same time at \$87.09 per barrel, up 1.93% from Tuesday's close of \$85.44 per barrel.

Concerns that increasing tensions in the Middle East will spill over into other regional countries and impair oil supplies drove price upticks.

According to the Palestinian news agency WAFA, more than

500 people were killed in the Israeli airstrike on the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza late Tuesday.

Any conflict between Iran and the US and Israel might jeopardize a successful outcome in the US-Iran nuclear deal, which would eliminate sanctions on Iran, including Iranian oil exports.

Fears of a breakdown in the normalisation process between Saudi Arabia and Israel, both of which do not have formal diplomatic relations, also impacted oil prices.

Saudi Arabia called on the international community to cease dealing with double standards when it comes to "Israeli criminal practices."

Riyadh insists that any agreement to normalise ties with Tel Aviv include a component to advance efforts to establish a Palestinian state, concessions that Israel has so far flatly rebuffed.

Anadolu Agency

China to inject \$100bn into Belt and Road initiative

Beijing, China – Beijing will inject over \$100bn of new funding into its Belt and Road initiative, President Xi Jinping said Wednesday at a summit marking the vast infrastructure project's tenth anniversary.

The Belt and Road is a central pillar of Xi's bid to expand China's clout overseas, with Beijing saying it has now inked over two trillion dollars in contracts around the world.

Proponents hail it for bringing resources and economic growth to the Global South.

But the initiative has also been slammed for saddling poor countries with enormous debt.

Xi announced on Wednesday that key Belt and Road lenders the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank will now offer an additional \$100bn in loans.

Both will set up financing opportunities of 350bn yuan (\$47.9bn) for BRI projects, he said.

An additional 80bn yuan will be injected into the project's official lending institution, the Silk Road fund, Xi said.

This week's forum, attended by representatives of 130 countries, is the third major summit of its kind to be hosted by Beijing since the Belt and Road's launch in 2013.

Critics have long pointed to



Chinese President Xi Jinping gesturs during the opening ceremony of the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Wednesday (AFP)

Under the Belt and Road initiative, China says it has now inked over \$2tn in contracts around the world

opaque pricing for BRI projects built by Chinese companies, with countries including Malaysia and Myanmar renegotiating deals to bring down costs.

Beijing has been forced to hand out billions of dollars in bailout loans to BRI countries in recent years to allow the countries to extend their loans and re-

main solvent, according to a joint report this year by the World Bank and other institutions.

And China said this month that BRI participants owe more than \$300bn to the Export-Import Bank of China.

The initiative has also drawn scrutiny for its massive carbon footprint and the environmental

degradation caused by massive infrastructure projects.

The development of mega-ports, pipelines, railways and highways could render the Paris climate goals unreachable, researchers from China, the United States and the United Kingdom warned in 2019.

AFP

China's economic growth slowed in third-quarter but beat forecasts

Beijing, China – China's economy grew more than expected in the third quarter, data showed Wednesday, but the reading was still below target and officials continue to face calls for more stimulus while struggling to contain an unprecedented property crisis.

The 4.9% expansion in July-September was helped by forecast-beating retail sales figures and follows a series of broadly positive readings that point to a period of stability following months of weakness despite the lifting of strict zero-Covid measures.

But authorities are still on edge over turmoil in the real-estate sector, which has long accounted for a quarter of the country's gross domestic product, supports thousands of companies and is a major source of employment.

The industry enjoyed dazzling growth for decades, but the recent woes of key developers including Evergrande and Country Garden are now fuelling buyer mistrust while homes lie unfinished and prices plummet.

Country Garden, one of China's biggest property firms and long believed to be finan-



This aerial photo taken on October 13 shows cargo ships at Qingdao port in China's eastern Shandong province (AFP)

The International Monetary Fund on Wednesday called for China to implement a 'comprehensive strategy' to address problems in the real estate sector

cially sound, failed last month to repay interest on a loan totalling \$15.4mn.

The group has been granted a 30-day grace period which ends on Wednesday, and risks default

if it does not honour the repayment

The country faced a "grave and complex international environment and challenging tasks in promoting reform, development

and stability at home" in the first three quarters of 2023, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Wednesday.

Authorities have stepped up incentives for property purchases in recent months to reinvigorate the sector, but buyers remain cautious.

Households are watching their spending amid sluggish growth, which has hurt consumption this year, though a week-long national holiday in

October helped boost spending on tourism and other services.

Retail sales, the main indicator of household consumption, rose a better-than-expected 5.5 percent on-year in September.

Stimulus calls

But the government continues to face calls for measures to rekindle the economy.

While leaders have unveiled a series of targeted stimulus for various sectors -- particularly property -- pressure is building on them to announce wider-ranging support.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Wednesday called for China to implement a "comprehensive strategy to address problems in the real estate sector".

"China's weaker near-term growth outlook will weigh on regional growth," it said, adding that the country's debt-burdened property sector will be a drag on demand across the region.

Bloomberg News reported last week that Beijing was looking at issuing almost \$140bn in sovereign debt to boost the beleaguered economy, with cash would be spent on various projects.

AFP



Co-founder and chief executive officer of Nvidia Jensen Huang (L) and Chairman of Foxconn Technology Group Young Liu attend the Hon Hai Tech Day in Taipei on October 18, 2023 (AFP)

Foxconn, Nvidia are building 'AI factories'

Taipei, Taiwan – Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn and US hardware leader Nvidia said Wednesday they would team up to create "AI factories", powerful data processing centres that would drive the manufacturing of next-generation products such as electric cars.

The world's largest contract electronics maker, Foxconn -- officially known as Hon Hai Technology Group -- already plays a lynchpin role in assembling gadgets for top global brands, including Apple's iPhone.

But it has ambitions to diversify beyond electronics assembly -- even embracing the competitive but rapidly expanding electric vehicle business by unveiling concept cars on its "Hon Hai Tech Day" in past years.

This year, chairman Young Liu opened the annual event with Nvidia's CEO Jensen Huang to introduce a "new class of data centres powering a wide range of applications".

Silicon Valley-based Nvidia made its name developing graphics processing units (GPUs), a powerful chip technology that started as the backbone of modern video

games -- but has now become a crucial pillar in the rapid development of generative AI.

"Together we will be helping the whole industry move much faster into the new AI era," Liu announced onstage with Huang.

The "factories" would include "digitalisation of manufacturing and inspection workflows, development of AI-powered electric vehicle and robotics platforms, and a growing number of language-based generative AI services", according to Nvidia.

Huang said Foxconn "has the expertise and scale to build AI factories globally".

If successful, Foxconn's customers could use these systems to deliver generative AI services and use simulation to train autonomous machines like industrial robots and self-driving cars.

The announcement Wednesday came a day after the United States unveiled tightening curbs on exports of state-of-the-art chips to China -- the latest move to prevent Beijing's advances in cutting-edge tech, seen by Washington as a national security threat.

AFP

British inflation stays elevated in September

London, UK – British inflation remained elevated in September, official data showed Wednesday, prolonging a cost-of-living crisis and stoking fear that UK interest rates could stay higher for longer.

The Consumer Prices Index held at 6.7% last month, after unexpectedly slowing to the same level in August, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

That dashed market predic-

tions for a further slowdown to 6.6%, as easing food and drink prices were offset by higher energy costs.

The gloomy news came one day after upbeat data showed that UK wage growth was outstripping inflation for the first time in almost two years. Inflation has sunk from a 41-year peak of 11.1% in October 2022, helped by a series of rate hikes from the Bank of England (BoE).

Yet Britain still faces a cost-

of-living crisis, with inflation remaining at the highest level in the G7 grouping of rich nations, although Japan has yet to report September figures.

ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner said the costs of food, non-alcoholic drinks, household appliances and air fares eased in September, but those falls were "offset" by rising prices for motor fuels and hotel stays.

Finance minister Jeremy Hunt insisted that UK inflation

remained on a downward path in the longer term.

"As we have seen across other G7 countries, inflation rarely falls in a straight line, but if we stick to our plan then we still expect it to keep falling this year," he said.

However, inflation is still running at more than three times the BoE's target level of two percent despite the central bank's aggressive rate-hiking campaign which started in late

2021.

The BoE left its key rate unchanged at 5.25% last month, snapping 14 straight hikes after inflation unexpectedly slowed in August from 6.8% in July.

Wednesday's data fuelled worries that the central bank will have to remain on guard, particularly as oil prices spike once more on the Israel-Hamas conflict in the crude-rich Middle East.

AFP

AFA international conference begins



The 35th edition of the AFA international technical conference and exhibition began on Tuesday, under the patronage of H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

The conference, organised by the Arab Fertilizer Association (AFA), is taking place at Kempinski Hotel, in Muscat, with the participation of more than 500 Arab and international companies, equipment and technology suppliers, and other research institutes and related companies.

H E Habsi clarified that the production and export of fertilisers constitute a significant process, as OMIFCO exports its products to various countries across the world. He stated that the ministry follows the directives of Zero Carbon Neutrality and emissions control, adding that MAFWR works in tandem with various companies investing in this sector.



The conference began with a speech delivered by H E Dr Ahmed al Bakri, Undersecretary for Agriculture in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. He stated that the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik direct the adoption of the year 2050 to reach Zero Neutrality in the sultanate, and the establishment of 'Oman Sustainability Centre', which will ensure the implementation of the initiatives and projects as per the National Plan for

Carbon Neutrality.

The centre will work for achieving the percentage targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. H E Bakri indicated that the chemical fertilisers emissions amount to 12%, therefore, the utilisation of modern technologies to improve the quality of fertilisers and to limit their use is a must.

Saad Abou Elmaaty, secretary general of the Arab Fertilizer Association, affirmed that this year's conference focuses on the oper-

ation mechanisms that preserve the sustainability of the environment, reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption of the fertiliser industry, and create future visions towards green transformation. He clarified that fertilisers manufacturing is a pivotal pillar of food security and agricultural production.

Mohamed Tahar Heouaine, chairman of the Arab Fertilizer Association, clarified in his speech that the adoption of efficient and clear strategies that

seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; requires the utilisation of the available eco-friendly solutions and modern technologies, in order to reach Zero Carbon Neutrality, through gradual scientific steps.

Abdulahakim bin Abdullah, president of the National Program for Carbon Neutrality, reviewed the benefits of achieving the objectives of carbon neutrality, and the national goals set to be reached by 2030. He also clarified the transformation of

the Sultanate of Oman towards zero carbon neutrality.

This year, the conference aims to discuss the latest technological developments, digital solutions, and green transformation methods, under the slogan 'The Path to Net Zero'.

It also discusses effective solutions to reduce and capture carbon from fertiliser factories of all kinds, the latest innovative trends in green ammonia technology, modern solutions for producing highly efficient blue hydrogen, emissions control, energy conservation initiatives, clean energy trends, water treatment, and introducing emission-free phosphate fertilisers.

The conference concludes with a special session on supply and demand, with the participation of major international companies, senior speakers, international experts, and those working in the field of fertiliser manufacturing and production technology.

The conference comes in line with the vision of the Arab Fertilizer Association, and efforts of the Sultanate of Oman towards sustainability, keeping pace with the global shift towards renewable energy, and adopting modern technology to reduce emissions, while preserving natural resources to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Mall of Muscat adds Fun VR to its package

Mall of Muscat, Oman's premium shopping and leisure destination, has launched Fun VR, Oman's premier Virtual Reality Gaming Arena to become the market leader in Oman for fun and entertainment activities.

In addition to the existing entertainment options such as Oman Aquarium, Fabyland, Extreme Zone, Novo Cinemas etc, at Fun VR now, avid gamers can delve into alternate virtual universes using cutting-edge VR technology.

Whether playing alone or competing with friends and family, exciting games are available for them to indulge in.

One of the largest virtual reality experience venue in Oman, Fun VR at Mall of Muscat aims to redefine the boundaries of immersive entertainment and interactive exploration for gamers and enthusiasts alike.

With this new opening, gamers can discover a world of art and adventure in virtual reality, making visits to Mall of Muscat an even more enriching experience filled with fun, entertainment and exploration.

A spokesperson for Mall of Muscat said, "As a focal point for the community, Mall of Muscat is pleased to announce the introduction of Fun VR, offering a wide range of state of the art immersive experiences."

Bank Muscat hosts seminar on Global Economic Prospects

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in Oman, hosted a special seminar on Global Economics Prospects presented by Dr Gaurav Ganguly, the Chief Economist for Europe and the Middle East, and the Head of the Climate Scenario Group at Moody's Analytics.

The event was attended by a number of officials representing different institutions and corporates and senior officials from Bank Muscat.

"It is one of Bank Muscat's priorities to organise events like this and connect with our corporate partners with the aim of keeping them informed about the latest developments in the banking and economic sectors," said Ilham Murtadha al Hamaid, General Manager - Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat.

"The bank is also keen to attract expertise and exchange knowledge in the related fields. Our aim is to ensure that our partners are well-aware about all the latest trends on the local, regional and international arena. We will continue to go above and beyond to serve our customers and contribute to the prosperity of Oman."

During the seminar, Dr Gan-



guly focused on a number of points around global prospects including non-oil economy in the GCC, inflation and risks, long term growth prospects, shifting Fiscal Breakevens, improvement of government balances, top CO2 emitters, global greenhouse gas emissions, and energy consumption and supply amongst other related points.

Through continuously upgrading the services and products, Bank Muscat seeks to meet the aspirations of its customers by keeping pace with the latest trends in banking sector and it exerts efforts to provide only the

best to them.

The bank has succeeded over 40 years to gain people's trust which can be seen in the ever-growing bank's family.

As part of its efforts to enhance convenience and add value to services offered to the governmental institutions, corporates and SMEs, the bank's five exclusive corporate branches are located at major business hubs in the sultanate, Al Nahdha Towers branch, CBD corporate branch, Sohar corporate branch, Salalah corporate branch and the newly-opened branch in Duqm.

Merc CLA Coupé becomes trendsetter

With numerous innovations and upgraded standard equipment, Mercedes-Benz is strengthening the position of the CLA Coupé as a trendsetter in the compact segment.

The newly shaped front apron, the revised radiator grille with star pattern and the new rear diffuser sharpens the sporty character. Added to this are the modernised graphics in the LED High Performance headlamps, which are standard for the first time, and the LED rear lights.

The new paint colours hyper blue (exclusive to the CLA models) and spectral blue, as well as three additional wheel-rim designs in sizes up to 19 inches, extend the choice for individualisation.

As standard, the new CLA Coupé model is fitted with 17-inch five-spoke alloy wheels in vanadium silver or a five-double-spoke design in high-gloss black with high-shine finish. Exclusive interior with high-tech look, fresh colours and new trims

The highlight of the interior is the free-standing double screen. It now includes two 10.25-inch displays with a wide-screen look as standard.

They offer a holistic high-tech experience and create an exceptionally open spatial architecture.



The steering wheel of the current generation is upholstered in leather Nappa as standard. Alternatively, the multifunction sports steering wheel is available in ARTICO man made leather for the first time. The new trim elements in a dark carbon look, open-pore brown lime wood or brown MICROCUT microfibre (AMG Line only) further enhance the interior.

The comfort seats are also part of the new high-quality standard in the CLA Coupé. They are fitted as standard with a combination of ARTICO man-made leather and three-dimensionally embossed fabric in black. They are also optionally available in trendy sage grey.

In the AMG Line, the standard seat upholstery in ARTICO man-

made leather/microfibre MICROCUT is now also available in bahia brown. A total of five upholstery colours are available in the AMG Line: black, bahia brown, sage grey, titanium grey pearl/black and, for the first time, red pepper/black.

In the ARTICO/MICROCUT seat cover, this proportion is 65% in the seat mirror and 85% in the bottom fabric. The use of recycled materials is an important measure on the way to CO2 neutrality.

As early as the end of this decade, Mercedes-Benz aims to at least halve the CO2 emissions per passenger car in the new vehicle fleet over the entire life cycle compared to 2020. From 2039 onwards, the passenger

car and van fleet aim to be CO2-neutral with offsets across the entire automotive value chain.

Mercedes-Benz has significantly upgraded the standard equipment and tailored the offer logic even more precisely to specific customer wishes.

The basic equipment of the new CLA model already includes Highbeam Assist, a reversing camera and the USB package in addition to the leather steering wheel and LED front headlamps.

The CLA Coupé features the latest generation of MBUX - with newly designed display styles: 'Classic' provides all relevant driver information, 'Sporty' impresses with the dynamic rev counter and 'Discreet' is limited to the most essential items.

Workshop highlights early detection of autism and developmental disorders

A two-day workshop on the mechanism for early detection of autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disorders, organised by the Department of Woman and Child Health, commenced at the erstwhile building of the Ministry of Transportation & Communication on Wednesday.

Sixty-three health workers from various public and private health institutions from various governorates participated in the workshop carried out by specialised speakers, promoting thus the programme of 'Early Detection of Autism'.

Most recent updates of



Autism detection programme and management of suspected cases are of the event's focus,

along with the key educational, rehabilitation, and promotional services delivered for this cate-

gory of children.

The new updated policy for the referral of suspected cases

with autism and other developmental disorders among public and private health institutions

was addressed.

Notably, the National Programme for Early Detection of

Autism was integrated in September 2016, then a National Workshop on Autism Spectrum Disorder was conducted to train health workers on the implementation of the service.

Moreover, Manual of Management of Children with Autism and other Developmental Disorders was issued.

The ministry is working currently to finding specific mechanism for the feedbacks regarding medium and high risk referred cases between primary healthcare institutions and specialised hospitals such as the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and the Royal Hospital.

A 'DAY OF RAGE' IN MIDEAST

Arab world blames Israel for hospital strike as thousands rally in the region

Israel and Palestinian fighters have traded blame for the hospital strike on Tuesday

Dubai, UAE - A Gaza hospital strike that killed 471 people has unleashed a torrent of condemnation across the Arab world, with even allies blaming Israel for the attack, despite its denials.

The denunciations coincided with angry rallies in Lebanon, Jordan, Libya, Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco, Iran and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, with more planned on Wednesday following calls for a 'day of rage' across the region.

Israel and Palestinian fighters have traded blame for the hospital strike on Tuesday night, with the Israeli army saying on Wednesday it had 'evidence' that Hamas was responsible.

But the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which both established ties with Israel in the Abraham Accords of 2020, condemned the 'Israeli' attack which came as Israel lays siege to Gaza.

"The United Arab Emirates strongly condemns the Israeli attack... resulting in the death and injury of hundreds of people," the UAE's official WAM news agency said early on Wednesday.

Bahrain's foreign ministry 'expressed the Kingdom of Bahrain's condemnation and strong denunciation of the Israeli bombing', the Bahrain

News Agency said.

Morocco, another country that recognised Israel in 2020, also blamed it for the strike, as did Egypt, which became the first Arab country to normalise relations in 1979.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi condemned in the strongest terms 'the Israeli bombing' of the Ahli Arab hospital, which led to 'the deaths of hundreds of innocent victims' among the Palestinian citizens in Gaza. He called the 'deliberate bombing' a 'clear violation of international law'.

The denunciations coincided with angry rallies in Lebanon, Jordan, Libya, Yemen, Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco, Iran and West Bank

Saudi Arabia, which has ended talks on potential ties with Israel since violence flared, called the blast a 'heinous crime committed by the Israeli occupation forces'.

'War crime'

During a press conference in Beirut on Wednesday, Palestin-



People inspect to identify one of the bodies of victims of the overnight strike at the Ahli Arab hospital at a makeshift tent at the site in central Gaza on Wednesday (AFP)

ian Islamist group Hamas called for attacks against Israeli forces in the West Bank and other territories in response to the hospital strike.

"We call on our people in the West Bank and our people in Palestine...to rise up against the Zionist enemy and clash with its forces in all cities, villages and

camps," Hamas official Osama Hamdan told reporters.

Hamdan called for region-wide protests on Friday and Saturday, demanding the 'expulsion of the ambassadors of the Zionist entity in all Arab and Islamic capitals'.

Jordan said Israel 'bears responsibility for this grave inci-

dent' while Qatar, which has close ties to Hamas, slammed the 'brutal massacre'.

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference, also blaming Israel, called it 'a war crime, a crime against humanity, and organised state terrorism'.

Gulf Cooperation Council secretary general Jassem Mo-

hamed Albudaiwi said it was 'glaring evidence of the serious violations by the Israeli occupation forces'. Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit called on Tuesday for leaders to 'stop this tragedy immediately'.

"What diabolical mind intentionally bombards a hospital and its defenceless inhabi-

tants?" he wrote on X, previously Twitter.

Lebanon's Hezbollah movement called for a 'day of rage' against Israel following the attack as hundreds rallied at the US and French embassies overnight, where they scuffled with security forces.

AFP



NO TO GENOCIDE

Demonstrators holding a banner which reads 'No to Genocide' march from Kocatape Mosque to Abdi Ipekci Park in Ankara in support of Palestinians on Wednesday. Turkey will declare three days' mourning over the deadly strike on a hospital in war-torn Gaza that killed hundreds, said an official (AFP)

Egypt's Sisi blames Israel for aid block

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt's president said on Wednesday he would not allow any mass influx of refugees from Gaza, saying it would set a precedent for 'the displacement of Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan'.

After talks with visiting German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi blamed Israel's air strikes on the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt for the failure to get aid to the territory's 2.4mn people. "The displacement of Palestinians from Gaza to Egypt means the same displacement will take place for Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan," Sisi warned.

"Subsequently, the Palestinian state that we are talking about and that the world is talking about will become impossible to implement - because the



Smoke plumes billow after an explosion during Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday (AFP)

land is there, but the people are not. Therefore, I warn of the danger of this matter." Sisi's meeting with the German chancellor came as Gaza faced a 12th straight day of ferocious Israeli bombardment in retaliation for a shock cross-border attack launched by Hamas.

About 3,000 people have been killed in Gaza, which is

nearly out of electricity, food, water and fuel.

Pressure has mounted for aid to be allowed in through Egypt's Rafah crossing with Gaza, the only access to the besieged territory not controlled by Israel.

Sisi said Egypt 'did not close' the crossing, but that 'developments on the ground and the repeated bombings by Israel of

the Palestinian side of the crossing have prevented its operation'. Hundreds of lorries carrying aid have been waiting for six days on the Egyptian side of the crossing, which Israeli aircraft has bombed four times.

Scholz told reporters Berlin and Cairo 'are working together to get humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip as quickly as possible'. The two men also warned against the threat of regional spillover, with the Egyptian president calling for 'immediate international intervention' to put a stop to 'dangerous military escalation that may get out of control'.

Scholz reiterated that Germany sought to avoid a 'conflagration in the Middle East' and warned Hezbollah and Iran 'once again not to intervene in this conflict'.

AFP

Joe Biden backs Israel stance on hospital attack

Tel Aviv, Israel - US President Joe Biden on a visit to Israel on Wednesday backed his ally's stance blaming Palestinian fighters for a rocket strike on a hospital that killed hundreds in war-torn Gaza and has inflamed anger across the Middle East.

Biden, on a solidarity visit to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, voiced support for Israel's position that a misfired Islamic Jihad rocket caused the deadly carnage at Gaza's Christian-run Ahli Arab Hospital.

"I was deeply saddened and outraged by the explosion at the hospital in Gaza yesterday," Biden said about the strike that killed 471 people according to Gaza's Hamas-controlled health ministry.

"And, based on what I've seen, it appears as though it was done by the other team, not you," said the US president, referring to the armed movements Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

"But there's a lot of people out there not sure, so we have to overcome a lot of things," Biden added, as protests also erupted against Israel and the United States in the occupied West Bank and Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

Biden has expressed 'iron-clad' US support for top regional ally Israel and its military campaign. "We will continue to have your back," Biden said after meeting Netanyahu's war cabinet in Tel Aviv. "As you work to defend your people, we will continue to work with you and partners across the region to prevent more tragedy to inno-



US President Joe Biden listens to Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu as he joins a meeting of the Israeli war cabinet in Tel Aviv on Wednesday (AFP)

cent civilians."

'Bloodshed must stop'

But the horror of the hospital deaths threatened to derail his high-stakes regional visit, with Jordan cancelling a summit between King Abdullah II, Biden, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

destroyed entire city blocks. More than a million people have been displaced ahead of an anticipated Israeli ground offensive. Overnight, after the explosion, scores of bodies cloaked in blood-stained sheets and white plastic lined the floors at the nearby the Al-Shifa hospital, where bereaved relatives tried to identify loved ones.

"As I entered the hospital, I

As I entered the hospital, I heard the explosion. I saw a massive fire. The entire square was on fire. There were bodies everywhere

ADNAN AL-NAQA

Israel's military campaign to destroy Hamas, which is holding 199 hostages in the besieged territory, has now claimed the lives of 3,478 people, according to health officials.

In besieged Gaza, the hospital blast brought new horrors after 12 days of sustained bombardment that Israel says targets Hamas and which has

heard the explosion. I saw a massive fire," said Gaza resident Adnan al-Naqa. "The entire square was on fire. There were bodies everywhere, children, women and elderly people."

The Palestine Red Crescent Society said hundreds died including 'internally displaced people seeking safe shelter'.

AFP

Putin says world conflicts 'strengthen' ties with China

Putin was the guest of honour at the BRI summit hosted by Xi in Beijing

Beijing, China - Russian leader Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that world conflicts 'strengthen' his country's relations with China, after talks with Xi Jinping that celebrated their nations' deepening political and economic ties.

Putin, on his first trip to a major global power since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, met his 'old friend' Xi in Beijing on the sidelines of a major forum in an event overshadowed by conflict in the Middle East.

At a press conference following the talks, Putin said that global turmoil served to bring China and Russia even closer together. "All these outside factors are common threats and they strengthen Russian-Chinese cooperation," he said.

The Russian leader also said he had 'optimism' for the future of the relationship.

Xi, too, said that 'political mutual trust between the two countries is continuously deepening', according to Xinhua news agency, hailing their 'close and effective strategic coordination'.

Xi noted that he had met with Putin 42 times in the past decade, saying they had 'developed a good working relationship and a deep friendship'.

Putin was the guest of honour at the summit hosted by Xi in Beijing this week to celebrate his



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping during a meeting in Beijing on Wednesday (AFP)

Global turmoil served to bring China and Russia closer together. These outside factors are common threats and they strengthen Russian-Chinese cooperation

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Belt and Road Initiative, a vast trade and infrastructure project. International attention has been focused on the Israel-Gaza conflict, which has raged for more than 10 days, and both Russia and China condemned the Tuesday night strike on a

an 'immediate ceasefire'.

Earlier, Xi called for joint efforts by China and Russia to 'safeguard international fairness' and 'justice', Xinhua reported.

China is Russia's largest trading partner, with exchange between the nations reaching a record US\$190bn last year, Beijing customs data shows.

And Xi said on Wednesday it was progressing towards a goal of US\$200bn set by the two countries in bilateral meetings this year.

Beijing has drawn criticism from Western countries for its stance on the Ukraine war, on which China insists it is neutral. It has refused to criticise Moscow's invasion.

Putin is on a mission to strengthen the already strong bond with his communist neighbour, though experts say Moscow is increasingly the junior partner in the relationship.

In his talks with Xi, he stressed the importance of 'close coordination in foreign policy' in 'the current difficult conditions'.

Representatives of 130 countries are in the Chinese capital for the two-day talking shop that wraps up on Wednesday. Earlier, Xi said in a speech to the international delegates that his country rejected 'economic coercion' and 'bloc confrontation'.

AFP

Gaza hospital that killed hundreds. Putin on Wednesday said the strike was a 'tragedy' and showed the need to bring the conflict between Israel and Hamas to an end.

"This is a terrible event... I really hope that this will be a signal that this conflict needs to end as soon as possible," he said.

China's foreign ministry said it was 'shocked by and strongly condemns' the strike, calling for

Russian foreign minister arrives in North Korea

Seoul, South Korea - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arrived in North Korea on Wednesday, Russian news agencies said, as Western concerns mount over deepening military ties between the historic allies.

The envoy's two-day visit is expected to focus in part on laying the groundwork for a future trip to the country by President Vladimir Putin, a Kremlin spokesman told the TASS news agency earlier. It comes a day after Moscow dismissed US allegations that North Korea had begun supplying Russia with arms for its war in Ukraine.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last month travelled to Russia and invited Putin to visit his country. Kim's summit with Putin fanned Western fears that Pyongyang could provide Moscow with weapons for its drawn-out war in Ukraine.

On Friday, the United States said arms shipments were already under way, with North Korea delivering more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions to Russia in recent weeks.

Pyongyang was seeking a range of military assistance in return, including advanced technologies, White House national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

According to a graphic provided by the White House, a load of containers was shipped by sea from Najin in North Korea, to Dunay in Russia, between September 1 and October 1.

They were then delivered by rail to an ammunition depot about 290km (180 miles) from the Ukrainian border.

But the Kremlin on Tuesday said the United States had no evidence that weapons were being shipped.

"They report this all the time, without providing any proof," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian news agencies when asked about the reported arms shipments.

Washington-based analysts Beyond Parallel last week separately released satellite images showing what they termed an 'unprecedented' build-up of train traffic along Russia's border with North Korea.

The flurry of activity 'likely indicates North Korea's supply of arms and munitions to Russia', the group said in its report.

While Russia has ramped up production of shells this year to a forecast 2.5mn, analysts have suggested that could fall short of its needs on the battlefield.

Moscow's forces are firing about 60,000 rounds per day, according to Ukrainian figures.

North Korea is a mass producer of conventional weaponry and known to be sitting on large stocks of Soviet-era war material - albeit in unknown condition.

AFP

Cambodian opposition figure jailed for three years

Phnom Penh, Cambodia - A Cambodian court on Wednesday jailed a senior opposition figure for three years over his social media post discussing the disputed history of the fall of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime.

The ultra-Maoist regime left about two million Cambodians dead from overwork, starvation, illness and mass executions from 1975-79. Cambodia's ruling party commemorates January 7 as 'Victory Day', marking the liberation of the country from the Khmer Rouge's rule, but opposition activists describe it as the start of Vietnam's decade-long occupation of Cambodia.

Thach Setha, a vice president of the opposition Candlelight Party, in January posted a video to Facebook discussing the politically sensitive history of January 7, but his critical comments drew the ire of authorities accusing him of incitement ahead of the July election. The Phnom Penh Municipal Court on Wednesday found Thach Setha guilty of two incitement charges.

He was sentenced to three



This file photo shows Thach Setha speaking during a protest in front of the Vietnamese embassy in Phnom Penh on October 4, 2014 (AFP)

years in prison and ordered to pay a US\$1,000 fine, his lawyer Sam Sokong told AFP.

"The defence team is disappointed with the ruling because it is an unjust conviction," he said, adding that his team would consult with Thach Setha about whether to appeal.

In January, Thach Setha was also arrested for allegedly issuing bad cheques and received an 18-month jail sentence in that case last month.

Government critics say that case was politically motivated because he was taken into custody ahead of the country's election which the ruling party won by a landslide. The ruling Cambodian People's Party won all but five of 125 seats in the lower house in July polls.

AFP

Striking civilians: Three killed in Russian attack on Ukraine

Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine - Russian overnight strikes on Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk regions killed at least three people on Wednesday morning, Ukrainian officials said.

Two were killed in a missile strike that hit a residential building in the southeastern city of Zaporizhzhia, the local governor said, and a 31-year-old woman was killed in a strike on a town just outside the city of Dnipro, Ukraine's internal affairs minister Igor Klymenko said.

Zaporizhzhia governor Yuriy Malashko said Russia 'launched six missile attacks on Zaporizhzhia city' between 1:33am and 1:48am (2233 and 2248 GMT Tuesday).

"I am at the scene where the S-300 missile hit a residential building. As of now, we have confirmation of two dead, three wounded who were taken to medical facilities and two wounded who were treated on the spot. Three people are considered missing," Malashko said in an interview with a Ukrainian TV station.



Ukrainian rescuers work outside a residential building destroyed following Russian missile strikes, in Zaporizhzhia, southeastern Ukraine on Wednesday, amid the Russian invasion in Ukraine (AFP)

Emergency services said the strike in Zaporizhzhia destroyed the building's third to fifth floors. Photos showed a crater in the upper floors and a collapsed facade. "The apartment was badly damaged. The part facing the street is not there at all. There are two rooms on the other side and there is nothing left at all," 41-year-old Tetyana, who owns a third-floor flat in the building and was not home at the time of the strike, told AFP.

Residents said they were worried for the fate of at least one more couple who lived on the fifth floor.

Governor Malashko said three people were still missing.

In Dnipropetrovsk, interior minister Klymenko said a 31-year-old woman was killed and four were injured in an attack that destroyed eight buildings.

"Russia once again struck the civilian population," he said in a post on Telegram.

There was no information on what weapon was used.

Wednesday's attacks come a day after Ukraine announced that it had used US long-range ATACMS missiles against Russia for the first time.

AFP

Poland: Women and young voters behind victory of liberal opposition

Warsaw, Poland - The electoral success of Poland's liberal opposition led by 66-year-old former EU president Donald Tusk was largely thanks to votes from people less than half his age.

Sunday's elections saw the highest turnout in Poland's post-Communist era, mainly due to unprecedented mobilisation among sometimes reticent voters - young people and women.

Nearly 69 per cent of eligible young people aged 29 or less voted, a 12 percentage point increase from the levels seen at previous elections four years ago.

Almost two thirds of them

voted for the pro-EU opposition parties with only 14 per cent choosing the ruling PiS - and it was enough to make a difference despite Poland's demographic imbalance.

"There are around five million voters in the 18-29 age bracket compared to 10mn of those aged 60 or older," 22-year-old activist Wiktoria Jedroszkowiak told AFP.

"I've often heard that it is not worth addressing young people, because they won't influence the election results and they don't vote anyway." Her nonprofit, Inicjatywa Wschod (Sunrise Initiative), had tried to prove such



Poland's main opposition leader Donald Tusk addresses supporters at the party's headquarters in Warsaw, Poland on October 15 (AFP)

ideas wrong by encouraging young people to vote.

It launched a viral campaign with a slogan saying 'we will not be quiet anymore', addressed primarily to women. The campaign, along with many similar initiatives, was successful: almost 74 per cent of women voted.

Defeat of Ultrationalist

In a country with a near-total abortion ban introduced three years ago, women's rights movements have already fought hard battles - but this time they needed to reach further.

"It turned out that young people cared not only about legal abortion... but also about the housing crisis or taxes," Jedroszkowiak said.

Lowering tax rates was one of the key issues on the agenda of Confederation - a libertarian and ultranationalist party that hoped to score double-digit support, but ultimately ended up with just seven per cent of votes.

According to analysts, women's votes may have played a part because of a dawning realisation of the effect that lower taxes would have on creaking public services.

"They were raised under Law and Justice and saw the public funds being squandered. We had to go out there and tell them things can be different," Jedroszkowiak said.

"You have to talk to them, for example about public transport."

Justyna Kajta, a sociologist at SWPS University in Warsaw, said many respondents declared themselves undecided in the polls were young women. "When these young women actually went to vote, the balance was tipped in favour of other parties and against Confederation."

AFP

India plans manned Moon mission, space station by 2040: PM Modi

New Delhi, India - India plans to send a man to the Moon and set up a space station by 2040, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, as the country ramps up its space programme.

The premier's announcement comes as the world's most populous country readies for a key test flight due on Saturday for its first crewed space mission.

Modi told space agency officials that they should 'build on the success of Indian space initiatives'. The country 'should now aim for new and ambitious goals, including setting up 'Bharatiya Antariksha Station' (Indian Space Station) by 2035 and sending first Indian to moon by 2040', he said in a statement late on Tuesday.

Modi asked them to develop plans for 'a series of missions' to the Moon.

India runs a low-budget space operation. It became the first to land a craft near the largely unexplored lunar south pole in August and, a month later, successfully launched a spacecraft to observe the outer-most layers of the Sun.

In 2014, India became the first Asian nation to put a satellite into orbit around Mars, and

its space agency Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched 104 satellites in a single mission in 2017.

India's current focus remains on its first manned mission into outer space, called Gaganyaan or 'Skycraft'.

The three-day mission, expected to take place next year, aims to send a three-member crew into Earth's orbit at a cost of about US\$1.08bn, according to ISRO.

The country also plans to launch a probe to the Moon with Japan, land a craft on Mars, and send an orbital mission to Venus within the next two years.

India has been steadily matching the achievements of established spacefaring powers at a fraction of their cost.

Experts say India can keep costs low by copying and adapting existing technology, and thanks to an abundance of highly skilled engineers who earn a fraction of their global counterparts.

India says it only accounts for two per cent of the US\$386bn global space economy, a share it hopes to increase to nine per cent by 2030.

AFP



Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairs a high-level meeting to assess the progress of the Gaganyaan Mission and to outline the future of India's space exploration endeavours, in New Delhi on Tuesday (ANI)

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AFP

'Ghost of Boris' looms over UK local poll

Vote in Mid-Bedfordshire constituency follows the resignation of Nadine Dorries, a key ally of Johnson

Flitwick, UK - UK voters go to the polls on Thursday in a bellwether local poll that could make it clear just how serious a challenge Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservatives face at the next general election.

The vote in the Mid-Bedfordshire constituency follows the resignation of MP Nadine Dorries, a key ally of ousted ex-premier Boris Johnson.

Dorries held the seat, a Tory stronghold since 1931, with a huge 24,000 majority in the 2019 general election.

If the Conservatives lose it this week, it will be one of the biggest collapses of support in English by-election history.

Sunak's party - battered by a bruising cost of living crisis, stubbornly high inflation and the fall out from a series of political scandals under Johnson - is currently trailing in the polls behind Keir Starmer's main opposition Labour Party.

But with recent surveys showing Labour's poll lead narrowing after Sunak announced populist policies, the poll is being closely watched.

Retirees in the mainly rural constituency in central England told AFP they expected the Con-

servatives to hold the seat but that without Johnson they would flounder in the national ballot, expected next year.

Some younger voters said they were so fed up with politicians of all stripes they wouldn't be voting in either poll.

Nursery nurse Leigh-Ann Munn said she hadn't decided who to vote for yet but that the biggest issue for her was spiralling costs.

The 31-year-old mother of a toddler from the small town of Ampthill said the rise in food, energy and housing costs had hit

All the people who voted Conservative instead of Labour because of him (Boris Johnson) will just go back to Labour

MAUREEN DUNLOP

her family 'big time'.

"My grocery bills have doubled. Nursery costs have gone up, everything has, it's just so hard," she said.

Labour is hoping Thursday's



Labour party campaign team members cross the High Street in Shefford, central Bedfordshire, north of London, on Tuesday (AFP)

result will mirror the drubbing meted out to the Conservatives in July in the northern Selby and Ainsty local election, where the opposition overturned a 20,000 majority. Voters on the same day,

however, narrowly backed the Tories in Johnson's former Uxbridge and South Ruislip constituency in a local poll dominated by contentious plans by London's mayor to extend a

scheme taxing the use of the most polluting vehicles.

Retired museum worker Maureen Dunlop, 75, said she thought 'getting rid of Boris' had been a mistake for the Tory Party.

"I know he was an idiot," she said referring to controversies over COVID-19 rule breaking in his Downing Street Office, 'but I don't think they'll win (next year) without him'.

Johnson won a landslide election victory in 2019 with an 80 seat majority in parliament.

The resounding win was partly due to so-called 'red wall' voters, former Labour supporters who backed the Conservatives for the first time. "All the people who voted Conservative instead of Labour because of him will just go back to Labour won't they," Dunlop said.

The Tories will be seeking to persuade voters that the economy is back on track after short-lived prime minister Liz Truss's disastrous mini budget a year ago sparked economic turmoil.

The vote is being held on the same day as another local election in the central Tamworth constituency, where the Conservatives also have a large majority.

"The cost of living crisis is a mess," said one Mid-Bedfordshire voter, a retired accountant, also from Ampthill who asked not to be named.

"I like to vote Conservative, and I probably will, but they've not been achieving much recently," the 76-year-old said.

"I think Boris did a good job," he added.

AFP



The Joint Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry meets at the National Congress in Brasilia on Tuesday (AFP)

Brazil's Bolsonaro to face coup charges: Congressional report

Brasilia, Brazil - A Brazilian congressional committee found Tuesday former president Jair Bolsonaro should face charges of an attempted coup for his supporters' invasion of the presidential palace, Supreme Court and legislative headquarters in January.

The committee investigating the January 8 riots in the capital Brasilia wrapped up nearly five months of drama-filled hearings with a final report recommending prosecutors also charge the far-right ex-president with attempting to overthrow the rule of law, political violence and criminal conspiracy.

The report does not legally bind the prosecutor general's office to act. But it is the latest in a raft of legal woes for Bolsonaro, 68, who is already under investigation for various allegations of

corruption and abuse of office.

Bolsonaro - who was president between 2019 and 2022 - was also barred in June from running for election for eight years, over his unproven fraud allegations against Brazil's electronic voting system. The January 8 riots deeply shook Brazil, as thousands of Bolsonaro supporters overwhelmed security and trashed the halls of power, calling on the military to oust President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The riots drew inevitable comparisons to the 2021 US Capitol invasion by supporters of Donald Trump, Bolsonaro's political role model. Bolsonaro, who lost to veteran leftist Lula in a divisive election in October 2022, was in the United States at the time, having snubbed his arch-rival's inauguration one week before.

But the report by the joint

lower house and Senate committee found Bolsonaro instigated his supporters' actions.

Before leaving office, the ex-president 'used the apparatus of the state in any way he could to achieve his greatest aim: erode Brazil's institutions to the point of total destruction and remain in power', said Senator Eliziane Gama, reading the report.

The more than 1,300-page report also called on prosecutors to charge military officers including Bolsonaro's ex-defence minister, General Paulo Sergio Nogueira de Oliveira, and the former navy and army commanders.

The riots were part of a 'premeditated coup attempt' that aimed to 'destabilise the government, ignite the country, and sow chaos and, if necessary, a civil war,' it said.

AFP

A PRAYER AGAINST DRUGS

Students gather at the Golden Temple during a special prayer for drug-free Punjab, in Amritsar, India on Wednesday (AFP)

Fake bus stop calms Swedish dementia sufferers

Stockholm, Sweden - In a Swedish nursing home, residents wait for a bus that never comes.

Staff have installed a fake bus stop in a hallway to ease the minds of anxious dementia patients eager to leave. A bench is pushed up against the wall under an authentic-looking bus stop sign for the municipal transport company, complete with a map of the town of Sodertalje.

An imaginary bus schedule is even posted on the opposite wall.

Caroline Wahlberg, who runs the Tallhojden nursing home, sat down with Edward, a resident in his 80s whose piercing blue eyes looked vaguely off into the dis-



Caroline Wahlberg sits with an elderly man at the fake bus stop

Alzheimer's and dementia, she told AFP. 'Some have their bags packed' as they wait on the bench, she said.

The bus stop was installed four years ago and has helped patients on numerous occasions.

"I had a lady who lived here and she would come to me several times a day and ask for her parents to come and pick her up," Wahlberg said.

"We used to sit on the bench with her and just wait. And then we started to talk... and then she was calmer (and) happier. And we could then go eat or watch TV," she said.

Fake bus stops were erected in

parks outside some retirement homes in Germany in 2008 to give wandering patients a place where they would instinctively go to sit.

At the Swedish nursing home 35km (22 miles) southwest of Stockholm, where 17 people currently live, the measure is part of the patients' treatment.

"It has brought some change here, it's like therapy," said Louise Bass, a nurse who has worked at the home for 13 years.

The bench is most sought-after at the end of the day, when the patients are more likely to feel restless.

AFP

BSC U16 A , MCCC BLUE U16 register thumping victories

Muscat - BSC U16 A defeated BSC U16 B by 253 runs in the U16 Academies Junior League 2023-24 powered by Mazoon Dairy SAOG in the Municipality Grounds in Amerat on Saturday.

Skipper and opener Nimish Dhuri scored a double century (202) in 105 balls as BSC U16 A amassed 332 runs in 30 overs. Tharun Mahesh scored a 37-ball 54 in the slog overs. In response, BSC U16 B were bundled out for 79 with Naushad Manaz and Vivikta Dande taking two wickets each.

MCCC Blue U16 thumped MCCC Red U16 by 162 runs in another match.

MCCC Blue got off to a superb start with Abdul Muqith scoring a half century. Vihaan



Nimish Dhuri



Vihaan Sanjay Chauhan

Sanjay Chauhan then took control and scored a superb 165 (95). Kartikeya Gupta (42 off 23) also pitched in as MCCC Blue U16 made 320 in 30 overs. In response, Ishva P, Shrivatsa V and Ayaan Adil all scored in thirties but MCCC Red's innings ended at 158 in 30 overs. Kartikeya Gupta picked 2 wickets.

BRIEF SCORES : BSC U16 A

332/2 in 30 overs (Nimish Dhuri 202(105) 33x4) beat BSC U16 B 79/10 in 20.4 overs (Naushad Manaz 2/8) by 253 runs.

MCCC Blue U16 320/3 in 30 overs (Vihaan S Chauhan 165(95) 22x4) beat MCCC Red U16 158/6 in 30 overs (Ishva Pradeep 34(44) 4x4 ; Kartikeya Gupta 2/10) by 162 runs.

Ruud loses to qualifier Giron at Japan Open

Tokyo, Japan - Norway's Casper Ruud said his trip to Asia was "not what I was really hoping for" after exiting the Japan Open with a second-round defeat to qualifier Marcos Giron on Wednesday.

World number eight Ruud, who reached this year's French Open final, lost in the Beijing Open quarter-finals before bowing out in the last 16 of the Shanghai Masters this month.

Ruud's Asian swing ended with a 6-3, 6-4 defeat to American world number 79 Giron in Tokyo, but he tried to stay positive, noting his fall at the first hurdle at last year's tournament.

"I think it went better than last year so what can you say, I played better than last year, for sure," said the tournament's number two seed.

"Maybe not what I was really



Casper Ruud

hoping for and kind of what I needed but there's still a couple of weeks to go and I'll keep my head high and try to fight in the last couple of weeks of the year."

German number three seed Alexander Zverev and American Frances Tiafoe, seeded sixth, had already been eliminated in the first round in Tokyo. Shanghai Masters champion Hubert

Hurkacz joined them after losing to China's Zhang Zhizhen.

Zhang, who won gold at the Asian Games in the Chinese city of Hangzhou last month, beat the Pole 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4).

American number five seed Tommy Paul booked his place in the quarter-finals alongside Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime, the number eight seed.



Jorge Martin

MARTIN 'CONFIDENT TO FIGHT FOR VICTORY'

Spaniard aims for error-free Australia with MotoGP title on knife edge

Phillip Island, Australia - Spain's Jorge Martin is determined to cut out any errors as a tense title race shifts to Phillip Island this week after a blunder in Indonesia cost him his lead in the MotoGP standings.

The Pramac ace won the sprint at the Mandalika track in Lombok last weekend to build a seven-point championship advantage over Italy's Francesco Bagnaia.

But he blew the hard work in Sunday's grand prix, crashing at a gravel trap while three seconds clear and seemingly on track for his fourth victory of the year.

It was his first non-score in a grand prix since round three at

Austin in April.

With just five steps of the 20-leg season left, he cannot afford any more slip-ups in Australia with Bagnaia on his Ducati now 18 points ahead and fellow Italian Marco Bezzecchi still in the hunt, 45 points behind.

Martin blamed a dirty track for his mishap, and insisted it was a one-off.

"It's been 14 races without a mistake. It's just statistics. It was coming sooner or later," he said. "So, the races still remaining I feel confident to fight for victory."

Reigning world champion Bagnaia accepted Martin's gift, powering to a sixth MotoGP win of 2023 and his first since Austria in

August. That Austria triumph put Bagnaia 66 points ahead of Martin, but injury and errors, including a failure to finish at Catalunya and India, saw the lead eroded by his rival. The Italian said being back in the winners circle had revived his confidence heading into a challenging Australian weekend. "To have that performance again was very, very important," he said, adding that it gave him "a lot of motivation".

"Not only for me, but also for my team. They are trying always to give the maximum possible."

During last year's grand prix, the waterfront Phillip Island circuit was marred by persistent rain, and more is forecast this week.

Despite the elements, the 2023 race was a thriller with Spain's Alex Rins crossing first

ahead of Spanish great Marc Marquez and Bagnaia in one of the closest top three finishes the sport has known.

Martin smashed the nine-year lap record to grab pole position, only to finish seventh.

Along with Rins, Honda's Marquez and Aprilla's Maverick Vinales are both former Australian winners.

Local hero Jack Miller, who is ninth on the world championship ladder, will be another to watch on his home circuit, confident his KTM machine is well-suited to the Phillip Island conditions.

"I think the KTM can work really, really well around the island," he said. "The bike is nice and agile at high speed which you need around the island, and there's always some decent grip there as well."

CLASSIFIEDS

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An Indian-British national, U.K. citizen, a published writer on defence policy and strategy, available for advice/consultancy work on geopolitical and international security issues or assignments. Please reply in the first instance to pjl11.online@gmail.com

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'WE CAN BEAT ANY SIDE'

Netherlands equipped to fight for semifinal berth, says captain Edwards

Dharamsala, India - The Netherlands are confident they “can beat any side” after a shock win over South Africa, with skipper Scott Edwards eyeing a spot in the World Cup semi-finals.

The Dutch stunned South Africa by 38 runs in a rain-reduced 43-overs-a-side contest in Dharamsala on Tuesday for their first win over a Test-playing nation at cricket's 50-over showpiece event.

Edwards led from the front with an unbeaten 78 to steer the Orange army - ranked 14th in men's ODIs - to 245-8 before they bowled out third-placed South Africa for 207.

“I suppose we go into every game with our plans and our ways that we're going to try and win the game,” Edwards told reporters after the win.

“For us, it's just about playing our best brand of cricket and we feel like if we play well enough on the day, we can beat any side.”

The Dutch, whose only World Cup wins have come over Namibia in 2003 and Scotland in 2007, beat a South African team coming off big wins over Sri Lanka and five-time winners Australia. But Tuesday was not the first time they have shocked



Netherlands' captain Scott Edwards celebrates after scoring a half-century in their match against South Africa on Tuesday (AFP)

South Africa at a global event, having bested the Proteas at last year's T20 World Cup. The win has moved them up one spot from the bottom to ninth in the

10-team World Cup table, with the top four advancing to the semis. “South Africa is obviously a very strong side and they'll be close to that semi-final spot. If we

want to be amongst it, we've got to beat sides like this,” Edwards said. “I think after qualifying we were pretty quick to set our minds to what we wanted to do

at this tournament,” he added.

“We weren't coming here just to have fun and enjoy it. We're here to win games of cricket and give ourselves the best chance to

make that next stage.”

The Netherlands and former champions Sri Lanka joined the top eight teams in this edition of the ODI World Cup through the qualifiers.

South Africa coach Rob Walter said the loss was a harsh reminder that there were no easy games at the competition.

“As I said before the World Cup started, I don't think there's any weak teams in this tournament,” he said.

“And if you're not switched on and you don't win the key moments in the game, you find yourself on the wrong side of the result. We learned that today.”

The 13th edition of the ODI World Cup had already seen a major upset on Sunday when Afghanistan shocked defending champions England.

South Africa will play England at the weekend in Mumbai.

Walters said the team would discuss their shortcomings before the next match.

“Look, I mean, obviously we'll sit and do a proper dissection of the game, but for me it's really what do you take from this game that makes you better next game,” he said.

AFP

Pakistan complains to ICC over 'inappropriate' conduct of Indian crowd

New Delhi, India - The Pakistan Cricket Board has lodged a complaint with the sports' world governing body over “inappropriate conduct” towards its players during the World Cup match against arch-rivals India.

Babar Azam's Pakistan lost to India at Ahmedabad's 132,000-seater stadium where just 10 Pakistani expatriate fans were believed to have gained tickets for the tournament's marquee match-up.

Team captain Azam was booed at the toss while video on social media appeared to show several Pakistani players including Mohammad Rizwan being abused by Indian fans.

The PCB on Tuesday said it has “filed a complaint (with the International Cricket Council) regarding inappropriate conduct targeted at the Pakistan squad during the India vs Pakistan match held on 14 October 2023”.

India glad to have 'top-gun' Bumrah firing again

Pune, India - The return of India “top-gun” Jasprit Bumrah for the World Cup could not come soon enough for bowling coach Paras Mhambrey as he hailed the paceman's strong start to the hosts' campaign.

India have won all three of their opening games, with the 29-year-old Bumrah taking eight wickets at a meagre average of just over 10 apiece.

But his career has been blighted by injury, with the unorthodox Bumrah sidelined for over a year following back surgery before returning in August.

“You have seen him in the last three games that he has played,” Mhambrey told a pre-match press conference on Wednesday ahead of India's match against Bangladesh in Pune.

“What he brings to the table - he is a world class bowler. He gives you that breakthrough that you require in the power-plays.

“He's well adapted to bowl in



India's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan on Saturday (AFP)

the middle overs and he's a top-gun 'death' bowler. I think in that sense, we really missed him.”

Mhambrey added India had yet to consider “rotation” as they

look to maintain their unbeaten start in a quest to win a third one-day international World Cup title and second on home soil following their 2011 triumph.

And that means the likes of proven performers in seamer Mohammed Shami and off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin are set to remain on the sidelines.

Ashwin especially has often found himself omitted across all formats in recent times.

The 37-year-old was also left out of the team that lost to Australia in this year's World Test Championship final at The Oval.

“He (Ashwin) has been a great lad,” said Mhambrey. “He understands that, he's a great team guy.”

Bangladesh sweat on Shakib's fitness

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan is to have a fitness test just hours before Thursday's World Cup match against in-form India in Pune.

The star allrounder is battling to overcome a thigh injury he suffered during Friday's eight-wicket loss to New Zealand in Chennai. Shakib scored 40 with the bat and the spinner completed his bowling quota of 10 overs in a return of 1-54 before hobbling off the field.



New Zealand's Lockie Ferguson (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Tanzid Hasan

Ferguson, Santner star as New Zealand rout Afghanistan

Chennai, India- New Zealand handed giant-killing Afghanistan a brutal reality check on Wednesday when they exploited a disastrous fielding performance to romp to a 149-run victory at the Cricket World Cup.

Glenn Phillips, Tom Latham and Will Young all scored half centuries and benefitted from dropped catches to score a fighting 288-6.

The Black Caps then ran through Afghanistan, who had shocked defending champions England last time out, for just 139 in 34.4 overs.

“I thought 250 was par. We are in an environment where we keep working for each other and play as a team,” said man of the match Phillips who made 71.

The victory gives New Zealand, runners-up at the last two World Cups, a fourth victory in as many games and comfortably on course for the semi-finals.

Fast bowler Lockie Ferguson took 3-19, spinner Mitchell Santner claimed 3-39 while veteran seamer Trent Boult chipped in with 2-18 as New Zealand turned the screw.

Afghanistan have one win and three defeats from their four games.

“We are very disappointed because at this level you have to take those kind of catches. End of the day those catches hurt us,” admitted captain Hashmatullah Shahidi, one of the worst culprits.

They had hoped Rahmanullah Gurbaz could repeat his fireworks against England when he made 80.

However, on Wednesday, the opener was cleaned up by Matt Henry in the sixth over for just 11.

Boult dismissed Ibrahim Zadran (14) and Azmatullah Omarzai (27) while Rachin Ravindra dismissed Rahmat Shah who was the top-scorer for Afghanistan with 36.

Santner completed 100 wickets in his 98th ODI when he dismissed Mohammad Nabi for seven before wrecking the rest of the batting in the company of Ferguson.

Earlier, Phillips hit 71 off 80 balls, Latham made 68 off 74 and opener Young 54 off 64 balls to lift New Zealand from a precarious 110-4 after they were sent in to bat on a slow pitch.

Pakistan 'under extra pressure' in India with no fans

Bengaluru, India - Pakistan paid a heavy price for being “under extra pressure” in their World Cup defeat by arch-rivals India, said batsman Saud Shakeel, who Wednesday lamented the absence of the team's passionate supporters from the tournament.

Pakistan were thrashed by seven wickets on Saturday at Ahmedabad's 132,000-capacity stadium where there was only a handful of Pakistani supporters.

Babar Azam's team slumped from a solid 155-2 in the 30th over to be dismissed for a paltry 191.

“I think we were under extra pressure so we tried to get out of that and wanted to play shots,” Shakeel told AFP on Wednesday.

The smattering of Pakistani



Saud Shakeel

fans at the game were expatriates from the United Kingdom and United States.

Supporters from across the

I think we were under extra pressure so we tried to get out of that and wanted to play shots

SAUD SHAKEEL

border are effectively banned after a failure to gain visas.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Wednesday lodged an official complaint with the world

governing body over the visa delays which have also kept many members of the country's media at home. “When you have your crowd then you get the support. We did not get that and it was not in our hands,” added Shakeel.

Despite an eighth loss in eight World Cup meetings with their arch-rivals, Pakistan are still well-placed in the tournament after wins over the Netherlands and Sri Lanka.

Middle-order batsman Shakeel scored 68 against the Netherlands before making 31 in the game with Sri Lanka. He was out for just six against India.

Next up for Pakistan is another high-profile duel, this time with five-time champions Australia in Bengaluru on Friday.



England's Harry Kane scores against Italy on Tuesday (AFP)

England secure Euro 2024 berth, Denmark survive San Marino scare

Paris, France - England sealed their place at Euro 2024 on Tuesday as Harry Kane scored twice in a 3-1 win over Italy at Wembley, while Denmark scraped to victory over San Marino to keep their qualification bid on track.

Gareth Southgate's England exacted a measure of revenge on Italy in a repeat of the Euro 2020 final won at the same stadium by the Azzurri on penalties.

Luciano Spalletti's Italy still have plenty of work to do to avoid missing out on a major tournament for the third time in

four qualification bids.

England wrapped up top spot in Group C with two games to spare, sitting three points clear of second-placed Ukraine who won 3-1 in Malta, with Italy three points further back.

"Qualifying is never easy. Sometimes we are just expected to go to the big tournaments but we have seen in the past it is not as easy as it looks," Kane told Channel 4. "We went 1-0 behind and stayed calm. We knew we could get the winner and we have done it."

Italy can learn from England defeat, says Spalletti

London, United Kingdom - Luciano Spalletti said Italy must learn from their 3-1 defeat against England at Wembley as he battles to secure qualification for the Euro 2024 finals in Germany.

Spalletti said his side had switched off at key moments.

"We were a bit casual at times but I do think we created a great deal, I think we were organised and I think ultimately we did cre-

ate the conditions to do certain things well and that's besides the goal we scored," he said.

He added: "I don't think the lads necessarily deserved to lose by two goals this evening but we need to grow and develop as a team, particularly when it comes to those big match-winning moments and this is what European football is all about. It asks you serious questions."

AFP

MESSI MAGIC AGAIN

Captain's double helps Argentina beat Peru; Neymar injured as Brazil slump

Montevideo, Uruguay - Lionel Messi scored two goals as Argentina extended their perfect start to South American qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup on Tuesday with a 2-0 victory over Peru.

The Inter Miami star took his international goal tally to 106 with strikes in the 32nd and 42nd minutes at Lima's Estadio Nacional.

Messi's first-half brace left reigning world champions Argentina on top of the South American qualifying table with 12 points from four games, five points clear of Uruguay, Brazil and Venezuela, who all have seven points.

Restored to the starting line-up after coming off the bench in last Thursday's 1-0 win over Paraguay, Messi showed no sign of the injuries that have recently limited his appearances in Major League Soccer.

The 36-year-old crashed home an emphatic opener just after the half-hour mark, then added a second 10 minutes later after good work by Enzo Fernandez down the left flank.

The win leaves Argentina firmly on track to return to the World Cup finals in 2026, which are being expanded to include 48 teams and will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The top six teams in South America's 10-team qualifying competition will be guaranteed a place at the finals.

While Argentina continued their serene progress through qualifying, arch-rivals Brazil suffered a nightmare 2-0 defeat in Montevideo, crashing to a first loss against Uruguay in 22 years.

The defeat was compounded



Argentina's Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring against Peru on Tuesday (AFP)

Restored to the starting line-up after coming off the bench in last Thursday's 1-0 win over Paraguay, Messi showed no sign of the injuries that have recently limited his appearances in Major League Soccer.

by the sight of veteran forward Neymar being stretchered off just before half-time with what appeared to be a knee injury.

Uruguay's Darwin Nunez struck with a bullet header on 42 minutes to open the scoring in a dour first half at the Estadio Centenario.

The Liverpool striker then played a pivotal role in Uruguay's second, holding up the ball well from a throw-in and cutting back for Nicolas de la Cruz to fire past Brazil goalkeeper Ederson on 77 minutes, sealing a 2-0 victory.

The win was Uruguay's first over Brazil in a World Cup quali-

fying fixture since a 1-0 victory over the Selecao in Montevideo in July 2001.

The defeat marked another disappointing result for five-time world champions Brazil, who were held to a 1-1 draw by Venezuela last week in the previous round.

Brazilian team officials said Neymar would undergo examinations in Sao Paulo on Wednesday to assess the nature of his injury.

Venezuela meanwhile boosted their hopes of reaching the World Cup for the first time with an impressive 3-0 rout of

Chile in Maturin. Winger Yeferson Soteldo was the star for La Vinotinto, scoring the opening goal and setting up second-half goals for veteran striker Salomon Rondon and Darwin Machis.

Soteldo opened the scoring in stoppage time at the end of the first half, stabbing a low angled shot into the bottom corner to the delight of a raucous home crowd.

The Santos winger turned provider for Venezuela's second, bursting down the left flank and cutting back for Rondon to sweep home from close range on 72 minutes.

AFP

MUSCAT DAILY

YOUR WINDOW TO THE WORLD

R024

1 YEAR

(Print edition)

R015

6 MONTHS

(Print edition)

R015

1 YEAR

(Online edition)

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Weekend



14

SEA BREAM DREAM
Nothing like a crisply roasted Sea Bream, caught off Oman's shores



15

IN TOWN
Cake Talk's cake exhibition and Italian concert
Li Quentetto



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

SILENT WARRIORS



With pens & lens

Anirban Ray

Just like food and football, perfume has always been a unifying factor between Oman and France. Seven journalists from various print and audio-visual media were in Oman this week as part of a mission called Perfume of the East. The dynamic team has embarked on an intriguing journey to Oman to uncover the secrets of Omani perfumery as part of an ongoing exhibition at the French Institute of Arab World in Paris. Their quest was graced by H E Veronique Aulagnon, setting the stage for an enriching experience. Jointly hosted by Amouage, French Institute of Arab World and the Omani government, the journalists will be travelling to various places including Jabal Akhdar and Salalah to track the aroma of roses and frankincense. Muscat Daily spoke to a few journalists on issues that are of burning concern in the present world of journalism. Despite being a tech-savvy journalist, my mobile notepad suddenly shut down leaving me in a confused state of being unable to either note, snap or record any of the proceedings. In a moment of unexpected connectivity, the French journalist graciously handed me his red pen, saying, "I'm glad you're back to the conventional method." It was a reminder that while technology advances, the basics remain irreplaceable.

Eric Bietry Rivierre
Senior correspondent, *Le Figaro*

On 'death' of newspapers: I am not of the conviction that newspapers will die away; this is, indeed, a phase and there will be some changes. Content will be more preferred in a brief format, though for serious and industry readers lengthy content will still be preferred. Papers are under threat but they will continue to exist for serious readers.

On manipulated news: The threat of manipulated news has always loomed large all around the world. It is upto the journalists how to stay neutral and never be swayed by personal opinions.

On AI: Chatbots like ChatGPT can automate several tasks but can never replace the human touch and emotion that a reporter can have while filing his article. Chatbots (ChatGPT) were explored by many. While AI offers efficiency, it also poses questions about authenticity and the human touch in storytelling.

Lion Pailles
Senior correspondent, *Le Monde*

Impact of Social Media: I agree that young people these day are getting more information that are fast through social media, including my 21 year old daughter. However, when one needs to get the au-

thentic news, they always turn to credible sources, which are the newspapers.

How to save newspapers: The best method is to have digital subscription as more and more people, these days, prefer to read through their devices. At *Le Monde*, we charge 9Euros per month, and the response has been good.

Photography: A picture is worth 1000 words and a picture always lends credibility to an article. A photographer is always the reporter's best friend professionally. I also believe that journalists also need to learn the basics of photography. Our publication recognised the evolving role of photography. They stressed that modern journalists must also be adept at capturing compelling images to complement their narratives.

Isabelle Chenu,
Correspondent, *Radio France Internationale*

The Call for Bravery: These days journalists are under pressure from every corner and thus what I want to say to young reporters is to be brave and report the actual facts with courage and objectivity, which is always needed to report on sensitive issues, and thus, often facing threats and intimidation in pursuit of the truth. We are silent warriors, though with pens and lenses.

A group of French journalists on a fragrant mission to Oman to discover the roots and fruits of Omani perfumery, share a few insights on the changing universal role of scribes

PRINT MEDIA IN FRANCE

The print media played a significant role in the formation of popular public opinion towards the monarchy and Old Regime under which France had a small number of heavily censored newspapers which needed royal licences to operate. There also existed several brief public opinion pamphlets and daily life periodicals which were reviewed and edited heavily in order to indirectly influence the people. Between 1789 and 1799, over 1,300 new newspapers had emerged, combined with a large demand for pamphlets and periodical literature, which caused a flowering, albeit short-lived press. While official regulations attempted to suppress social dissent in large-scale publications, some smaller papers and journals provided readers with more radical subject matter. The new Third Republic, 1871-1914, was a golden era for French journalism. Newspapers were cheap, energetic, uncensored, omnipresent, and reflected every dimension of political life. The main dailies employed their own journalists who competed for news flashes. All newspapers also relied upon the Agence Havas (now Agence France Presse), a telegraphic news service with a network of reporters, that is popular till date all over the world.

cook-up

SOMETHING FISHY

Sea Bream



Roasted Sea Bream

Ingredients

- Vegetable oil for roasting and frying
- 1kg maris piper potatoes - unpeeled, cut into small cubes
- Small bunch fresh rosemary sprigs
- 3 garlic cloves - 2 crushed, 1 bruised
- 2 whole sea bream (400-500g each) – cleaned
- Zest and juice 1 lemon, plus wedges to serve
- 30g butter - cubed

For the sauce

- 1Vegetable oil for frying
- 2 shallots - finely sliced
- 1 garlic clove - crushed
- 2tbsp white vinegar
- 200ml white grape juice
- 100g butter - cubed
- 2tbsp double cream
- Handful fresh chives - snipped
- Handful fresh flatleaf parsley - finely chopped
- Small handful fresh tarragon leaves - finely chopped
- Lemon juice, to taste

Method

Heat the oven to 200°C. Heat a generous glug of oil in a large roasting tray, then add the potatoes and toss to coat in the oil. Season with salt and pepper, then roast for 35 minutes.

For the sauce, heat a little oil in a saucepan, then add the shallots and fry for 3-4 minutes until softening. Add the crushed garlic clove, vinegar and grape juice, then bring to the boil. Bubble for 10-15 minutes until the liquid has reduced by a quarter. Slowly whisk in the 100g butter, 2 cubes at a time, adding more only when the butter has melted into the sauce. Once all the butter has been whisked in, keep warm over a very low heat until you’ve cooked the fish.

After the potatoes have been in the oven for 35 minutes, remove them and toss in the hot oil with most of the rosemary sprigs and 2 crushed garlic cloves. Heat the grill to a high setting. Heat a glug of oil in an ovenproof frying pan large enough to hold both fish. Add the bruised garlic clove and the rest of the rosemary, then gently fry for 1-2 minutes until fragrant. Remove from the heat, then add both fish to the pan with the lemon zest and juice. Dot the 30g butter over the top. Put the fish under the grill and the potatoes underneath, at the bottom of the oven/grill. Cook for 14-15 minutes until the fish is golden and cooked through; it should flake easily.

To serve, stir the cream and all the chopped fresh herbs into the butter sauce, then season to taste with salt and lemon juice. Serve half a fish per person with plenty of roasted potatoes, with the sauce drizzled over the top and lemon wedges to squeeze over.

Advertisements of Omani Sea Bream at traffic intersections these days beckon seafood lovers to head to the supermarket to bring home this tasty fish, available quite cheap. Here's what you can do with them:



Tandoori Sea Bream

Ingredients

- 2 Sea Breams, 400g each
- 1tbsp yoghurt
- 1tsp ginger garlic paste
- 1tsp red chilli powder
- ½tsp turmeric powder
- ½tsp garam masala powder
- Juice of half lemon
- 1tsp salt
- 1-2tbsp oil
- A pinch of carom seeds



Sea Bream and Potato Bake

Ingredients

- 2tbsp olive oil
- 1 small fennel bulb - finely sliced
- 2 large baking potatoes - peeled and finely sliced
- 1 small onion - finely sliced
- 1 garlic clove - crushed
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 100 ml white grape juice
- 2 whole sea bream - cleaned
- 1 lemon – zested, then sliced
- 2 sprigs thyme
- 2 sprigs rosemary
- 2 sprigs parsley
- Small handful of parsley chopped

Method

Preheat your oven to 200°C. Place the fennel, onions, potatoes and garlic in a large roasting

tray. Pour over the oil and add salt and pepper to taste, then turn the veggies over in the oil so everything gets coated evenly. Spread the vegetables out over the base of the tray. Pour in the grape juice, but let it not wash off the olive oil on the veggies. Cover the dish tightly with foil and bake for 20 minutes, then uncover and bake for a further 10 minutes.

Now season the fish and stuff with slices of lemon and sprigs of thyme, rosemary and parsley. Pop your fish on top of the vegetables and cook uncovered for a further 20 minutes. Finely chop the remaining parsley and mix with the lemon zest. Scatter over the fish and serve warm.

Method

Clean the fish and keep them whole. Mark cuts with a sharp knife on both sides. Now mix all the other ingredients to form a smooth paste and apply generously on both sides of each fish. Drizzle the oil to cover both sides. Set aside for 30 minutes.

Now heat your oven or air fryer to 200° C. Place the fish on the racks and grill for 12-15 minutes, turning once, depending on how well done you like it. Remove and serve with lemon wedges and onion rings.



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و قليل السكر

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take a break

IN TOWN

CAKE EXHIBITION



Cake Talks held its Season 5 cake exhibition at Avenues Mall last weekend



'Il Quintetto' concert



The Embassy of Italy and The National Museum jointly hosted 'Il Quintetto' Oscar Music Songs - a tribute to Ennio Morricone



Photos: V K Shafeer

BOGGLER

T	S	T	A
O	I	B	U
Y	A	U	B
B	P	Y	T

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. Which is the largest mammal?
- A. Elephant
B. Rhinoceros
C. Blue whale
D. Great White Shark

2. In which year was Joe Biden elected US President?
- A. 2018
B. 2019
C. 2020
D. 2021



3. How many stars are in our solar system?
- A. One
B. Nine
C. Thirty-two
D. 14 million

Answer: (in reverse)
3. A - The Sun
2. C
1. C

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Try to adopt a "keep it to yourself" attitude about controversies today. Play it safe. It's quite likely that an authority figure's opinion will differ from yours. It's best to just button your lip and bite your tongue. This person isn't interested in starting a debate about whether you're right or they're right.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your charms are absolutely intoxicating to every person you encounter right now. People will be eager to hang out with you just to soak up some of the sunshine you emit every time you smile. Consequently, they're going to work hard to make you smile over and over again. The jokes will be flying and your funny bone will have the life tickled out of it.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's time for a little maintenance work with your relationships. Today, make sure you've answered all their messages and confirmed all your upcoming social plans. Responding is the best and easiest way to show someone that they matter to you. If you don't have time for a long phone conversation, that's fine.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Put as much energy into communication today as you can, because connecting with others is more important now than it has ever been. You don't have to have deep philosophical conversations to make an impact, though. Even simple small talk can open up new avenues and ignite a spark or two regarding new ideas.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You might have a bit of extra money in your account right now, but don't spend it. It needs to stay there. Don't go overboard today. It's much wiser to play it cool and save your money for the next rainy day that you know will come. You should play it conservatively in all areas of your life right now, including a developing relationship. Don't push things too far too fast.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you spend your morning organizing the rest of your day, you could be amazed by how much free time you end up with. And you know exactly how you want to spend that free time. Your flirtatious energy has you bursting at the seams, and you're ready to lay your charms on the next person who walks by. But save it for that special someone.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your mantra for today should be "keep it simple." If you're faced with too many details to contend with, you could get too overwhelmed, which could send you down a very grumpy path for the rest of the day. Try hard to resist the urge to overly complicate things or make them exactly how you want them to be. Today, good enough is good enough.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Don't let your appreciation for someone else's accomplishment turn into jealousy. The grass in front of their house isn't necessarily greener. Before you start coveting what they have, remind yourself that what's right for them might not be right for you. It can be hard to be content in your own life, but you should at least try.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If your current projects are going well, don't rush ahead to start a new one. Take the time to enjoy the success you're having right now. You'll deprive yourself of a lot of joy if all you do is think about the next mountain you can climb. Stay right where you are for a while. Be grounded and live in the moment. Speed and progress shouldn't be a priority for you right now.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Every invitation you get isn't necessarily one you should accept. Before you say yes to any of them today, wait a while. Find out who else is going. Will it be worth your while? Try not to fill every second of your free time with something social. Sometimes spending time alone doing nothing is a lot more rewarding than joining a group just for the sake of having something to do.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

There is turmoil in one of your friendships, but don't worry too much about it. This person is going through some uncertainty, and there isn't anything you can do to help. The fact that their problems are affecting your relationship is something you should make them aware of, but don't blame them for it.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's important to consider the source when you get information today. You can't be too critical right now. Even what the boss tells you should be double-checked. And make sure you're not just going to the sources that you know are going to tell you what you want to hear. You need to be challenged, and you need to know the truth. Put on your detective hat and be ruthless.

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

entertainment



BOLLYWOOD STALWARTS FELICITATED AT INDIA'S 69TH NATIONAL FILM AWARDS

The 69th National Film Awards ceremony was a grand celebration of outstanding achievements in Indian cinema, held at the prestigious Vigyan Bhavan in Delhi today, October 17. The star-studded event honoured some of the most talented individuals in the film industry, including acclaimed actors Alia Bhatt and Kriti Sanon, among others.

The ceremony featured an array of notable winners, and it was graced by Kriti Sanon, who was already in Delhi after winning the Best Actress award for her re-

markable performance in *Mimi*. She expressed her gratitude, saying, "I thank God and my fans for everything."

Notably, Allu Arjun, the charismatic star of *Pushpa: The Rise*, was honoured with the Best Actor award, marking a historic moment as he became the first Telugu actor to receive this prestigious accolade. The movie *Rocketry: The Nambi Effect*, directed by R Madhavan, was recognised as the Best Feature Film, while Vivek Agnihotri's *The Kashmir Files* received the Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration.

'SWIFTIES' FLOCK TO MOVIE THEATRES FOR RECORD BREAKING 'ERAS' FILM

Taylor Swift fans sporting friendship bracelets and glittery cowboy boots packed into early screenings of the pop megastar's concert film at movie theatres across the United States on Thursday.

Thanks to the hysteria surrounding the singer's ongoing and record-setting world tour, a filmed version of her concert - 'Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour' - is already tipped to be one of the year's biggest movies.

Usual cinema etiquette has been thrown out the window, with multiplexes such as AMC encouraging customers to dance, sing and even take selfies throughout screenings.

HOLLYWOOD DECLARES SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

More than 700 leaders from the entertainment industry signed an open letter released Thursday by the non-profit entertainment industry organisation Creative Community For Peace in support of Israel after Hamas's murderous rampage in southern Israel.

The celebrities and entertainment executives who signed include Gal Gadot, Jerry Seinfeld, Jamie Lee Curtis, Chris Pine, Mayim Bialik, Liev Schreiber, Amy Schumer, Michael Douglas, Debra Messing, Haim Saban, Mark Hamill, Rick Yorn, Howie Mandel, Julian Edelman, Antoine Fuqua and others.

"My heart is aching for the lives lost and families shattered," said Gadot. "I'm praying for everyone who has been affected by Hamas's terrorism and brutality. And I hope that the world remains steadfast in their support of the Israeli people."

OPRAH'S BEST PAYCHECK

Oprah Winfrey is reflecting on her time playing Sofia in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* for the 1985 original, saying it's still one of the best and most meaningful paychecks she's ever earned.

Winfrey, an executive producer on the upcoming movie musical, sat down with several members of the film's leading cast back in May ahead of the SAG-AFTRA strike for an *Essence* cover story. During the round-table-style chat, the actresses opened up about following in the footsteps of the 1985 cast, why they worked on the stage musical (or turned it down), and their reactions to hearing the news they'd been cast.

"I can't even begin to tell you what it means to me — a person who wanted nothing more in my life than to be in *The Color Purple*. They were only offering US\$35,000 to be in this film, and it is the best US\$35,000 I ever earned. It changed everything and taught me so much. It is God moving through my life."



MICHAEL DOUGLAS TO RECEIVE SATYAJIT RAY LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Renowned Hollywood star Michael Douglas will be soon honoured with the Satyajit Ray Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Film Festival of India in Goa, India's Union minister Anurag Thakur announced on Friday.

Thakur shared the news in a post on microblogging site X, saying that the actor will also attend the 54th edition of the festival along with wife Catherine Zeta-Jones and son Dylan. The film gala will be held from November 20 to 28.



BRITISH ACTOR MICHAEL CAINE ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM ACTING

Veteran British actor Michael Caine, a Hollywood icon with a decades-spanning career littered with awards and acclaim, revealed on Saturday that he has retired from acting at the age of 90.

The Oscar-winner bows out following another widely-praised performance in his final film, *The Great Escaper*, which was released on October 6.

In it he plays real-life World War II British veteran Bernie Jordan, who escaped from an elderly residential care home to attend 2014 D-Day celebrations in France.

"I keep saying I'm going to retire. Well I am now," Caine told BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme.

RELEASING TODAY



Genre: Action
Starring: Josh Hutcherson, Morgan Freeman, Greg Germann, Bevin Bru
Language: English

57 SECONDS
Tech journalist Franklin Fausti lands an interview with visionary entrepreneur Anton Burrell after saving him from an assassination attempt. On his way out, Franklin finds a mysterious ring that Burrell dropped on the floor and discovers it allows its user to travel 57 seconds back in time.

CRIME PURSUIT IN NEW SKINS

BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:
KANNUR SQUAD (Malayalam)
Genre: Crime Starring: Mammootty, Sunny Wayne, Rony David, Vijayaraghavan

This movie narrates the tale of a quartet of police officers collectively known as the Kannur Squad. Inspired by a real-life police unit bearing the same name, originally formed by former Kannur SP S Sreejith to expedite case resolutions, the film features only four cops and two specific cases they tackled during the period spanning from 2007 to 2017.

The movie kicks off by introducing the four cops: Assistant Sub Inspector George (Mammootty), constables Jayakumar (Rony) and Shafi (Shabarishesh), and their driver Jose (Azees) as they embark on a mission to apprehend some criminals hiding in a forest area near the Kannur-Virajpet border.



While Roby provides Mammootty with an impressive intro, he ensures it aligns with the plot and avoids excessive fan service.

The plot revolves around a brutal murder which stunned the city and opens up mystery in the air. And the squad travels across the country in their quest for the criminals, led by ASI George Martin, only to discover many tangles in the bargain.

Although the movie maintains a quick pace in its first half, the transitions between scenes are a bit laid-back, disrupting the flow. Also, the dramatic elements — like those depict-

ing the characters' emotions and family relationships — fail to strike a warm chord as the film leans on the same typical melodrama. The roles of the villains are the same old southern fare.

Though Mammootty delivers a sterling performance, something that he has consistently displayed in his recent films, there was nothing novel about it, especially since this is his second consecutive role as a police officer after his role in B Unnikrishnan's *Christopher* earlier this year.

Rating ★★★★★